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Defining the Worlds of Journalism Study Sample

Definitions Working Group's Recommendations for WJS3 (2020-2022)

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Abstract

This report to investigators in the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) responds to a methodological need, expressed at the WJS Global Convention held in Madrid on July 5 and 6, 2019, for clearer and more globally viable definitions of various key concepts in our research, especially those that affect sampling method. Following a literature review and theoretical discussion, we propose that sampling for WJS3 be founded upon a set of concise, pragmatic, semantically rational, and longitudinally consistent definitions for the primary concepts involved and selected secondary concepts.

The proposed definitions for three pivotal constructs are as follows:

- *Journalist*: Someone who regularly seeks, describes, analyzes, interprets, contextualizes, edits, produces, presents or portrays intentionally accurate information about current affairs (news), in any text, sound and/or or visual form or medium, as part of a process of providing or interpreting this information to a more generalized group of people than those previously familiar with it, and without expectation of deriving personal benefit from the consequences of this information being made available. The journalist's work may or may not specialize in any particular subject matter or "beat" (e.g. politics, culture, business, crime, sports, lifestyle). The journalist may be employed by one or more news outlets, and/or may be self-employed ("freelance").
- *News*: Subject matter that consists of factual information about current affairs, analysis of or commentary upon that information, or any combination thereof.
- *News Outlet*: An original editorial product (e.g., a newspaper, TV newscast, online news site or radio station) with an identifiable focus on providing *news*.

Definitions are also proposed for other constructs deemed methodologically useful, including *Professional Journalist*, *Peripheral Journalist*, *News Organization*, *Media Platform*, *Media Range*, *Media Property*, and *Social Media*. We recommend avoiding inherently ambiguous terms such as "citizen (or amateur) journalist," "mainstream journalist/media," and "alternative media."

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Background: the road to WJS3

To investigate the worldviews, practices, conditions and social functions of journalism in a changing world, each country's investigators for the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) must construct a "representative" sample both of individual journalists and of the news outlets with which they are associated. (WJS2 Field Manual, 2.3) Today's increasingly complex media ecology requires clear, consistent definitions of key terms—not as a matter of theoretical argument, but as a pragmatic methodological necessity when it comes to determining eligibility for inclusion in our samples.

Definitions in WJS2

For the second wave of the study (WJS2, fielded from 2012 to 2016), the targeted sample population was described as "professional journalists," a construct then defined as follows:

A person who earns at least 50 percent of his or her income from paid labor for news media and is involved in producing and editing journalistic content as well as in editorial supervision and coordination. Press photographers are journalists by definition, camera operators only when they independently make editorial decisions. (WJS2 Field Manual, 2.1)

While eligible "professional journalists" sampled for WJS2 were generally selected through their association with "news outlets," country investigators were encouraged to include freelancers as well.

On the topic of media platforms, the same section of the Field Manual stated that journalists "from all kinds of media" should be included, and these kinds were listed as: "newspapers, magazines, television stations, radio stations, online media and news agencies." On the other hand, the WJS2 dataset explicitly excluded those described as "amateur journalists," such as "bloggers and participatory/citizen reporters."

Madrid 2019: an expanded framework

During the July 2019 meeting of investigators in Madrid, a "General Framework" for WJS3 was proposed and broadly adopted, with the aim of conducting a more holistic analysis of journalism as currently practised. Accordingly, the Framework paid special attention to the ways in which different contemporary information forms interact with each other, and outlined an expanded approach to sampling. This expansion was justified as follows:

Journalism is a social institution that is [...] subject to continuous discursive negotiation and (re)creation, with journalists retaining "definitional control" over what they consider legitimate practice, laying claim to cultural authority, and reinforcing a sense of professional identity. (WJS3 General Framework, 2019)

To promote sampling consistency, the Framework proposed that "journalists" be defined as: "news-media personnel who have editorial responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news stories or other basic information units."

This definition was seen as embracing those whose principal responsibilities lie in gathering, editing or producing news, or the supervision or management of news operations. As with WJS2, journalists associated with all types of media outlet (newspapers, magazines, TV, online, etc.), media range (local, regional, national, international) and media property (public, private, state, community), and who specialize (or not) in any kind of subject matter or "beat"

(e.g., politics, business, public security, culture, sports, and lifestyle) would be included in the selection process. (WJS3 General Framework, 2019)

Enter the “peripheral journalist”

The Framework pointed out that WJS2, like most studies of journalism to date, focused on “professional” (or full-time) journalists, “by design ignoring a class of peripheral journalists working at the margins of journalism.” It was therefore recommended, and duly agreed, that to recognize the increasing significance of news work at the margins of traditional structures, while maintaining longitudinal consistency with the previous dataset, WJS3 would include both a main sample of “professional” journalists, and a secondary sample of “peripheral” journalists.

Of course, this new demographic distinction would demand new definitional work.

The Framework suggested that a “professional journalist” (elsewhere termed a “mainstream journalist”) could be recognized as one for whom journalism is their “main occupation” and who “considers that his salary/time as a journalist is the most important for him, both economically and symbolically,” because it provides financial self-sufficiency or professional recognition.

The “peripheral” class, on the other hand, would include those who (with or without compensation) work for a platform or related space that, by its very nature, “can more easily adapt and respond to changes in journalism’s environment by experimenting with new practices and models of doing news.” (WJS3 General Framework, 2019) These peripheral areas have become central to journalism’s ability to adapt to new challenges, in part because they circumvent the limiting and restrictive structures (including formal and informal rules, conventions and practices as well as corresponding organizational manifestations) that constitute the conventional media. The new spaces include:

- Third-party microblogging platforms (e.g. *Twitter, Weibo, etc.*);
- Third-party messenger apps (e.g. *WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, etc.*).
- Third-party photo/video sharing sites (e.g. *Instagram, YouTube +, etc.*).
- Third-party news aggregating sites (e.g. *Yahoo! News, Apple News +, etc.*)
- Third-party social networking sites (SNSs) (e.g. *Facebook*)
- Specific additional cases unique to each region and country studied, which should be listed in the Study’s documents to facilitate comprehensively contextualized analysis.

Due to the highly malleable and innately controversial nature of the “peripheral” class, investigators agreed that selection for WJS3 under this heading should be based on observation of the content generated by the individual. At least part of their product must be “informative and/or relevant” to current or recent issues. In short, to be included even in the “peripheral” sample, a person must be demonstrably involved with the production of “news.”

Transformed “news outlets”

According to the General Framework, the “professional” sample for WJS3 would, as in WJS2, be selected with reference to their various areas of employment. As the principal construct for these areas, the Framework defined a “News Outlet” as “the editorial product (e.g., a newspaper, TV newscast, online news site),” and reserved for media products that have an identifiable and substantive “news program or news section.” News work might or might not be done within the physical confines of “newsrooms” or the structural boundaries

of an “editorial organization” (defined as “the organizational space or unit” within which a news outlet is produced), dominant as these forms of employment and organization had been throughout the 20th century. (Deuze & Witschge, 2018) On the other hand, our study should exclude any media outlet that does not carry any “news” or “editorial” content, such as a radio station that broadcasts only music.

Refining definitions

Several WJS members attending the Madrid meeting expressed reservations about the universality, utility or consistency of the above operational definitions for sampling. The concerns included some conceptual circularity within and amongst individual definitions, a desire for greater precision about relative terms like “principal responsibilities,” the overall vagueness of the idea of “peripheral,” and an unease with classifying journalists according to their proportionate sources of income in a global context.

There was broad agreement in Madrid that a journalist’s income sources should not be the determining variable for inclusion in the “professional” group. In some countries, such as Paraguay or Cuba, someone who earns less than 50 percent of their income from journalistic work may well have journalism as the focus of their professional identity, and this relatively low-earning work could occupy most of their time—that is, they may earn more money from other jobs on which they spend less time. Similarly, some journalists work part-time for news organizations and part-time in public relations work for businesses or government agencies. This can be problematic in terms of autonomy, but only if or where there is an intersection between the sector of their second job and the subject matter of the news content they produce. In any case, journalists in these situations keep other jobs not out of choice, but to survive. To discard these people from our sample because of their second job would be to ignore the degree to which some journalists might need a second income source to financially subsidize their work as journalists.

The purpose of this report

Due to the complexity of these conceptual issues, our working group was convened and tasked with recommending new sampling definitions for WJS3. This report is the result of our discussions, which were moderated by Martín Oller Alonso and Ivor Shapiro and conducted entirely by email. The group’s proposals were accepted in principle by the committee responsible for compiling the final questionnaire for WJS3 at its meeting in Munich on September 27, 28 and 29, 2019, and our findings are now commended for consideration by the investigators globally.

Discussion: key constructs

Any attempt to define who is a journalist (Deuze, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2010) or what is journalism (Ortega and Humanes, 2000; Wyatt, 2007; Shapiro, 2014) must first ask how to carry out this research (Löffelholz and Weaver, 2008) and then build an analysis capable of accommodating local and regional nuances (Hanitzsch, 2019) with the global perspective of the journalistic profession (Murray and Moore, 2003) to establish the profile of journalists and their professional situation in the different countries and regions of the world (Oller, 2016).

Theoretical approach

In this respect, the first definitional challenge is presented by the need to choose between moving from lower to higher levels of theory (i.e. from micro to macro approaches), on the one hand, and the safer path, on the other, of starting with reliable and standardized definitions at a higher level and using them to help define lower-level definitions.

We chose to begin by exploring the theory of identity (Habermas, 1981; Hecht, Warren, Jung and Krieger, 2005; Collier and Thomas, 1988), which highlights the identification troubles of organizations and actors involved in media and information processes. We did so in full awareness of the current moment of professional precariousness where, according to Deuze and Witschge (2018:176), “newsrooms become networks of loosely affiliated competitor-colleagues, news organizations retool toward an enterprising mode of production, access to the profession is increasingly exclusive, and journalists are held responsible for market success”.

This obliged us to limit and delimit the concept and meaning of journalism and journalist through recognizing the role of diverse journalistic cultures in forming these professional identities. By *culture*, we refer to one of the three key concepts in the *Theory of Communicative Action* proposed by Habermas (1981), the other two being *personality* and *society*. Habermas (1981) understood *personality* as the skills that make a subject capable of language and action; that is, that enables him to take part in processes of understanding and to affirm his own identity in them. *Society* refers to the legitimate ordinances through which participants in their interaction regulate their belongings to social groups. And by *culture*, Habermas meant the interest in knowing how community participants use interpretations to understand something about the world.

The investigation of these journalistic cultures—the commonalities, variations, and variability in journalists’ worldviews and social place—has been, of course, a central objective for our Study from its beginnings.

Journalistic cultures

The WJS has gained much traction through challenging a largely Anglo-Saxon hegemonial understanding of journalism. Likewise, in tackling its project of definition, our working group chose to de-center cultural norms, recognizing, as Hanitzsch (2019) claimed, a global diversity of journalistic cultures that range far beyond the intellectual thought lines of North America and Western Europe. On the other hand, we also wish to challenge too binary a classification of journalistic cultures into North and South. The idea of “intermediate cultures” has been used to refer to groups of underdeveloped or developing countries that share certain situational characteristics including that they have not-developed, hybrid or imperfect democracies, or political regimes other than democratic ones, through a cultural synthesis of colonial and pre-colonial elements. (Oller & Barredo, 2013) To shirk the challenge of decolonization and de-centering in our Study would be especially ironic given the particular role that has been ascribed to journalists as “cultural intermediaries” (Bourdieu 1984:354) and as an “interpretive community” (Zelizer, 2004:52).

This paradigm of journalistic cultures seems, in principle, to resist the notion of a firm dichotomy between a centre (or mainstream) and a periphery. Rather, different journalistic cultures naturally define differently what journalism is expected to be and what journalists are expected to do. A peripheral journalism or journalist in one country may be considered quite mainstream elsewhere. In Egypt, for example, a journalist is quite simply a person who is officially affiliated to the union of journalism; anyone else would be on the periphery of journalism, at best.

Therefore, to avoid marginalizing the essential value of a broad-based global comparative study, we need to develop a more dynamic approach to the classification of journalists and outlets into types. In the end, a typology that endures through alterations in time and space will need to be *multidimensional*. By this, we mean a model that both (1) offers concepts and definitions drawn from theory, and (2) lends itself to practical operationalization in a research instrument and empirical measurement through data analysis. We do not claim, of course, that any such model can endure forever; rather it will require reconfiguration and review cyclically. But the concepts and definitions recommended by this report should be dynamic enough to deserve the purpose of the third wave of WJS.

One advantage of a cross-cultural analysis and dynamic approach to typology is that it will reflect the actual global reality of the profession and practice of journalism, its complexities and its severe deviations from any single universal vision of what journalism is and who is a journalist. In this way, the WJS may avoid, following Hallin and Mancini (2016), the temptation to assume that it could be possible to represent a media system, a type of journalist or a model of journalism by any single value on any given variable.

Through capturing the richest diversity of journalistic practices, we will attain a more complete understanding of continuity and change, difference and similarities, global and local. A multidimensional approach will not negatively affect the value of continuity and comparability of results over time, but will open a window on dynamic changes in journalists' practice at a time of unprecedented and multi-faceted crisis in which the collective work of journalists and of news organizations faces existential danger as a social institution.

Profession, professionalism and professionalization

In debates on journalism, the concepts of profession and professionalism are tied together, and a discussion of journalism as a profession is therefore a helpful point of departure toward recognizing the distinct identity of a "professional" journalist.

In the "classical" professions, such as medicine and law, people working in these occupations undergo a lengthy education and receive formal certification to serve the community and share benefits in a select group of people qualified for these professions (Henningham, 1979; Tunstall, 1973). But is formal certification a required component of the idea of "professional"? This question has fuelled a long-running debate amongst social scientists. Tumber and Prentoulis (2005), in their contribution to Hugo de Burgh's anthology *Making Journalists*, claim that the founding fathers of sociology, Marx, Weber and Durkheim were relatively vague about the role of professions. Rather than defining professionals as a sociological category, Weber's work centered on "the accumulation and manipulation of specialized skills and knowledge that occupational groups began to master" (2005, p.58). Nor did Durkheim illuminate the debate, providing no link between history and the development of the professions in France. Marx's exploration of class struggles provided no more enlightenment on this topic beyond connecting the professions to the bourgeoisie, the capitalist market, and a monopoly in providing services. (Dooley, 1997).

According to Dooley, sociologists, economists, and political scientists have viewed the concept of professionalism from various angles. Sociologists emphasize how professionals serve the broader public with accumulated expertise, skills, and knowledge. Economists are more concerned with the monopoly privileges that professionals traditionally have enjoyed, while political scientists point to their character as "privileged private governments" (Dooley, 1997:59). When relating professionalism theory to the development of journalism, Everett C. Hughes, part of the "Chicago School" of sociology in the 1950s, states that professional groups were formed by specific circumstances such as mandate and professional licenses.

The acceptance from peers was crucial, and the shared identity was the glue that kept professional groups together (Hughes, 1958; Dooley, 1997).

Professionalism was therefore the result of a shift from an occupation to a profession, with shared licence, responsibility, and admiration. Another theoretical trend in sociology, according to Tumber and Prentoulis (2005) focused on the power to define professionalism by the professionals themselves, also called relative autonomy (Joseph, 2008). The creation of professional associations with colleagues led to a power shift in defining professionalism; those “inside” would distinguish a profession from an occupation. This shift in the Anglo-American sphere set the stage for what later became the benchmark of defining a profession in the western world (Caplow, 1954; Wilensky, 1964) usually based on characteristics that included the adoption of a formal code of ethics, the establishment of training schools, the founding of a professional association, and, in time, legal protection of the association’s freedom to regulate its own practices. (Dooley, 1997; Freidson, 1983; Johnson, 1972)

Few of these characteristics have consistently applied to journalism, in which the idea of professionalism has a short history and a lack of global consensus. Debates continue to rage as to whether it is best described as a craft, a trade or a profession, even though some locate the gradual professionalization of journalists as beginning in 19th century as U.S. as journalists sought to distinguish themselves from politicians. (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2005:58; Dooley, 1997) Unlike the classic professions, journalism has lacked the anchoring in an explicit tradition; rather, its historic, political, and cultural evolution has followed complex lines. Neither journalism’s “truth claims” nor the expertise, skills and knowledge required for journalistic practice are not standardized on the basis of theoretical or scientific frameworks (cf. Abbott, 1988). Because much journalism relies on the essentially subjective crafts of writing and editing, norms of practice are more vulnerable to change and dispute than is the case for classic professions. (Tumber and Prentoulis, 2005)

Recent years, however, have seen a turn of tide toward understanding of journalism as a profession, with an early contribution being Schudson’s argument (2003) for a cultural-historic link between journalism as a profession and the objectivity demands of science. For Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), the key distinguishing feature of the profession is the idea of accountability to the public interest, rather than to employers, the core purpose of journalism being to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments. Likewise, Deuze’s much-cited article, *What is journalism* claimed that “journalism as a discipline and an object of study is based on a consensual body of knowledge, a widely shared understanding of key theories and methods, and an international practice of teaching, learning and researching journalism.” (Deuze, 2005:442)

This consensus is not as strong as one might think. Paradoxically, Deuze notes a growing lack of international consensus in the academic field of journalism, which he attributes to a high level of critical debate (Fidler, Carey & Counts, 1998), and the constant debates between the media industry and scholars regarding the discipline. What, then, is the “body of knowledge” that Deuze refers to, and to what degree is it open to historical-political relativity? Deuze does not define it fully, preferring to identify common values that he considers widespread. Drawing on Russo (1998), Golding and Elliott (1979), Merritt (1995), and Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), Deuze suggests that journalists identify themselves more easily with their peers than with their employers and, as a group, hold “discursively constructed ideal-typical values” of journalism. These values include public service (as collectors and disseminators of information), objectivity (impartiality, fairness), autonomy

(independence in their work) immediacy (inherent in the concept of news), and ethics (providing validity and legitimacy). (Deuze, 2005:446-7)

The degree to which these or any values are commonly held by journalists worldwide remains a preoccupying question in our own Study amongst others. Deuze himself points out that critical literature on journalism, e.g. especially Schudson (2001), and questions the values of objectivity and detachment as absolutes, and questions the stability of the ideal-typical values in the practices of a global and more fluid news age. Rather, according to Deuze, these traditional, mostly Western values, gain different meaning in different circumstances and are more a matter of journalists' self-representation than anything else.

The notion of professionalism in journalism was revisited by Silvio Waisbord in his 2013 book, *Reinventing Professionalism* (2013). There, he argued for a widened approach to the Western basis for "professional journalism." Rather, the global journalism community could foster a professional community through seeking agreement on certain "boundaries" through "cultivating a unique epistemology and sharing common practices and norms." (Waisbord, 2013:222)

In our view, the WJS provides a concrete example of the quest to explore the boundaries of epistemology and practice while avoiding Northern professional self-referentiality (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) and de-Westernizing and decentering journalism theory, research, practice, and education (Grüne and Ulrich, 2012). In this sense, our working group's task of defining parameters for key constructs forms part of an effort to combat "global professional colonization" in journalism (Hanitzsch, 2007:367), instead facilitating an internationalization grounded on recognizing the globalization-westernization duality and the "homogenization of journalistic practices." (Oller & Tornay, forthcoming).

Who is a journalist?

We turn now from exploring the concepts underlying the demarcation of "professional" journalists to discuss what it means to be a journalist at all. Growing public and political concern in many countries about unethical conduct of the media, coupled with a lack of effective self-regulatory mechanisms (Aznar, 2011), has been used by some governments (Schudson, 1996) to force the industry to distinguish between journalists based on their qualifications, employers, or membership of professional groupings. These ethical principles are used to suggest how journalists should behave and to define who they are (Singer, 2014). It follows naturally that some associations of journalists have wanted to define who is a journalist and who is not. In Norway, for example, this is tied to adhering to the Ethical Code of journalists.

A counter-argument to any kind of qualification of a "class" of journalists is that freedom of expression, or otherwise freedom of the press, innately includes the idea that no one should be inhibited from setting about the kind of work that comprises journalism. According to this view, every citizen—indeed, every person—should have the right to "do journalism." It follows that people should be able to define for themselves what constitutes journalism, and that no privileges or penalties should flow from this definition.

This inclusive approach to reasoning would suggest that we should adopt the broadest possible approach to qualifying potential subjects in WJS3, an approach that also carries some obvious practical advantages, since capturing anyone who self-identifies themselves as a journalist would make it easier to recruit larger numbers of subjects. However, so broad an approach would also have significant disadvantages, in diluting, or even negating, the value of the survey.

At the extreme opposite end to a broadly inclusive approach would lie various kinds of screening. Some might involve value-judgments on the quality of individual's public work (e.g. the presence of transparent attribution). Other screens could filter for the type of work that we most readily associate with journalism (e.g. a short pre-interview question to establish the degree to which the subject's work consisted of producing topical reports, for a general audience, that includes alternative views of a situation or issue). Yet again, an outcome-based screen could limit the sample to those who have produced a certain minimum number of published pieces including news reports, commentary, long-form non-fiction and the like. However, any type of pre-screening would make recruitment more difficult and would likely reflect innate cultural biases. More objective qualification methods could use legal attributes, such as a formal labour or contractual relation to a registered organization, or some aspect of training, or assessments of income sources and proportions. (such as was proposed in the Madrid 2019 Framework document)

The peril of all these approaches is that they imply a definitional assumption that people are admitted, or not admitted, to the "class" of journalists based on *our* values as investigators. Malik and Shapiro sought to avoid the perils of a "class" definition of journalists by proposing instead a "functional" definition of the kind of work that comprises journalism, as follows:

Journalism comprises the activities involved in an independent pursuit of, or commentary upon, accurate information about current or recent events, and its original presentation for public edification. (Malik and Shapiro, 2016:16; based on Shapiro 2014:561)

From this functional approach, a "journalist" might be described as anyone who conducts work that meets the above description. In principle, this approach would avoid distinctions based on how much time this person spends doing this kind of work, how much money (if any) they make for doing so, or where that money comes from: if someone is doing journalism, then they are, at least at that moment, a journalist. This strictly functional approach does not, however, answer the methodological questions that guide sampling for survey research. Clarity about who is or is not eligible for our survey will require more than satisfaction that, at some point in recent history, the potential subject has conducted something that looks like journalism.

An alternative approach would be to include as a "journalist" anyone who works for, or regularly sells content to, one or more news outlets. The journalist, through this approach, is simply someone who plays a part in news production whether in offline or online news media or both, and whether the job is part-time or full-time. Qualifying job descriptions would include producing news, editorials, news programs, talk shows or any other editorial service that results in news dissemination. Journalists, in this case, should not be selected on the basis of income sources or time allocation, but would meet just one criterion: that they serve a news outlet in the production of news.

The advantage of this approach would be that even a person who owes only a small fraction of their income to their involvement with news would be recognized as potentially knowing more about news production than a colleague who earns 100% of their income, and spends 100% of their time, in journalism practice. After all, the ideal WJS subject is someone who understands the profession, its determinants and consequences. A definitional approach that starts with the news outlet might therefore, in principle, provide the easiest way to arrive at an ideal sample.

Such an approach would, however, only lend greater urgency to two other definitional challenges: the nature of a "news outlet," and the difference between "professional" and "peripheral" journalists. We now turn to address these two challenges, in turn.

What is a news outlet?

To understand what a “news outlet” is, we must first understand what “news” is. Literally, the word “news” means “information about important or recent events” (Oxford English Dictionary); more colloquially, it means things that are “new,” that is, things that formerly did not exist or were formerly unknown, as in the colloquial expressions, “breaking news,” and, “that’s news to me.” At its simplest, therefore, news is simply subject matter that describes current or recent events, or at least events that are of interest to a broader public rather than a powerful, exclusive “inside group.”

It is also commonly accepted that journalism of acceptable quality places bare facts about current events in some kind of context, which may include reaching back into the past rather than a strict inclusion only of current events. For our purposes, therefore, the idea of “news” extends beyond strictly factual reporting about current events to include interpretation and analysis of those facts.

We recognize that the term “news” is sometimes used in opposition to “comment” or “opinion—that is, to distinguish a neutral description or analysis of current events from commentary that is based on one’s personal perspective. However, consistency with the WJS2 sampling method demands that we include in our survey journalists whose work consists, in part or in whole, of commentary or analysis on “current affairs” (a term that we take to encompass both specific events and contemporary public or issues in general). Rather, the chief definitional issue around “news” in WJS methodology has been, since the Study’s beginnings, to distinguish it from *entertainment*. Thus, “news outlet” is defined in the WJS3 General Framework (2019) as an “editorial product (e.g., a newspaper, TV newscast, online news site) [with] an identifiable and substantive news program or news section,” by contrast, for example, with radio stations that broadcast only music.

Developments in the media landscape of the 21st Century, however, suggest consideration of more complex issues regarding what constitutes a news outlet for the methodological purposes of WJS3. Most of these arise with respect to the widening range of online or digital media products, platforms, and activities. It is possible that many online-focused journalists were wrongly excluded by the sampling approaches of WJS2, at least in some countries, depending on the way in which they defined a news outlet. Everyone agrees that this likely error should not be repeated in WJS in the 2020s. One way to avoid it would be to ensure that the definition of “news outlet” remain as broad as possible, insisting only that an included outlet should be involved in the original production (versus mere aggregation) of news content. Another is to avoid (by contrast to the simplistic implication at the end of the previous section, and, indeed, to a core sampling approach in WJS2) excessive reliance on a relationship with a news outlet in order to recognize a journalist.

“Peripheral” journalists

As we turn to consider the concept of “peripheral” (as opposed to “professional”), we should emphasize that this distinction applies to individuals, not organizations. A viable definition of “news outlet” should apply to *Agence France Press* as easily as it fits a tiny community-based radio newscast in Gabon. Nor do we subscribe to the outdated view that all or even most journalism is disseminated today through formal “news outlets” in any sense. And finally, the work of a “professional” journalist is not necessarily any more likely than that of a “peripheral” journalist to play an important part in the dissemination of an important, even world-changing, item of news.

As noted above, the urgency of establishing a category of “peripheral” journalist owes much to the rise of one-person-band, self-publishing news workers whose who owe their success

to the predominance of social media in today's information landscape. Social media are, by definition, organisms driven by the interests and activities of people in general, not by "professional" practitioners or specialists in journalism. But the news-production process, focused as it is (at least in its theoretical intentionality) on disseminating accurate information, is not a merely spontaneous, organic function consisting of the indiscriminate sharing of opinions and alleged facts amongst participant-consumers, the characteristics and activities of whom do not resemble the definitional concepts attached above to journalists and news media. (Hamada, 2018)

For example, it may be fascinating to think about whether an *Instagram* influencer could be considered as doing journalism if the content produced and published involves original research on current affairs. Many social media influencers earn substantial incomes from this work, and are highly disciplined and skilled in their approach, yet their routine inclusion in the dataset of "professional journalists" would raise many practical issues for WJS3, not least through imperilling longitudinal consistency with WJS2. There could, however, be strong arguments for their inclusion in the secondary, "peripheral" dataset.

Similarly, community media have played an important role in public information for decades. In some countries, such as Ecuador, Bolivia and others, recent changes in communication law have granted official recognition to media outlets that, in many cases, previously operated on the margins, without a license and/or clandestinely. People who provide editorial work for these radio stations should certainly be included as journalists, whether "professional" (if it is their main work) or as "peripheral" (if they are volunteers), and this should be true whether they have any kind of education or professional training or, as in many cases, none.

After all, formal training as a journalist has never been a *sine qua non* for news careers. A case of frequent reference is a trained accountant who ran Zambia's most decorated newspaper for 25 years until it was shut down by the government in 2016. This man also won more awards than anybody else in the industry despite his lack of formal training in journalism.

If this former accountant had started his news outlet last year as an upstart blog rather than running an established newspaper, would we consider him a merely "peripheral" journalist? Would that determination depend on analysis of his income, or how he spends his time? These measures are unlikely to capture the increasingly diverse populations of journalists in all countries, as we saw in the large percentage of freelancers in some countries in WJS2.

Finally, under this heading, we suggest that the notion of "peripheral journalist" is significantly different from the older term, "citizen journalist." The idea that a citizen can do journalism is consistent in principle with freedom of expression and of the press, but it stems more specifically from the rise of social media, which allowed anyone to add their research and interpretive voice to the dissemination of information about current affairs. The idea of the "citizen journalist" emphasizes that one does not need special training or recognition, or to be associated with the "mainstream media," to contribute to a collectively sourced, dynamically growing body of information about current affairs. But it also has a connotation of a wild-west approach to the dissemination, with no particular value attached to prior ascertainment of accuracy; instead, the "Crowd" is best placed to decide what is true and what is not.

Further, the recognition that almost all journalists are "citizens" of somewhere spurs the need for a more specific term for the class of non-professional, non-mainstream contributors to public information who nonetheless may be expected, in principle, to express and aspire to values and roles that are similar to those of "professional" colleagues. Thus, we suggest

avoiding “citizen journalists” in favour of “peripheral journalists.” This model is part of an ecological transition in the study of “glocal journalistic models” emerging from a globalized culture and the identities of particular country or region defined by their borders and conjunctures. (Oller, 2016.) But in our view, a bipolar and reductionist “centre-periphery model” does little justice to the more complex and diverse understanding of what journalism is and who journalist is.

“Online news” and “digital journalism”

By common consent, WJS will include more online media platforms than in the previous wave, accentuating the need for clarity on what distinguishes online or digital “news” from other new media products.

Recent years have seen attempts to parse out distinctive characteristics of “online” or “digital” news or journalism as compared with analogue or legacy forms. According to Hamada (2018), offline or traditional journalism are mainly newspapers, magazines, radio, and television news while online or digital journalism refers to both the online versions of traditional journalism and online-only news sites, which report on top news stories with no offline publication versions.

The distinct and common feature of both offline and online journalism is that in both cases, full- or part-time journalists working for these outlets earn all or most of their livelihoods by working in the production of news. “Professional” journalists increasingly use social media to produce, disseminate, and consume news. In their capacity as journalists, they frequently turn first to social media platforms, such as *Twitter*, to disseminate news, and later compose or contribute to more comprehensive news reports for other (non-social) news outlets.

A distinct development in online news and digital journalism over the last few years has been that of the increased communication between journalists and audiences. Journalists interact with both audiences and “followers” and may participate in social media for personal reasons, not representing their news organizations or pretending to cover the news, but frequently expressing their own views, interests, and attitudes with little or no connection with or involvement by their employers. It has even been suggested that direct relationship between journalist and consumers (audience) through social media without mediation “might actually have a positive effect on how news consumer perceive traditional journalistic roles.” (Willnat, Weaver & Wilhoit, 2019:438)

Certainly, one of the most distinct features of social media platforms, relative to older forms, is the direct and dynamic relationship between news producers and consumers (decide whether we use audiences or consumers). Malik and Shapiro (2017) built on Shapiro’s functional approach (2014, see above) to define as “digital” those forms of journalistic activity that were interactive (involving a two-way relationship between news producers and consumers), potentially global in reach, and long-lasting (in theoretically eternal archives) yet “unfinished” (because the work produced may be infinitely corrected and augmented). They also suggested that digital journalism tends toward more “unsiloed” compilations of information from multiple sources, and a more “personal” voice. For Beckett (2010), the collaboration of the public and its participation as co-creator in the information process, from sharing real-time information all the way to authoring autonomous news stories, shape an emerging type of “networked journalism”. From this new journalistic model emerges the so-called “networked journalists” (Van Der Haak et al., 2012) whose work is driven by a networked practice dependent on sources, commentaries, and feedback, some of which are constantly accessible online. (in Deuze & Witschge, 2018)

The “interactive” characteristic of digital journalism raises a core problem. It has been suggested that journalists may be distinguished from propagandists and marketers by the likelihood that the latter, but not the former, will prosper as a direct result of disseminating certain information, even if it is indisputably accurate. For instance, the timeliness of a news report may affect a stock price; journalists are therefore widely expected not to own shares in companies likely to be affected by their reporting. Similarly, the direct relationship between a journalist and their readers, listeners and viewers should not lead to the journalist’s compensation being based on their pleasing, rather than informing, their audience. (Brethour et al., 2012; Shapiro, 2014) Rather, a legitimate news outlet may be recognized by a degree of stability, regularity, accountability, ethics, laws, contractual relations between employers and employees, hierarchical relationships, and, more importantly, the existence of gatekeepers. Today, many journalists live and work with these at times conflicting realities.

Approach to definition

The complexity of the foregoing discussion leads us to adopt a somewhat complex approach to our task of definition, in which we will use both inclusion and exclusion to first embrace certain types of actor or activity, and then to exclude certain subtypes.

For example, our discussion above of the relationship between news producers and consumers suggests that the definition of “News Outlet” should include some social-media activities but not others; even if it produces “news,” an outlet should be excluded if, in the opinion of the investigator, the relationship between news producers and news consumers is so reciprocal that it routinely favours audience popularity above factual accuracy (i.e. “fake news.”)

Such a layered, multidimensional approach is a necessary response to the rich diversity and hybridity of journalism(s) around the world, to new and creative ways in which journalists are “making it work”, as well as to the deteriorating conditions (i.e. precarity) of journalistic labor and media work generally. This reality is presented as one of the main challenges for students, professors, and scholars to find an adequate way to describe and explain the complexity of what it means, or takes, to be a journalist today.

In view of the above considerations, our approach to defining the key terms for WJS3 sampling may be summarized as a search for definitions that are *concise, precise, linear, glocal, longitudinally consistent*, and finely balanced between *exclusivity and sufficient breadth*:

- *Concise and precise*: There is little point in seeking a lengthy and proviso-laden definition that leaves much room for colleagues to interpret it in their own ways. Rather, the rule for the word count of our definitions (and indeed for all definitions) should be “less is more.”
- *Linear*: Many inherited definitions in this area have resorted to some degree of circularity. For example, journalists are often defined as news-media personnel who produce either journalism or “news or ‘other’ information units,” while news outlets are defined as media groupings that produce journalism or news products! Meaningful definitions will define news without referring either to news or to journalism, and define journalists without referring either to news or to journalism.
- *Glocal*: The need to accommodate both local/regional nuances and a broader, global professional profile, our definitions must work equally well in all media systems covered by the WJS world-wide. To speak pragmatically in our common vernacular,

WJS teams must be able to apply our definitions efficiently in local systems that variously recognize populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, critical change agents, and opportunist facilitators. (Hanitzsch, 2011)

- *Longitudinally consistent:* We cannot forget that while the new definition proposed should allow us to capture a broader variety of journalists, this would make longitudinal comparison difficult, if not impossible, as we wouldn't know whether any differences can be attributed to change over time, or are due to the different populations. Hence, it might also be wise to have a filter question somewhere in the questionnaire that later lets us differentiate out those we can meaningfully compare with WJS2 journalists (e.g. *How much of your income do you derive from journalism? Have you published in a public forum in the past 5 years?*).
- *Exclusive:* We propose that our definition of journalism must, while admitting journalists who seek a wide range of outcomes (e.g. maximized audience interest, community development, accountability, justice), avoid diluting the sample with those whose explicit interest in commercial or political goals routinely outweigh their interest in accuracy. In short, a propagandist or public relations agent is definitively NOT a journalist (although they might have started out as one). Wording this exclusion will not be easy, but it is necessary. Having said which, there is also such a thing as *too much* exclusivity—a balance must be drawn, to the opposite scale of which we turn next.
- *Sufficiently broad:* While our definitions must be specific enough to protect the integrity of the sample, they must also accommodate diverse culturally, economically or historically based assumptions. For example, some people do not include the authors of comment and opinion as journalists; some would want to exclude those who have clear biases, or whose journalism is motivated by an ideological cause. Others strongly disagree, perhaps arguing that all human beings have biases or that much excellent journalism is motivated by furthering a better, more humane society, whether for its own sake or as an outcome of more widely available information. While these debates continue to be useful, they should not limit our sample to the most narrowly set of qualified professionals. Rather, our definition should embrace as many workers as the investigators, in their various countries and cultures, consider to be widely recognized as journalists. In general terms, therefore, we may want to think along the lines of two sets of definitional critique, “inclusive” and “exclusive”. For example, we might first include subjects who meet the threshold of spending at least half their working life working for News Outlets, and then exclude those who fall into certain subsets (e.g., the camera operator or microphone holder who simply “follows orders” from the reporter/producer).

Recommended definitions

The preceding arguments summarize the challenges for the third wave of WJS on how to achieve a consensus on who or what counts as a news outlet, as journalism in general, and as a professional or peripheral journalist. These definitions must not only serve the realistic cause of sampling, but also be translatable into questions that the interviewer uses to identify the interviewee and the organization in which they operate, as well as whether an interview subject most neatly belongs in the main sample or the secondary dataset.

Based on the guidelines and constraints articulated above, we therefore recommend the following primary and secondary¹ definitions as pragmatic methodological parameters to achieve sampling consistency in WJS3.²

Journalist

Someone who regularly seeks, describes, analyzes, interprets, contextualizes, edits, produces, presents or portrays intentionally accurate information about current affairs (*news*), in any text, sound and/or or visual form or medium³, as part of a process of providing or interpreting this information to a more generalized group of people than those previously familiar with it, and without expectation of deriving personal benefit from the consequences of this information being made available. The journalist's work may or may not specialize in any particular subject matter or "beat" (e.g. politics, culture, business, crime, sports, lifestyle). The journalist may be employed by one or more *news outlets*, and/or may be self-employed ("freelance").

- *Professional journalist*: Someone who meets the definition of *Journalist* and who considers their activity, income, or time as a *Journalist* to be their main or most important occupation, whether economically, because it provides financial sustainability, or symbolically, in that it provides social recognition or professional status. (This person is therefore eligible for inclusion in the main sample for WJS3.)
- *Peripheral journalist*: Someone whose frequent or regular work includes providing intentionally accurate *News* content without expectation of deriving personal benefit as a direct consequence of this information being made available, but who does not otherwise fully meet the definition of *professional journalist*. This class includes full-time and part-time workers as well as unpaid interns and others whose sense of "identity" or "belonging" leads them to consider themselves as *journalists*. It may include people who work exclusively in spaces at the margins of conventional *news* dissemination, such as microblogging platforms, messenger apps, and other *media* spaces that provide social networking, video sharing or news aggregation, or that experiment with new practices and models of doing news, but it should also include, for example, volunteers at more long-standing outlets, such as community radio stations. (These people are eligible to be included in the secondary sample of WJS3.)

News

Subject matter that consists of factual information about current affairs, analysis of or commentary upon that information, or any combination thereof. (For the methodological purposes of our study, we do not differentiate *news* from "opinion.")

- *News outlet*: An original editorial product (e.g., a newspaper, TV newscast, online news site or radio station) with an identifiable focus on providing *news*. (Media outlets

¹ *Journalist*, *news*, and *media* are considered primary definitions on which the other definitions rely. The latter definition is pivotal because it is referenced in the sampling method for *professional journalists*.

² Italicized text points to terms for which we have proposed separate definitions. The use of non-gendered plural forms may be read as either singular or plural.

³We avoid here the alternative construct of "platform." According to Van Dijck (2016), from the point of view of mediatizations, the "platform" phenomenon is a level of multiple media exchange that forces us to review not only the definition of media, but also, at this point, those of networks or social media.

that do not carry any editorial coverage, e.g. radio stations or programs that only broadcast music, will be excluded, as will aggregation sites.)

- *News organization*: A company or other grouping that provides financial resources and editorial or logistical infrastructure (such as physical space and data networks) within which one or more *news outlets* functions. This organization may or may not also be involved in dissemination of non-News products.

Media

Means for distribution of information in any form to large audiences that are physically separated from the originators.

- *Media property*: A for-profit, non-profit, and/or publicly owned entity whose principal pursuit is the distribution of information to large audiences. These entities include:
 - *Private media*: owned by a for-profit company, whether or not its shares are publicly traded.
 - *Public service media*: oriented to public service rather than profit, and protected from political interference in editorial processes through strong traditions or structural protections related to hiring, firing and allocation of funding;
 - *State-run media*: financed either by the state (official media) or public through parliamentary allocations (state media), but, in either case, controlled by the state whether directly or through government proxies.
 - *Community media*: serve discrete audiences whose commonality may be delineated by geography (e.g. towns or regions) or membership (e.g. universities, ethnic groups or local organizations), often operated by volunteers and/or *peripheral journalists*.
- *Media platform*: The form of communication technology used by a *media property* to disseminate content. Media Platforms commonly used by *news outlets* include: television, newspaper, magazine, radio, news agency, and a variety of online products such as websites, blogs, and social media feeds. A *news outlet* may or may not share its resources, content, and production streams, within or beyond its parent *media property* amongst two or more media platforms.
- *Media range*: The geographical or cultural extent of audience targeted or reached by a *media property*. These include local, regional⁴, national and transnational ranges.
- *Social media*: Online discussion forums, social networking sites (SNSs) (such as *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *Ozone* or *RenRen*), content-sharing sites (such as *YouTube*), microblogging platforms (such as *Twitter* or *Sina Weibo*), messenger apps (such as *WhatsApp* or *Facebook Messenger*), video sharing sites (such as *Instagram* or *YouTube+*) and news aggregating sites (such as *News* or *Apple News*). This excludes search engines (such as *Google*, *Yahoo*, *Bin*, or *Baidu*) which per definition are not considered social media.

⁴ By “region,” we mean a territorial area bounded by common characteristics that can be geographical, cultural, political or economic within a country.

Concepts to be avoided

Finally, we recommend that the following terms be avoided for the purposes of WJS methodology, due to their innate ambiguity.

- *Citizen (or amateur) journalists*: These terms have been used for journalists who are not “professional” in terms of training, standards, and/or compensation sources (if any). For greater clarity, we recommend consistently applying the descriptor *Peripheral* to those who are not regularly compensated for *News* work but otherwise meet the definition of *Journalists*.
- *Mainstream journalists/media*: Although the proposed methodological framework for WJS 3 (Madrid 2019) refers to “mainstream journalists” as a variation of “professional journalists,” no consistent definition is available for the term “mainstream.” It is sometimes an antonym for “citizen journalists” or “alternative media,” and “mainstream media” is often associated with pejorative judgments against news outlets or organizations of which the speaker disapproves for ideological reasons that can vary dramatically. We recommend against using this imprecise term within an increasingly diverse media landscape.
- *Alternative media/platforms*: The term “alternative” is sometimes used to connote non-traditional approaches to news, points of view that are out of the cultural or economic “mainstream,” new social-media technologies, or any combination of the above. The sheer breadth and ambiguity of the term makes it pragmatically indefinable for methodological purposes.

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