

Networked Press Freedom and Social Media: Tracing Historical and Contemporary Forces in Press-Public Relations*

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This paper analyzes how mainstream, online news organizations understand press autonomy in their relationships to audiences. I situate the press in terms of neo-institutional sociology, seeing its autonomy as a distributed, field-level phenomenon involving “boundary work” among distributed actors. I then trace press-audience relations through two historical examples (letters to the editor and ombudsmen), showing how the press has historically both separated itself from and relied upon audiences. Examining eight news organizations’ social media policies, I analyze the “inside-out” and “outside-in” forces through which the press distinguishes itself from audiences, concluding with a discussion of how such guidelines structure the types of control that news organizations have, or might have, as they use social network sites in their news work.

Key words: Social media policies, networked journalism and news production, online press freedom, ombudsman, press-public relations.

doi:10.1111/jcc4.12076

Introduction

For today’s networked press to claim autonomy, it must walk a fine line. It must distinguish itself *from* others, while simultaneously acknowledging that much of its work happens *with* others. What does press freedom mean today, given that news production spans so many different actors, norms, practices, and technologies?

Rather than simply being about distance from others, *networked press autonomy* might better be understood as a set of moves and orientations – separations and dependencies through which the press negotiates its uniqueness, leaving traces of how it understands its democratic role. Studying press freedom, therefore, entails tracing both how journalists act independently and how their independence is both supported and bracketed by broader social and organizational forces. This requires a *mezzo*-level framework for understanding how pieces relate to wholes – how individual agency is both scaffolded and constrained by field-level forces that structure institutions (Giddens, 1984; Latour, 2005; Powell, 1990).

I develop this argument by first reviewing a field-theory view of the press, arguing that it lives within a set of forces that continually remake its identity and define its autonomy. I then focus on two historical

*Accepted by previous editor Maria Bakardjieva

sites of press autonomy (how the U.S. print press has related to its audiences through letters to the editor and ombudsmen) and link these sites to the “outside-in” and “inside-out” forces structuring press-public relations in contemporary online news production. I conclude with a short case study of how eight major news organizations use official policies to regulate their staffs’ use of social media, and consider how these policies fit within the larger arc of press-public relations, and outside-in and inside-out forces.

Locating Press Freedom Within A Journalistic Field

Journalists make myriad decisions as they work: who interview, what words to use, what stories to pursue, how to meet tight deadlines, which audiences to imagine, and what feedback to incorporate. But they do so within a sociology of news production that uses political, cultural, economic, technological, and professional pressures to signal what kind of journalism is acceptable, high-quality, legal, marketable, and democratically valuable (Schudson, 2005b). That is, journalists have considerable “operational control” over the day-to-day aspects of their jobs, but such independence is bracketed by the “allocative controls” that define the conditions under which they work (Murdock, 1977) – or can imagine working (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008). Allocative control lives not only within individual newsrooms or organizations, but is distributed among new actors, many of whom may not call themselves journalists or see their work as news work.

Indeed, journalism scholars (*e.g.*, Benson and Neveu (2005); Cook (1998); Schudson (2005a); Siapera and Spyridou (2012); Sparrow (2006)) have reinterpreted Bourdieu’s Field Theory (1993) to show how news actually emerges from “loosely coupled arrays of standardized elements” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 14):

- rules and laws that regulate news work (*e.g.*, in the U.S. press, the First Amendment, libel law, and shield laws);
- individual values and professional norms (*e.g.*, journalistic ideals of objectivity and public service, ethical standards of professional bodies, editorial norms of sourcing and verification);
- sociocultural expectations about how the press should behave and what democratic role it plays (*e.g.*, how audiences define “news” and who they expect to deliver it);
- political and economic factors that distribute journalistic resources (*e.g.*, compare the access and power of *The New York Times* to smaller, community-operated newspapers staffed by volunteers);
- technologies that disseminate, sort, rank, aggregate, and archive online content (*e.g.*, how Google News, Facebook’s News Feed, or Twitter’s Trending Topics use algorithmic rules to make some topics and people more visible than others).

These elements are among the institutional building blocks with which “journalists work hard to maximize their autonomy.” (Cook, 1998, p. 7) They work within this field of forces as they both reject and relate to audiences. That is, journalists are both “professional communicators” (objectively distancing themselves from stories) and “individual interpreters” (crafting stories designed to be meaningful and accessible to audiences) (Carey, 1969/1997, pp. 132–133), continually tacked between making “news judgments [and] moral judgments” (Ettema & Glasser, 1998, p. 8) – weighing what they think audiences will find interesting against what they think is important.

In its *ideal* form, press autonomy is not simply about reporters, editors, and publishers being left alone to say whatever they want. Rather, it is about the press — as “loosely coupled arrays of standardized elements” — figuring out how to both critique and participate in public life, ensuring that the public hears all it needs to hear amidst myriad influences. Put differently, since the press exists in no single place, neither does its autonomy. The press and press freedom exists within largely invisible infrastructures that run “underneath” (Star & Bowker, 2006, p. 151) – connecting, regulating, and making visible a variety

of social and expressive practices. Press autonomy is thus a *boundary* concept (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 287): individuals with varied traditions articulate, contest, and (perhaps) reconcile different visions of how and why they think publics should speak and hear.

Press Autonomy, Letters To The Editor, And The Ombudsman

The mainstream U.S. press has historically defined its autonomy in a number of different ways. From shield laws, tax exemptions, representations in popular culture, and appeals for special access to the creation of academic programs, professional organizations, and credentialing systems, the press has distinguished itself from other domains. “Hard news” journalists historically separated themselves from public relations professionals, advocacy-based writers, interested audiences, and anyone else seen as lacking “objective,” disinterested views of the world. (Schudson, 2003; Schudson & Anderson, 2008) For example, reporters routinely define their work in terms of conflict, timeliness, proximity, prominence and the unusual (Stephens, 1988, pp. 32–33), using opinion polling, “quantification, and statistics... to routinize processes of observation,” (Herbst, 1995, p. 12) and organizing their work around predictable locations and beats (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1973). By distancing itself from others through “rituals of objectivity,” (Tuchman, 1978) the press protects itself against claims of bias.

But the press has also historically constructed “participatory spaces” (Reich, 2011) – places where it meets audiences, co-constructs news with them, and interacts with those it normally reports on and for. As historical context for understanding how contemporary news organizations govern participatory spaces like social media, it is worth considering two long-standing features of the press: letters to the editor and the newspaper ombudsman. Both aspects of how journalists have traditionally negotiated their relationships with audiences.

Letters to the Editor

A letter to the editor is both personal (written to a particular editor or editorial board) and public (the addressing a broad enough concern that it is meant to be relevant to a news audience). It represents a personal point of view (letting readers consider whether they agree or not with one of their own), but it is also evidence of editorial decision-making (signaling that *this* letter writer is the kind of participant editors are willing to engage with).

Such letters have indicated a newspaper’s popularity and growth (Hynds, 1994), served as proxies for public opinion (Sigelman & Walkosz, 1992), been sites for discussing local issues (Perrin & Vaisey, 2008), and provided audience feedback on editorial decisions (Raeymaeckers, 2005; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002). But they have also been poor representations of audience diversity (Grey & Brown, 1970), forums for encouraging petty conflict and spectacle (da Silva, 2012), and ways for political operatives and party boosters to garner free publicity and influence elections (Richardson & Franklin, 2004). More often than not they are simply reflections of what senior editors perceive to be important topics (da Silva, 2012; Renfro, 1979) and ancillary to an editor’s primary tasks (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007). (Indeed, some editors are often dismissive of letter writers, seeing them as part of an “idiom of insanity.” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002)) Nielsen (2010) found that editors only printed letters they judged to be novel, personally evocative, publicly resonant, timely, written by individuals (not groups), fair and objective in the traditional journalistic sense of telling a story with two sides, and likely to incite further public debate (even at the expense of printing letters that editors suspect contain false statements).

Such letters are “boundary objects” (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393) that let readers meet editors, and that make sense as an easily understandable genre of press-audiences relations. That is, they are “plastic

enough to adapt to local needs” (letting readers express personal opinions and letting editors make purposeful selections) and “yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (recognizable and sensible no matter which newspaper you read, or on which day you read).

For letters to appear within a newspaper, they had to align with what editors imagined legitimate audience participation to be. They are markers of both “outside-in” and “inside-in” forces because they represent an attempt by the press to involve audiences, but to do so on its *own* normative and ideological terms – to keep the public “in a constant state of agitation or boredom ... immobilized and demobilized” (Carey, 1995, p. 391) in ways that agree with journalists’ ideas of what the news-reading public can or should be.

The Ombudsman

Just as letters to the editor both invite and exclude audiences, many news organizations employ ombudsmen as institutionally sanctioned liaisons with audiences. Beginning in the U.S. in the mid-1960s, many newspapers began to hire “ombudsmen”, “reader representatives”, or “public editors” as part of attempts to establish credibility with readers (McKenna, 1993; Meyers, 2000). He—such employees have been almost exclusively male and the scholarly literature usually uses the title “ombudsman” regardless of the person’s gender (Meyers, 2000)—was “typically a senior editor equipped with the authority to investigate complaints and get answers for readers.” (Nemeth, 2003, p. 2) Although the position is relatively new and rare in U.S. newsrooms, Japanese newsrooms employed people as early as 1922 to “receive and investigate reader complaints” (Organization for Newspaper Ombudsmen, 2013) and reader representatives are common in many international newsrooms (Van Dalen & Deuze, 2006).

The ombudsman ostensibly maintains sufficient distance from his own organizations’ journalists, editors and owners in order to critique his colleagues, publicly sanction behavior, represent audience concerns and, most broadly, conscientiously reflect journalism’s ideals (Meyers, 2000; D. Nolan & Marjoribanks, 2011). He is not supposed to be an “omniscient journalist” who simply tells his colleagues should have been done, or lectures readers on how newspapers “really” work. Rather, he is often envisioned a “privileged reader” whose first mission is to critique the paper’s integrity, examining his organization as an experienced outsider (Cline, 2008).

Some evidence suggests that newspapers *without* ombudsmen tend to resolve reader complaints privately and idiosyncratically without making systemic changes (McKenzie, 1994) while readers of newspapers *with* ombudsmen are less likely to lodge formal or legal complaints against the news organization (McKenna, 1993; Pritchard, 1993). Historically, though, the ombudsman role has been largely symbolic or ineffectual. At papers with ombudsmen, journalists were less likely to share complaints they received from readers with colleagues and were more apt to simply ignore or hide negative feedback (Bezanson, Cranberg, & Soloski, 1987). And when audience responses were shared with ombudsmen, reporters tended not to assume responsibility for making changes to their reporting practices, outsourcing reform to them ombudsmen and letting them recommend changes (McKenna, 1993).

Perhaps most damaging to the role’s ideal, Ettema and Glasser (1987) found that ombudsmen’s *own* understandings of their roles were so inflected with public relations logics that they were more likely to represent the *paper’s* interests to the readers, rather than the readers’ interests to the paper. They served as symbols and not agents of accountability. That is, although ombudsmen rated “providing hard-hitting critiques of reporters’ and editors’ work” as goals, they also said that “single most important aspect of their job” was to “give readers a sense that the newspaper cares about them,” with nearly half admitting that “have no involvement whatsoever in the actual decision-making about publication of corrections.” (Ettema & Glasser, 1987, p. 7) This work agrees with Nemeth and Sanders (1999) finding that approximately 85 percent of the columns by members of the Organization of Newspaper Ombudsmen consisted

of public relations-oriented language aimed at convincing readers that a paper had acted correctly, and discouraging further public debate.

As with letters to the editors, ombudsmen both acknowledge and bracket journalism's relationships to audiences; the role involves both inside-out and outside-in forces. Although both editorial letters and ombudsmen are ostensibly about giving audiences access to news work, they in fact appear to be largely symbolic markers of audience dialogue and accountability – evidence that the press has historically seen its autonomy mostly in terms of *freedom from* unwanted influences like audiences.

Press-Public Dynamics In Contemporary, Networked News Practices

If, however, active audiences are part of the “loosely coupled arrays of standardized elements” that comprise the contemporary, online press — and are thus harder to exclude from journalists' work — how does the press establish both independence from and dependence upon today's online audiences?

It is difficult to characterize exactly how online news is produced today (Schudson, 2012; Siles & Boczkowski, 2012), but it increasingly emerges from networks spanning a variety of institutional contexts, professional traditions, technological tools and attendant practices (e.g., see Boczkowski (2004); Deuze (2007); Klinenberg (2005); Lewis (2012); Russell (2011); Turner (2005). Some news organizations are reducing or eliminating their print products (Usher, 2012); revenue from print advertisements and physical subscriptions are decreasing quickly and only slowly being replaced with lower amounts of online funding (Pew Research Center, 2013); news innovations are being funded through crowdsourcing and foundation grants (Carvajal, Garcia-Aviles, & Gonzalez, 2012; Lewis, 2011); the very idea of international news is changing in light of mobile media production, 24/7 news cycles, and transnational social media events (Carvin, 2013; Heinrich, 2012; Westlund, 2012); journalists are increasingly aware of how and when audiences consume individual stories (MacGregor, 2007), adapting their workflows to accommodate new technologies (Powers, 2012); and studies of network traffic studies show that traditional media organizations are still hubs that organize and concentrate online news consumers (Weber, 2012). Indeed, journalists are increasingly working in relation to “quantified audiences” understanding and serving readers through metrics-oriented reporting techniques. (C. W. Anderson, 2011, 2012; Loosen & Schmidt, 2012).

Essentially, while it was once relatively easy to analyze press freedom in light of specific intersections between journalists and audiences (e.g., which letters were printed and which complaints ombudsmen entertained) contemporary press freedom exists through myriad, intersecting technologies, contexts, practices and norms. There are still inside-out and outside-in forces defining and patrolling the press's boundaries, but they look different and have different implications for how and why journalists relate to audiences. Two such collections of forces are those that regulate user generated content and social network sites.

Outside-In Forces: Journalism and User Generated Content

User generated content (UGC) has always appeared in news work. Downie and Schudson (2009) describe the “adjunct reporting” of census-takers, Center for Disease Control health workers, and Audubon Society scientific bird watchers who have historically gathered data and accounts for journalists' review and publication. Pollsters and surveyors create data sets and images of publics that journalists use to motivate and organize their stories (Igo, 2007). Interviews of non-journalists by reporters have always appeared centrally within stories as authoritative sources (Darnton, 1975, pp. 182–185; Gans, 1979), and some news organizations outsource “low-level” reporting tasks and data gathering to crowds (Pro Publica, 2013) and interested readers (Canter, 2013), leaving more senior staff free for more complex investigative reporting. “Non-journalists” have always played some role in news production.

Today, though, it is unclear exactly what impact user participation and UGC have on the professional press's understanding of its audiences. Reader interactivity and UGC let readers debate issues identified by the news organizations, critique story details and framings, suggest topics and beats, participate with anonymity, provide background for future stories, converse with individual reporters, contribute content, and make certain stories more visible than editors had originally intended (Graham, 2013; Harrison, 2010; Jönsson & Örnebring, 2011; McElroy, 2013; Pérez-Peña, 2010; Robinson, 2007; Singer, 2013). But other aspects of news production (e.g., reporter assignments, pre-publication drafts, journalist notes, or retraction debates) are closed to public oversight and seen by journalists as beyond the influence readers should have over journalistic practices and culture (Domingo et al., 2008; Reich, 2011). Under contemporary regimes of UGC production and reader interactivity, audiences are allowed to contribute to the "interpretation stage of the news-making process," (Graham, 2013, p. 116) but not influence the conditions under which news is generated to begin with – to have influence over some "operational" but no "allocative" aspects of news work (Murdock, 1977).

Some journalists fear that their work will be marginalized by UGC, giving audiences the impression that all published content online has the same providence and value (Thurman, 2008). Others view UGC as low-quality or complementary to professional reporting only in the rare cases when audiences are "very knowledgeable about certain areas." (Hermida & Thurman, 2008, p. 349) Journalists offer different reasons for dismissing UGC: it diminishes their organizations' brands, they want to retain control over the style and scope of news stories, expensive and time-consuming labor is required to monitor UGC, answer readers' questions (pp. 350–351), and ensure that UGC meets "the standards of professionally produced output." (Thurman, 2008, p. 144). They are afraid of legal action "resulting from libelous comments posted on unmoderated user forums" (p. 150), concerned about duplication among readers' submissions, and discouraged by the overly personal and combative tone of web comments. (Indeed, the incivility prevalent in online comments seems to prevent audiences from learning about complex issues, encouraging them to adopt polarized viewpoints prematurely (A. A. Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2013).) Journalists in the U.S. seem to value UGC similarly, with 43 percent of them reporting it to be the least or second-to-least most important part of an online news site (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Such systems for reader participation show how contemporary, networked press freedom is less about creating clear separations from audiences (e.g., making one-off decisions about whether to publish a letter or pursue a reader complaint). Rather, it is about the press modulating "outside-in" forces – deciding how and why to let audiences into newsrooms, considering how such access impacts a host of factors including story quality, professional identity, legal liability, labor costs, anonymity, and organizational branding. In contrast, the next section considers "inside-out" forces – understanding how and why news organizations extend themselves into "non-journalism" spaces like social media sites.

Inside-Out Forces: Journalism and Social Media

Journalists are increasingly grappling with how and why to reach out to audiences, primarily through social media services like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, or MySpace. Such sites are currently a relatively small, but growing, channel through which readers encounter mainstream, professionally produced news stories. (Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2013) Ellison and Boyd (2013, p. 158) define a social network site as a

networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided

data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site.

It is, in part, the technologies, norms, and practices of *these* sites that news organizations encounter as they negotiate what press freedom means online. There are three principal ways that contemporary, networked news production is intersecting with these sites.

First, several mainstream news organizations are creating new staff positions for managing their relationships with social network sites. The *Wall Street Journal* (Beaujon, 2012), *Huffington Post* (Tenore, 2012), *Los Angeles Times* (2008) and The Associated Press (2012) all recently appointed or reappointed social media editors. But such roles are not yet well understood or standardized across the news industry. After a little over a year, *The New York Times* discontinued its social media editor position (originally envisioned to “guide [Times staff] on how to more effectively engage a larger share of the audience on sites like Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Flickr, Digg, and beyond” (H. Nolan, 2009)), saying that “social media can’t belong to one person; it needs to be part of everybody’s job [and] integrated into the existing editorial processes.” (Tenore, 2010) And the *Huffington Post*’s former social media editor claims that such roles are “dead” because “social media responsibilities are now frequently dispersed across the newsroom.” (Fishman, 2013) Such debates suggest that news organizations are trying to figure out whether social network sites are integral or ancillary to news work: do they require dedicated staff who know how to use them? Or are they now so embedded within news work that it makes little sense to think of them as distinct from anyone’s role?

Second, some news organizations see social media as a beat of its own. They quote directly from sources’ tweets and posts (Broersma & Graham, 2012) and see sites like Twitter as ambient “awareness systems” for: discovering and verifying events (Hermida, 2010, 2012); understanding audiences’ preferences (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012); sourcing stories and promoting content (Gulyas, 2013; Messner, Linke, & Eford, 2011); reporting on breaking events in faraway places (Carvin, 2013; Cozma & Chen, 2013); and sharing personal opinions (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2011). Others, though, caution that news organizations should not treat social network sites as beats or images of the public. They warn that such networks can lack socioeconomic diversity (Hargittai, 2007; Schradie, 2012, 2013); privilege those with pre-existing relationships to news organizations (Weeks & Holbert, 2013); are fleeting and difficult to reconstruct (Lehmann, Castillo, Lalmas, & Zuckerman, 2013); and tend to favor the circulation of crime, public affairs, and lifestyle stories over other types of content (Armstrong & Gao, 2010; Horan, 2012).

Finally, when news organizations use social network sites they immediately encounter a number of inter-organizational issues and legal questions. Twitter (nd), Facebook (Summers, 2013), and the American Society of News Editors (Hohmann, 2011) all recommend that journalists follow their “best practices” to find sources, verify facts, publish stories, and promote themselves on social network sites. (Twitter recently announced a new a “Head of News and Journalism” tasked with making Twitter “indispensable to newsrooms and journalists.” (Bloomgarden-Smoke, 2013)) And it is unclear whether news organizations’ policies regulating their staff’s use of social media are even constitutional (Greenhouse, 2013) and whether courts distinguish between tweets and retweets when applying libel law to online expressions of reporters or others (Henderson, 2013; Stewart, 2013). That is, as news organizations encounter social network sites, they must decide not only whether to hire new staff or change their work practices – they must also decide which organizational influences and legal risks to accept as part of participating in these new media spaces.

Social Media Policies As Boundary Objects

It is the boundary zones where outside-in and inside-out forces operate that are the least understood elements of contemporary networked press freedom. How and why do news organizations receive and extend into social media spaces? How do they allow or encourage such sites to influence their reporting practices and how do they resist aspects of them that are seen to be incompatible with their norms and values? One place to see these tensions at work is in the official policies that news organizations have created to regulate their staffs' use of social media, a domain only beginning to be studied (Stewart, 2013b). Such policies arguably tell incomplete stories—formal policies are always interpreted, resisted, subverted, or followed within complex social contexts (Meyer & Rowan, 1977)—but they can describe what Murdock (1977) calls the “allocative” conditions under which work happens, serving as evidence of how news leaders understand their organizations' *ideal* relationships to platforms that “host the public.” (Braun & Gillespie, 2011).

Sites & Method

I used textual analysis techniques to closely read the publicly available social media policies and guidelines of eight leading English-language news organizations: The Associated Press (2013), the British Broadcasting Corporation (2011), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (nd), ESPN (2011), the Los Angeles Times (2009), NPR (nd), Reuters (2013), and The Washington Post (2011). All policies are current as of June 2013. I selected these organizations for three reasons: each site is listed as a “top news” site by either Media Cloud (nd) or Alexa (nd); all had publicly available social media policies; and they represent a 4-year span that might reveal policy changes or consistencies over time. Following Creswell (1998), I used a grounded theory, “open coding” technique to identify themes (primarily at a sentence level) within each policy, looking for evidence (in word choice and phrasing) of how the policies distinguished between the work of news organization staff and the information practices of non-staff. I then used “axial coding” to create a new set of themes that combined the categories discovered in open coding, retaining only those that were “saturated” (*i.e.*, containing textual evidence from at least three different policies). Four themes emerged: motivations for using social media; negotiating personal and professional identities; adopting social media logics; and bracketing transparency.

Findings

(i) *Motivations for Using Social Media*

All policies begin with statements about why social media matter to news work, falling into two categories of motivation¹. The first is *utilitarian*, seeing social media as: powerful tools for “content distribution, user engagement, newsgathering ... and amplification of [staff] voices” (ESPN); “useful reporting and promotional tools” (LAT) for “disseminating” information (CBC); “valuable newsgathering and reporting tools [that] can speed research and extend a reporter's contacts” (NPR); and as ways to “advance the [organization's] brand and staffers' personal brands.” (AP)

A second motivation was to be *aware* of how social media influences journalism practices; they are seen as novel “conduit[s] for primary- and crowd-sourced information [that] give us new ways to report” (Reuters) and signal “transparency with our audience.” (NPR, ESPN) And Reuters draws a distinction between social media and journalism, cautioning that

journalism calls for communication preceded by fact-finding and thoughtful consideration.

Journalism has many ‘unsent’ buttons, including editors. Social networks have none. Everything

we say online can be used against us in a court of law, in the minds of subjects and sources and by people who for reasons of their own may want to cast us in a negative light.

Both motivations reflect largely *defensive* rationales, signaling news organizations' desires to leverage social media and mitigate their perceived risks.

(ii) *Negotiating Personal and Professional Identities*

The policies also suggest emerging and somewhat confused understandings of how to distinguish between journalists' personal and professional identities. Essentially, they tell journalists always to prioritize their roles as employees – *except* when expressing themselves on topics considered to be uncontroversial or unimportant to their employers.

The *Los Angeles Times* tells its workers to “[a]ssume that your professional life and your personal life will merge online *regardless of your care in separating them.*” “Washington Post journalists are *always* Washington Post journalists.” And the BBC says that “*even though you are acting in your own personal capacity, you are on show to your friends and anyone else who sees what you write, as a representative of the BBC.*” ESPN cautions that “*at all times* you are representing ESPN.” (All emphases added.)

Some news organizations suggest, though, distinctions between professional and personal identities. The BBC recognizes that a comment made by a BBC staffer “in their own name ... is not owned by the BBC.” NPR allows private accounts but notes that even “personal messages to friends or family can be easily circulated beyond the intended audiences [and] therefore, represents us and NPR to the outside world.” Reuters similarly says that even in personal “Twitter and Facebook profiles ... we should identify ourselves as Reuters journalists and declare that we speak for ourselves, not for Thomson Reuters.” But news organizations are also careful to say that their policies do not limit journalists' individual speech rights: staff expression is still “protected by the National Labor Relations act, such as candidly discussing wages, hours and working conditions” (Reuters) and “nothing in these Standards should be interpreted as prohibiting communications protected by federal or state statutes.” (WaPo)

The policies also suggest that social network sites and audiences are to blame for any confusions of personal and professional identities. The CBC says its journalists will “erode the trust of our audience” if they make personal statements. And the AP says that its staff cannot comment on AP stories because such spaces are “for the public, not for journalists to talk among themselves”; it would be “off-putting for an average Facebook user to ... see conversations between [AP] colleagues.” NPR says that the line “between private and public has been blurred *by these tools*” (emphasis added) and although the *Washington Post* tells staff to “indicate that links and [re-tweets] do not equal endorsements,” it, the AP, and ESPN all say that, regardless of what you indicate in your profile, audiences will see re-tweets as endorsements.

These guidelines, though, do not extend to topics that news organizations consider to be uncontroversial or unimportant. NPR says “not to express personal views on a political or other controversial issue” and Reuters prohibits comments on “matters of public importance and actual or potential subjects of coverage.” The CBC similarly warns its staff against “expression of personal opinions on controversial subjects or politics” and the AP prohibits “any postings that express political views.” Reuters *does*, however, let journalists “tweet or post about a school play, a film or a favorite recipe” and the AP says its staff are “free to comment on matters like sports and entertainment” – topics seen as having little value to the news organizations. Conversely, ESPN staff “are not permitted to report, speculate, discuss or give opinions on sports related topics on personal platforms” (since sports is ESPN's focus). That is, staff use of social media seem to pose little *general* risk to journalism – except when such expressions touch on news organizations' strategic interests.

(iii) *Adopting Social Media Logics*

All news organizations stressed the importance of applying traditional reporting norms to social media, but I found no evidence of challenges to social network sites' terms of service based on such norms. That is, news organizations seem to accept wholesale the logics and priorities of social network sites, neglecting to argue that anything like press privileges, privacy practices, or shield laws are relevant in their use of social media.

"Even if you use privacy tools," says the *Los Angeles Times* policy, "assume that everything you write, exchange or receive on a social media site is public." It continues: "The social media network has access to and control over everything you have disclosed to or on that site. For instance, any information might be turned over to law enforcement without your consent or even your knowledge." *The Washington Post* similarly cautions that "[e]very comment or link we share should be considered public information, regardless of privacy settings." And although NPR recommends that journalists "use the highest level of privacy tools available," it warns against letting them "make you complacent. It's just not that hard for someone to hack those tools and make public what you thought was private." Reuters, though, asks staff to avoid social media altogether because it is "difficult to demonstrate in the social networks' short forms and under the pressure of thinking-writing-posting in real time" the "posture of open-mindedness and enlightened skepticism" and "intellectual discipline" considered key for reporters to "keep their conclusions susceptible to further reporting." The BBC similarly warns its staff not to be "seduced by the informality of social media," reflecting concern over social media genres and norms rather than privacy settings.

The policies also seemed to recast news organizations' understandings of objectivity into the language and actions of social network sites. The *Los Angeles Times* and NPR both recommend that "if you 'friend' a source or join a group on one side of a debate, do so with the other side as well." (LAT) The *Washington Post* says that, to maintain the appearance of impartiality, journalists "should not accept or place tokens, badges or virtual gifts from political or partisan causes on pages or sites" and Reuters warns that although "it might be necessary to 'like,' 'join' or adopt a 'badge' to get the news," such actions compromise the organization's standards.

(iv) *Bracketing Transparency*

Social media policies also stress the importance of concealing certain aspects of news work from social network sites. ESPN warns against discussing "how a story or feature was reported, written, edited or produced; stories or features in progress; interviews conducted; or any future coverage plans." Reuters tells staff not to disclose "sensitive information from internal meetings" and, although it elsewhere says that social media can "promote transparency," the *Washington Post* states that "social networks are no place for the discussion of internal editorial issues such as sourcing, reporting of stories, and decisions to publish or not to publish." NPR suggests that some of its "meetings and gatherings" may be reported upon, but tells journalists to "always ask first if the forum is on or off the record before distributing information or content about it." Similarly, the BBC says that staff "can discuss the BBC and your work publicly" but also says not to "criticise your colleagues [or] reveal confidential BBC information."

Concerns about transparency apply not only to disclosure of internal information, but to times when reporters are in the field. The *Los Angeles Times* recommends that a journalist be an "observer of online content without actively participating [in it]" since "'friending' a professional contact may publicly identify that person as one of your sources." Similarly, although NPR tells its staff to "identify yourself as an NPR journalist when you are working online" and not to "use a pseudonym or misrepresent who you are," it also asks journalists to "[c]onsider whether you can accomplish your purposes by just observing

a group's activity rather than becoming a member." The policies seem to suggest that audiences cannot distinguish journalists' appearance *in* forums from their endorsement *of* forums.

Conclusion

The press has historically defined its freedom, in part, by how it relates to audiences. In the past, these relationships have been managed through processes that were largely about selectively admitting audiences into the newsroom – *e.g.*, through letters to the editor or ombudsmen. When the press did reach out to audiences it was usually through highly standardized “rituals of objectivity” (Tuchman, 1973) in which journalists retained considerable control over how and why audiences participated in news work. Press freedom was defined, in part, as freedom *from* audiences.

Today, though, press autonomy depends upon how journalists navigate an emerging set of outside-in and inside-out forces – *e.g.*, how they let readers interact with online news content and generate content for publication, and how they meet audiences in new social media spaces. It seems, though, in at least the official policies regulating news workers' use of social network sites, that news organizations are adopting utilitarian, defensive, and fundamentally conservative relationships to audiences – continuing to seek freedom *from* readers. When news organizations do use social media to meet audiences, it is to increase online traffic, source information more efficiently, and stay on top of technological trends. Staff are warned against using social media in ways that conflict with organizational priorities, reveal the details of internal news work, rely upon social media privacy protections, or upend norms of objectivity.

Such policies also reveal little in the way of principled resistance to social media based upon journalistic ideals. We might imagine news organizations using such policies as opportunities to: argue that social network sites *should* provide greater security for sources' identities; keep some data private while making other information easily visible; respect shield laws and reporter privileges in site terms of service; and allow for journalism-specific forms 'friending', 'following', 'liking', 'retweeting' and 'subscribing' that signal the kind of impartiality news organizations seem to desire online. In their official policies at least, news organizations are not mounting *journalistically* grounded challenges to social network sites – but neither are they using such policies as opportunities to reimagine news norms. Instead, their policies are focused on mitigating the risks of their staff misusing social media, their audiences misunderstanding social media activity, and their ideals of objectivity and impartiality become subsumed by social media relationships. Returning to Murdock's (1977) distinction, news organizations seem to be letting the *allocative* decisions social network sites make for themselves – the conditions under which *they* want people to manage information – define the operational conditions under which they do news work.

To be sure, this study has limitations. First, focusing on official and publicly available social media policies means missing organizational practices, informal heuristics, and context-specific negotiations that surely reflect how news organizations understand and use social media in practice. This study has little to say about how closely these policies are followed. Second, there are third-party actors and technologies who are not normally seen as social network sites, but who still influence press-audience relations. For example, many news organizations use Disqus to manage user comments and Chartbeat for real-time audience analytics – understanding tools like these is part of appreciating press-public infrastructure, but they were not part of this study. Finally, this study concentrated on large national or international news organizations. The policies of smaller, community-oriented or niche publications may differ significantly from those studied here. All of these areas deserve further research.

If press freedom is to mean anything in the context of *networked* news production, journalists and social media designers alike might debate how and why to regulate outside-in and inside-out forces. Doing so might help the press understand how its “loosely coupled arrays of standardized elements”

can be configured to serve democratic ideals. The exact meanings of these ideals are, as always, defined in light of contemporary conditions; today, it seems like they depend, in part, upon the often invisible infrastructures of social network sites that regulate press-public relationships outside of the press's direct control. Such infrastructures are important to study because, as institutional scholars have argued (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001) and analyses of news work have consistently shown (Boczkowski, 2010; Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Breed, 1955), the press has a tendency toward organizational mimicry. Since journalists and news organizations often imitate those they see as successful, official policies can travel easily and be interpreted as prescriptions for how to use social media; such standards can limit journalists' "reflexive potentials" to imagine new forms of professionalism specific to their contexts and cultures (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008, p. 675).

Instead of accepting the dominant logics of social media sites, news organizations might invoke the history of outside-in/inside-out press-public forces to propose new types of social network sites. They might advocate for *journalism*-driven technologies, norms, and policies that let the press experiment with and re-render its relationships to networked, interactive audiences.

Note

1 For easier reading, I use the following codes when citing organizations' social media policies: "AP" = The Associated Press (2013); "BBC" = British Broadcasting Corporation (2011); "CBC" = Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (nd); "ESPN" = ESPN (2011); "LAT" = Los Angeles Times (2009); "NPR" = NPR (nd); "Reuters" = Reuters (2013); "WaPo" = The Washington Post (2011). All citations refer to online publications and have no page numbers.

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