The Synchronising Function of New Participants in Digital News Production

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the function of emerging professionals in digital news production who are neither typical journalists nor typical technologists, but operate across the increasingly permeable boundaries of IT, marketing, PR, management, and the newsroom. These hybrid actors contribute to the creation, implementation, and distribution of news in the digital environment, with the primary function of synchronising cross-departmental activities in pursuit of sales-oriented goals. Based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with ten such professionals from France, Lithuania, Sweden, and the USA, the study confirms that the permeability of boundaries, the dissolution of traditional divisions, and the hybridity of professional positions have become increasingly radical, leading to a multi-level blurring of boundaries. These professionals engage in fluid collaboration that aligns the operations of diverse actors under the guiding principle of profitability. They are significantly involved in journalism-related boundary work, and undertake a range of tasks that enable them to influence epistemic journalistic practices. In doing so, they undermine the traditional divide between editorial and commercial domains, further blurring the lines that define journalism and its acceptable practices.

Keywords: boundary work, journalism, new participants, digital news production, newsroom, function

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Introduction

The introduction of novelties to news media organisations and the involvement of new professionals in news production have long raised fundamental questions about journalism identity construction, the function of new participants in this process, and their engagement in journalism-related boundary work. The "inherent porousness of journalistic work" (Carlson, 2015a: 7) makes journalism particularly responsive to change in environments both internal and external to news media. News production has transformed in parallel with economic, political, professional, social, and technological change (Zamith and Westlund, 2022), and the boundaries of journalism have been constantly challenged and (re)constructed by social actors within and outside news organisations (e.g., Carlson, 2016; Deuze and Witschge, 2018).

Technological change has had particularly profound consequences for news production, and has contributed to "an alteration in the professional identity of journalist" (Witschge, 2013: 162). These shifts are evident in the daily practices of journalistic output, the organisation of newsrooms, interactions and relationships with other groups in the media organisation, and the transformation of routines, norms, and rules. The boundaries of journalism have become increasingly blurred with "the entry of new producers of journalism" (Witschge and Harbers, 2018: 108) – the "journalistic strangers" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon, 2018), "peripheral players" (Chua and Duffy, 2019) and "peripheral actors" (Hanusch and Löhmann, 2023) – who work alongside or concurrently with traditional journalists, editors and producers (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019: 2). While the digitisation and internetisation of communication has increased the influence of non-journalistic participants in defining "journalistic territory" (Splichal, 2022: 118), new types of news work have appeared that "span multiple professional identities" (Ananny and Crawford, 2015: 192–193).

News organisations contain "a wide ensemble of social actors" (Westlund et al., 2021: 4), principally journalists, technologists and businesspeople, among whom the former have traditionally been the focus of academic research. In the past decade, the professionals emerging at the crossroads between journalism and other fields have begun to attract attention, and studies have increasingly addressed particular groups of digital professionals who "engag[e] in work that at least partly resembles journalism" (Hanusch and Löhmann, 2023: 1294). Each new actor performs a specific function in news production, and should be seen as a (potentially influential) participant of journalism-related boundary work.

This study examines a segment of these blurred territories, to position a particular group of news media workers within the process of news production. These actors

work under job titles such as *head of editorial innovation* or *senior taxonomist*, and do not fit neatly into the traditional occupational groups of journalists and technologists. The nature of their tasks – and the boundaries that separate them from those of other actors – remains under-researched and therefore unclear. What positions do these professionals occupy within the news media organisational and management structure, and which tasks do they perform? How do they fit into the newsroom organisation and its work? What are their professional responsibilities? What are their professional interactions and relationships with journalists and editors? In brief, what is their function in the digital news production process? To address these questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 such professionals from France, Lithuania, Sweden and the USA.

Blurring the Boundaries of Digital News Production

Issues of contemporary transformations in digital news production often relate to the "blurring of boundaries – boundaries involving people, practices, and places" (Carlson, 2015a: 2). This widespread notion, or "journalism's de-boundedness" (Loosen, 2015), is applicable to the concept of hybridity, and results from the broad processes of social change and the structural context of journalism (Hallin et al., 2023). The literature (e.g., Kristensen and From, 2012; Liu and Berkowitz, 2020) has covered its numerous aspects extensively, and the continual changes to the digital news media landscape have inspired frequent new research.

The already fluid boundaries of journalism have become further contested with the involvement of new participants in digital news production, who have "the potential to simultaneously contribute to the evolution of journalism and to disrupt its boundaries" (Chua and Duffy, 2019: 112). Amateur journalists, bloggers, mobile app designers, programmers, web analytics managers, and others "who have not belonged to traditional journalism practice but have imported their qualities and work into it" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon, 2018: 70) have all been part of the negotiation of journalism's boundary space.

The following three sections provide the theoretical grounding for our study. In the first, the paper briefly addresses the concept of journalism-related boundary work. Then, it discusses the wider context of the shifting borders and collapsing walls within digital news media organisations in terms of structure and organisation, practice, and rhetoric, with a particular emphasis on the news-business boundary. Finally, it clarifies important shifts in the continuous emergence of new participants.

Journalism-Related Boundary Work

In the traditional news production model, journalists are central actors: they control the production process, and strive to adhere to the values embedded in their occupational ideology (Zamith and Westlund, 2022). Although professionalism serves "as a semantic tool for journalists to draw boundaries and to demarcate their profession" (Riedl, 2021: 691), journalism has never had a stable identity, and its boundaries have not been firmly established. The formation of identity and its manifestation in practice are complex and ongoing processes of negotiation and reconstruction, carried out by participants in journalism-related boundary work.

Here we understand boundary work in terms of the expansion or expulsion of what qualifies as journalistic and who qualifies as a journalist, and of the protection of autonomy in the areas of participants, practices, and professionalism (Carlson, 2015a). Journalists have been intensely engaged in these processes (e.g., Väliverronen, 2022), by debating what journalism is and who can be considered a real journalist (Deuze and Witschge, 2018: 168), and revising ethical codes (e.g., Poler Kovačič and Van Putten, 2011). Organisational separation between news and business departments, for example, is a boundary-work strategy journalists have employed to control their professional autonomy (Coddington, 2015: 71). Research into boundary work from the perspective of journalists has been relatively extensive: recent studies include Banjac and Hanusch's (2023) examination of the boundary work of political and lifestyle journalists; Mathisen and Knudsen's (2024) investigation of boundary work in a debate over membership rules within a journalists' union; and Mathisen et al.'s (2025) application of a boundary work typology to analyse how data journalists are expanding the boundaries of public radio journalism in the USA.

Despite efforts to safeguard autonomy, journalism is subject to influences on multiple levels (e.g., Reese and Shoemaker, 2016), where numerous non-journalist participants take part in continuous negotiations on the scope and character of journalism by imposing their own views and interests. Actors outside journalism are also contributing to the metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016: 356), and asserting their understandings in the struggle for a dominant interpretation of journalism. Carlson and Usher (2016), for example, addressed this in their analysis of how for-profit digital news startups situate their product innovations within an interpretation of how journalism works, and how it should be improved, while Poler and Kerševan (2025) analysed court proceedings as an arena for discursive struggles among diverse actors in journalism boundary work. All sources of internal and external influence are therefore potentially relevant to journalism-related boundary work.

Shifting Borders and Collapsing Walls

The modern news organisation model with its two sets of goals – those of financial viability and public service – established the need for the news-business boundary, and its central metaphor: the wall (Coddington, 2015: 68). This normative divide emerged during the first few decades of the twentieth century, from a desire to sustain news organisations' dual endeavour of serving the public while making a profit (Mari, 2014: 379–380). It has since been regarded as a fundamental journalistic norm (e.g., Drew and Thomas, 2018), which journalists employ as an organisational solution to preserve autonomy (Cornia et al., 2020: 173), and to "legitimize journalism as a profession" (Artemas et al., 2018: 1008).

Despite its relevance to the conception of journalism in terms of professional autonomy and responsibility, the news-business boundary has always been permeable (e.g., Cornia et al., 2020: 175), and subject to negotiations between the competing interests of participants who represent the two principal norms of journalism and business (e.g., McManus, 1994: 24–25). Concerns that increased with the advent of digital journalism – which arose from less institutionalised ethical norms, and the general prevalence of online advertising content (Coddington, 2015: 75) – turned out to be justified.

The borders between news and business have been shifting on all levels within digital news media organisations: structure and organisation, practice, and rhetoric. In response to structural changes in the media environment, including the deterioration of the old advertiser-sponsored business model (Duffy and Cheng, 2022: 87), news media organisations have introduced novel organisational solutions. As the traditional walls between departments collapsed, many organisations integrated their editorial and business operations (Cornia et al., 2020: 172–173). Some experimented with new organisational structures, such as embedding startups within the newsroom (e.g., Boyles, 2016; Carlson and Usher, 2016; Chadha, 2016). Others opted for an editorial-business collaboration, which led to the formation of cross-functional teams "to tackle a range of projects and problems within news organizations" (Drew and Thomas, 2018: 200).

Under these conditions, news media practices have transformed rapidly. The boundaries between journalism and other public communication forms – from public relations and advertorials, to blogs and podcasts – have begun to vanish (Deuze, 2008: 4), and new approaches, such as online native advertising (e.g., Carlson, 2015b; Schauster et al., 2016), have appeared, further blurring the boundaries of traditional journalism and threatening its credibility. These practices frequently include de-

ceptive and invasive forms, which illustrate that the (long imperfect) wall between editorial and advertising divisions "has abruptly collapsed" (Pickard, 2020: 80).

The internal news-business boundary rhetoric has been changing on both sides of the traditional wall, with professionals resorting to concepts such as integration, collaboration and evolution to legitimise change. Ferrer Conill's (2016) study showed how legacy news media actors questioned the news-business divide, and indicated that the use of native advertising may become normalised, and "could signal the end of the separation of church and state and the appearance of a new model of openly commercial journalistic ventures" (Ferrer Conill, 2016: 912). Artemas et al. (2018) analysed how editors and advertising executives challenged the strict separation of news and advertising by using such metaphors as the wall to represent the past, and evolution to represent and legitimate current practices. Editors and business managers from six European countries used rhetorical discourses and normative statements to deconstruct the traditional norm of separation, build a new one of integration based on the values of collaboration, adaptation and business thinking, and legitimise new working practices (Cornia et al., 2020). Duffy and Cheng (2022) examined the discourse of editors who framed the changing editorial-commercial relationship as collaboration rather than integration, thereby stressing the alliance of the entities, each with its own integrity, in the pursuit of a common goal.

The Continual Emergence of New Participants

The blurring boundaries between news and business, IT, and other media departments, reflect the constant state of flux among professional, organisational and managerial reconfigurations in digital journalism. New categorisations of journalists and professions within the newsroom have consequently developed, and created innovative jobs and professional profiles (Kosterich and Weber, 2019: 431–435).

Although the computerisation of newsrooms in the 1980s did not immediately bring new professional positions or radical boundary transformations, by the mid-1990s the first stages of implementation of digital and web technologies started to attract attention. At first, there was a general recognition that journalistic work had changed drastically with the introduction of new communication hardware, which "place[d] greater demand on the journalist-as-processor" (Diamond and Silverman, 1995: 41). These developments meant that journalism was subject to "significant definitional changes related to shifting notions of work, including technological advancements in the workplace" (Hardt, 1995: 22).

With the entry of new participants in news production, professional positions and titles have evolved to reflect the strengthening impact of digital technologies. Co-

lumbia Journalism Review (CJR), for example, defined the new practitioners at the intersection of journalism, technology, and business as the "first generation of online journalists" (Ianzito 1996). The range of their tasks, performed under titles such as assistant producers, production associates, and online producers, provoked discussions about the nature of their roles, with CJR asking *"It's a job, but is it journalism?"* (Ianzito, 1996).

These new positions demonstrated the blurring boundary between news and business, consistent with the emphasis of market-driven journalism on news as a product (e.g., McManus, 1994). A number of new titles and tasks referred to "product" or "content", which led to the recognition of decreasing "boundaries […] between commerce and creativity", and between "individualism and teamwork" (Deuze, 2007: 103). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, authors noted that the definition of online journalism as a whole was a "moving target" (Kawamoto, 2003).

These blurring boundaries within media companies, and between media companies and other stakeholders, became a key identification point of the digital journalism in the 2000s. Authors established that "exclusive rights to […] dedicated working practices [were] being taken away from professionalists and unashamedly adopted by weblog publishers" (Domingo et al., 2008: 12–13), or, as Shirky (2008) asserted, by "everybody". The general consensus was to say that "what counts as journalism in the contemporary media environment is more open to negotiation than before" (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009: 570), particularly in the context of a new, "dialogical kind of journalism, through which news production becomes a collective endeavor" (Ibid.: 573).

In the recent decade, the literature has identified several new tasks and positions related to digital news production. Parasie and Dagiral (2013) determined the tasks of programmer-journalists, and examined the ways in which these new participants challenged established epistemologies of how data supported investigative journalism. Ananny and Crawford (2015) studied interstitial designers, and investigated their understanding of their work as it related to journalism. Baack (2018) analysed data journalists and civic technologists, and determined four groups of actors who differed in their self-positioning, professional self-understanding, data usage, and work environments. In the same year, Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018) identified three types of non-traditional journalistic actors: explicit and implicit interlopers, and media intralopers; and Belair-Gagnon and Holton (2018) researched managers of web analytics companies, with a focus on their understanding and positioning of their work in relation to news production as a boundary object. Schapals, Maares, and Hanusch (2019) explored how peripheral journalistic actors positioned their work vis-à-vis legacy journalism and other peripheral actors; Royal and Kiesow

(2021) studied product managers and related roles, with a focus on integrating audience needs with a media outlet's mission. Singer (2021) examined the adaptation of fact-checkers to digital journalism modes, through these participants' own perceptions of their role and its inherent challenges. Hanusch and Löhmann (2023) analysed the dimensions of peripherality that can be identified in the journalism studies literature on peripheral actors. Maares and Hanusch (2023) identified several forms of peripheral political journalistic actors in a specific Austrian case; and Ahva (2025) focused on the positions of data-related peripheral actors in journalistic practice.

New professional tasks and positions within the scope of digital news production have been addressed from various perspectives, and with different foci, including: technological and managerial aspects; the internal dynamics of media companies; stratification; perceptions; and news production and distribution. Despite the number and variety of extant studies, continuous developments, innovations and disruptions within media organisations and the media ecosystem call for continuous research into emerging tasks and positions.

Research Questions and Method

Economic and technological changes have affected news production in several ways, leading to novel newsroom designs, altered work tasks and practices, new types of labour and workers, and non-traditional work relationships and lines of authority (e.g., Picard, 2009). Within these circumstances, journalists have most often been the focus of academic research. Studies have addressed, inter alia, journalists' perceptions of the impact of technological, economic and cultural transformations on their work (e.g., Hanusch, 2015; Chadha and Wells, 2016); the construction of identity among digital journalists (Ferrucci and Vos, 2017); journalists' professional identity in a converged newsroom (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017); and their attitudes towards peripheral players and their innovations (Chua and Duffy, 2019). Attention has been paid, albeit to a lesser extent, to other participants in news organisations, such as technologists and businesspeople (see Lewis and Westlund, 2015; Westlund et al., 2021), and in the last decade peripheral actors have begun to take a more prominent place in academic scholarship (e.g., Hanusch and Löhmann, 2023).

Because "new actors continue to emerge and claim membership in the journalistic field" (Hanusch and Löhmann, 2023: 1294), and organisational, technological and other transformations within news media companies continue to create new stakeholders, research gaps have continuously opened regarding new peripheral profe-

ssionals and their function in news production. Starting from the premise that new positions and tasks at the borders of media outlet departments are an aspect of journalism-related boundary work, this study defines the function of a group of news media participants who are neither typical journalists nor typical technologists, and who occupy a hybrid position at the intersection of journalism and technology. For the purpose of this research, we use specific definitions of journalists and technologists: journalists are producers of journalistic content, "involved in an independent pursuit of accurate information about current or recent events and its original presentation for public edification" (Shapiro, 2014: 561); and technologists are workers who "bring specialties in data, design, and programming and otherwise help to build and maintain the software architecture for news applications and publishing" (Westlund et al., 2021: 8–9).

Understanding these workers' function will allow us to infer the nature of their journalism-related boundary work and its possible implications for the construction of journalistic identity. We are particularly interested in the expansion-type of boundary work in the area of participants, practices and professionalism (see Carlson, 2015a), and how it incorporates non-traditional journalists, introduces new journalism practices, and absorbs certain novelties as acceptable journalism. We understand news production as a set of epistemic processes "that draw upon a range of news-gathering techniques and formatting choices" (Zamith and Westlund, 2022), and are affected by the boundary work of participants. News discovery; selection/filtering; processing/production/editing; distribution; and interpretation/feedback are the main stages of news production process (Örnebring, 2016: 66), within which all participants have an opportunity to challenge and re-construct established epistemic practices. According to Lewis and Westlund's (2015: 29) cross-media news work matrix, both journalists and technologists have been involved in all these stages.

We addressed our goal through two research questions:

RQ 1: *What positions do these professionals occupy, and which tasks do they perform?*
RQ 2: *What are their professional interactions and relationships with traditional journalists/editors, and what is their connection to the newsroom?*

Our research used qualitative interviews, through which we gathered in-depth data about participants' perspectives and understandings (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 34) of their work tasks, positions, responsibilities and interactions with journalists, and thereby gained insight into how this group of news production participants is

involved in journalism-related boundary work. The format of semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer "leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee" (Brinkmann, 2013: 21). For this reason, we opted for a topic guide that did not have specific predetermined questions, but rather consisted of a sequence of subjects to be covered, thereby relying more "on the flow of interaction with the interviewee to steer the interview process" (Edwards and Holland, 2013: 55).

In the initial stage of the sampling process, we employed *the maximum variation sampling strategy* (Patton, 2015: 282) to obtain a heterogeneous sample of countries characterised by varying media systems, political structures, histories of journalism, and economic conditions. We selected three European countries (France, Sweden, and Lithuania), and the USA to add a global perspective. Our aim was not to make comparisons, but to study the phenomenon of these new professionals in different countries and systems to gain an initial understanding of their main function, which would provide a foundation for further research that could include additional countries and even greater diversity in terms of size, economy, political context, and other factors.

We searched for one key media outlet in each selected country, with an aim to cover the full range of media platforms (i.e., print in one country, broadcasting in another, digital in the third, press agency in the fourth). To get the final sample of news media, we combined two purposeful sampling strategies. First, after we selected one media outlet in each country as a starting point, we employed the *key informants sampling strategy* (Ibid.: 283), by contacting media professionals (editors, journalists or IT managers) in each media outlet who we assumed were the most knowledgeable about the outlet's production and organisational transformations and processes. We asked these professionals to provide the contacts of staff members who occupied positions that were neither typically journalistic nor typically IT-based. After obtaining names and conducting the first four interviews, we applied the *snowball sampling strategy* (Ibid.: 297) to get recommendations for further media outlets and interviewees.

The final sample of media was: *France Info* (interviewee reference: FRA1), *Group L'Express* (FRA2), and *Radio France* (FRA3) from France; *Dagens Nyheter* (SWE1), *TT* (SWE2), and *Ekot – Swedish Radio* (SWE3) from Sweden; *Delfi* (LIT1) and *LOGIN.LT* (LIT2) from Lithuania; and *Bloomberg* (USA1) and *The New York Times* (USA2) from the USA. The final sample of interviewees within these media consisted of 10 participants, with titles such as *head of editorial innovation*; *digital CTO*; *technical manager – data intelligence*; *head of digital development*; *senior software developer*; and *senior taxonomist*. In some cases, where titles

did not reflect new functions and practices, but rather long-term editorial traditions and positions (such as *digital editor* or *head of digital news*), participants were included if, according to our informants, their work incorporated boundary work activities and tasks. The interviewees are identified in the results section using the interviewee references for the selected media organisations, given in brackets at the beginning of this paragraph. These references consist of a country code and an interviewee number.

The interviews were conducted by Marko Milosavljević between 2020 and 2023; 7 were in-person, and 3 via *Zoom*. They were conducted in English, voice-recorded and transcribed, and had an average duration of 50 minutes. The transcripts were analysed by both authors according to key analytical steps in qualitative research, as suggested by Galletta (2013: 113–128), particularly thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In brief: we searched for and labelled thematic patterns, which reflected ideas evident in the data; located instances of meaning related to our research questions within and across the interviews; synthesised the ideas generated from relationships between codes; and clustered the codes under a broader theme (category).

Working Positions, Tasks and Responsibilities

Positions and Locations: Separated, Integrated

The interviewees reported the forms of the organisational IT and newsroom structures in their media companies, some of which maintained the continuity of separation, while others showed a trend of integration. The participant from *Radio France* noted a gradual convergence, stating that despite being "separated for many years, now we've started to come back and work together" (FRA3). A number of aspects of this separation culture have remained, "but we are trying to become – as many are – one newsroom" (USA1).

The new positions our participants held were delegated to either the newsroom or the IT department, with low levels of organisational and managerial interlocution. The participant from *Bloomberg*, for example, was not based in the newsroom, but worked "in a sort of an agile scrum group" (USA1), while the Swedish public radio participant revealed that they were part of the newsroom, and that sitting in the same room enabled them to "work closely" (SWE3) with each other. The participant from *The New York Times* reported that for years they were "in technology, and the last year we moved over to the newsroom. We've always kind of existed in this grey area between technology and the newsroom. […] We are in the physical newsroom,

kind of on the side of the newsroom that is more the people like us and fewer journalists" (USA2).

The participant from *Delfi* described a hybrid working model, which enables them to book work spaces and meeting rooms: "We have these areas where mostly marketing sits, sales sit, and editorial staff sit, but it depends on the situation […] we don't see the need to sit next to each other, because we always have these meetings, discussions and sharing of ideas" (LIT1). At *Bloomberg*, there is a specific type of location blending: "One of the members of our team is in the newsroom. She is the business person – the product owner – and works within the newsroom, and also with us in the development team" (USA1).

Work Tasks and Responsibilities: Offering Support, Creating Solutions

When describing their tasks and responsibilities, the participants generally perceived themselves closer to technological staff, whose main job was to offer technological support to journalists, and to search for the "strings of how technology could help editorial" staff (LIT1).

The participants mainly saw their function as separate from that of journalists, and argued that they did not undertake journalistic work and content creation: "Mostly content comes from the third party – well, third party, I would say editorial, marketing or sales. We don't create content" (LIT1). The participant from Swedish public radio, for example, stated that he was "more like a manager, […] not working with editing at all" (SWE3).

Despite this, the participants' task descriptions indicate that they play an active part in news production, producing video, infographics, 3D and other elements of news stories, and contributing to digital solutions in distribution and optimisation. They present "the audience numbers to the journalists every day" (FRA1), providing editors with information about "for instance, reader behaviour, how it changes, when is the best time to publish a story, a long-read story or an investigative story" (SWE1).

They contribute to other forms of enhanced content and assist in its distribution, such as re-making visual content, when they "add some visuals to the text […], [or] re-create content for better understanding" (LIT1); preparing social media content, as "any person in charge of Instagram content, for example, is creating content not merely adapting it" (FRA1). They also provide journalists and editors with "new opportunities for how they should or could make something digital […] maybe something interactive, you know, making a test in an article, if the people could get different reactions of some sort, or maybe implementing an interactive video that you can – you know – 360, you can walk around, see something …" (LIT1).

Their core function is to support the editorial department in pursuing sales-related goals that align with the "never-ending demand for new features, better software – faster, cheaper" (USA1), and they acknowledge that "it is easier to sell something when it is more technologically-driven, something interactive and appealing and you can always make a sale with that" (LIT1). The Bloomberg interviewee (USA1), for instance, strongly highlighted the influence of economic and market considerations on their tasks and responsibilities – factors typically outside the scope of journalism in the public interest.

Professional Interactions and Relationships with Journalists and Connections to the Newsroom

The Nature of Working Interactions and Relationships: Constant Collaboration

Interviewees from other countries also highlighted the importance of productive collaboration in these circumstances, generally stating that their main function was to fulfil the needs and requests of editorial staff by working together. The participant from *Group L'Express* explained: "It's more like: Oh, I've got a problem; Okay, I'm coming" (FRA2). It is not always a one-way process, however; some participants described their relationship with journalists and editors as "a constant collaboration/ cooperation" (SWE2), in which their professional expertise was complementary:

"An editor or reporter, with the developer and animator, try to solve problems together. This way we get idea of how to present news, and do a quick news update in the app in the best possible way. That's not something a tech developer can solve by himself, but working with an editor, they might be able to identify what needs to be done, and how we should go on making a product out of this" (USA1).

Working interactions tended towards mutual understanding. Close collaboration is necessary because they "can see what it is possible to do with the content", while the editors "understand what kind of content we should focus on" (SWE1).

Modes of Communication: From Mingling Over Coffee to Formal Meetings

The cooperation/collaboration of these workers with journalists takes place through formal and informal interaction channels, depending partly on location, since some are still physically separated from journalists, and others are in the same integrated newsroom.

Some communicate directly with journalists or editors, while others meet informally. The communication takes various forms, such as visits, observations and comments: "There was the business on one side, and IT on the other side, and they did not talk very well. It is becoming more and more about working together. We're encouraged to visit the newsroom and observe and comment on what's happening there" (USA1). The feedback from journalists was that communication is "not particularly hierarchical but there are formal ways (e.g., requests for changes), but also chatting over coffee and things like that. So we're encouraged to develop those kinds of professional networks" (USA1). Some participants said they "invite people to discuss [issues] over lunch" (SWE2), while others noted it was "very easy to meet physically, or on Google Hangouts, or chat on Slack" (USA2).

Meetings were usually not regular, and their frequency varied according to the need at the time. The participant from *Delfi* observed that "when there is a lot of stuff happening, we usually have these one, two, maybe three meetings a week with editorial staff from the project perspective" (LIT1).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined a particular group of new participants in digital news production, who work on the permeable frontiers of the newsroom, IT, marketing, PR and management departments. These participants contribute to news creation, solutions, and distribution within the digital environment, and their main function is to synchronise the activities of all departments to enhance the media outlet's efficient pursuit of sales-oriented goals. By identifying the function of these professionals, who take on a range of tasks that enable them to influence the epistemic practices of journalism, the study adds to the empirical knowledge on journalism-related boundary work and extends the scholarship on contemporary transformations in digital news production. Adding to previous studies' findings on the rapid pace of technological, professional, and organisational reconfigurations, it confirms that the permeability of borders, dissolving of walls and hybridity of professional positions have become even more radical in their multi-level boundary blurring. The new professionals synchronise the operations of multiple participants in digital news production, enhancing their coherent cooperation, and maximising the news organisation's profits.

The first finding refers to the investigated participants' physical location within news media organisations, where analysis shows that a variety of approaches was established, with some media outlets insisting on separating the workplace. This is reminiscent of the early stages of digital journalism, when many online newsrooms

were distanced from the legacy part of the newsroom (e.g., Singer et al., 1999). In other cases, integrated forms bring new and traditional professionals together, placing them in a challenging, uncharted territory and structure. The decision whether to maintain physical separation from those who perform other functions or to spatially integrate them indicates a media outlet's view on the norm of separating departments that are traditionally supposed to be divided by "the wall" (e.g., Coddington, 2015; Drew and Thomas, 2018). Since the responsibilities associated with particular tasks – such as those of journalists on one side, and marketing/management staff on the other (e.g., Underwood, 1995; Duffy and Cheng, 2022) – differ and may even conflict, sticking with the separation norm can be interpreted as an effort to preserve the borders of journalistic professionalism, by which journalists aim to "establish themselves as a distinct community with specialized knowledge" (Carlson, 2015a: 10).

The second finding concerns the work tasks and responsibilities of the professionals researched in this study. Despite their claims that they do not participate in content creation, their work descriptions indicate that they affect news production beyond mere technological support, and require them to merge tasks that previously belonged to the discrete journalistic and finance-related segments of news organisations. Editors, for example, used to run the newsroom budget, but did not conduct work required by some of these new positions, such as advertising budget allocation and media buying, or social media-related business tasks. These new professionals are often expected to provide technological solutions and establish new managerial approaches, while constantly synchronising the newsroom with the company's management, IT, marketing, and PR departments. They impact the epistemic practices of journalism – i.e., journalism's "rules, routines and institutional procedures" (Ekström, 2002: 260) – that operate within the newsroom in several ways, particularly by contributing to new(s) content, and the forms (genres) and ways (visuals, data presentations) in which it is created and presented. This makes them potentially influential actors in journalism-related boundary work, through which they contribute to the re-construction of the journalistic identity by introducing their own positions, approaches and methods, which may eventually "crystallize as institutional norms and practices" (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018: 151).

The third finding shows a diversity in the nature of the interactions and relationships these workers have with traditional professionals, although they have a shared starting position of "constant collaboration". This is an important development from the beginning of digitalisation in the mid-1990s, when conflict and ignorance were reported as fundamental characteristics of working relationships between traditional professions and new roles (e.g., Bollinger, 1991: 98). This shift in values

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"from separation to collaboration" (Drew and Thomas, 2018) has implications for the re-construction of boundaries regarding (appropriate) journalistic practices, as it facilitates editors' "legitimation of new practices that were previously considered violations of the norm of separation" (Cornia et al., 2020: 182). By emphasising collaboration and efficiency, the new professionals put pressure on traditional workers to adopt their novel practices as acceptable journalism. In this way, they have the potential to expand the conceptualisation of journalism in all three areas of boundary work (see Carlson, 2015a): participants, practices, and professionalism.

In the communication modes between these new and traditional participants, particularly journalists, our fourth finding points to flexibility and even agnosticism, where an "anything goes" approach was reported. This resulted in diverse formal and informal, technology-enabled and technology-free modes of communication, carried out in different directions (e.g., Verma, 2015: 66), and ranging from informal mingling over coffee or encouraged visits to managerially incentivised formal meetings. This varied and open structure of intra-organisational communication demonstrates the continuous relevance of "open communication" systems, as discussed in management research by, for example, Moss Kanter (1995), and emphasises that the type of communication system a company adopts can either constrain or empower innovation. Open communication systems stress access across segments, as established in our study: agnostic "open door" policies, which the participants described as including any given department within the media company, confirm the approach that "all levels can, theoretically, have access to anyone to ask questions, even to criticize" (Moss Kanter, 1995: 160).

When combined, these findings indicate a new level of activities, which exceed traditional understandings of collaboration. News media organisations have always required collaboration in the sense of "two or more people working together, with a shared purpose and whose roles are clearly defined, to achieve a stated goal" (Drew and Thomas, 2018: 212). Yet the investigated professionals go beyond this concept, as they engage in a fluid collaboration at multiple levels, with multiple participants and multiple tasks, within a synchronised timeline. Like in any synchronisation process, where "systems adjust some properties of their trajectories so that they eventually operate in a macroscopically coherent way" (Boccaletti et al., 2018: ix), they connect the sections and disparate cultures of a media outlet to facilitate their coherent operation under the key guiding principle of profitability, which demands a pragmatic approach to (conflicting) responsibilities and "situational reasoning" (Drew and Thomas, 2018: 211).

The work tasks our participants described led to the conclusion that their primary responsibility rests with the media outlet's profit-driven objectives, thereby reaffir-

ming the rationale that news production "remains, at its core, a business" (Boyles, 2016: 230). This has a potentially significant impact on journalism identity reconstruction, by redefining boundaries around what journalism entails and how it ought to be practiced, and fostering the contemporary trend of de-professionalisation (see Splichal and Dahlgren, 2016), particularly in terms of professional autonomy and ethics. They further undermine the traditional separation between editorial and business activities, which has already been seriously compromised, as previous research has found (e.g., Cornia et al., 2020).

The study does, however, have limitations, particularly its small sample and exclusively qualitative methodology. A quantitative study that includes a higher number of respondents from additional countries, media systems and organisations would provide additional insight into the wider complexities of contemporary digital positions and tasks. An ethnographic approach, with researchers observing routines within news organisations, would enable a more detailed analysis of the investigated tasks and positions, in terms of their natures, structures, timelines, and issues. The investigated tasks and positions should be observed through the lens of other news production participants, including journalists, to determine their implications for journalistic practice and identity. These methodological approaches may be adopted in further research.

Given the ever-evolving nature of digital journalism and the media landscape, it is likely that new tasks and job profiles will continue to emerge. The evolution of Artificial Intelligence and Intelligence Augmentation is likely to lead to "the rapid creation and destruction of […] labor markets for new types of […] tasks" (Gray and Suri, 2017: 9), where further transformations in digital news production are to be expected if "the future of news depends on journalists working alongside smart machines" (Marconi, 2017). Further research into the blurred lines within digital news media and journalism will therefore be an ongoing and permanent requirement.

BILJEŠKE

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Sinkronizirajuća funkcija novih sudionika u digitalnoj produkciji vijesti

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SAŽETAK

Ova studija istražuje ulogu novih stručnjaka u digitalnoj produkciji vijesti koji nisu tipični novinari niti klasični stručnjaci za digitalne tehnologije, već djeluju na sve propusnijim granicama između informacijskih tehnologija, marketinga, odnosa s javnošću, menadžmenta i redakcije. Ti „hibridni" akteri sudjeluju u stvaranju, implementaciji i distribuciji vijesti u digitalnom okruženju, pri čemu im je primarna uloga usklađivanje međusektorskih aktivnosti s ciljem ostvarivanja komercijalnih rezultata. Na temelju polustrukturiranih kvalitativnih intervjua s desetero takvih stručnjaka iz Francuske, Litve, Švedske i SAD-a, studija potvrđuje da su propusnost granica, nestajanje tradicionalnih podjela i preklapanje profesionalnih uloga postali sve izraženiji, što dovodi do nestanka jasnih granica među profesionalnim područjima i to na više razina organizacijskog djelovanja. Ovi stručnjaci djeluju unutar fleksibilnih modela suradnje kojima se usklađuje rad različitih aktera prema zajedničkom cilju – profitabilnosti. Aktivno sudjeluju u graničnom radu (boundary work), odnosno aktivnostima koje povezuju i premošćuju granice između različitih profesionalnih područja unutar novinarstva, obavljajući pritom niz zadataka koji im omogućuju da utječu na epistemičke aspekte novinarske prakse. Time potkopavaju tradicionalnu podjelu između uredničkog i komercijalnog sektora, dodatno brišući granice koje definiraju novinarstvo i njegove profesionalne standarde.

Ključne riječi: granični rad, novinarstvo, novi sudionici, digitalna produkcija vijesti, redakcija, funkcija