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# The Sociology of Journalism

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**Abstract:** Sociological inquiries into journalism have considered journalism as the product of cultural, economic, political, and technological forces in different times and spaces. As part of (and like) the field of media sociology, the sociology of journalism is an interdisciplinary subfield. It has several objectives of inquiry: examining situational and larger cultural differences of journalisms; analyzing systemic complexities in which journalism arises (i.e. technological formats and change, events, normative crises or organizational structures); illuminating intended and unintended consequences of practical routines of journalism; and exploring long-term patterns of professional, institutional, and organizational changes in journalism. Analyzing journalism through the sociological prism is central for understanding its larger societal implications and a continuous reminder that journalism studies is not an end in itself. Starting in the late 1950s, the gradual relocation of sociology of journalism from sociology to communication coincided with the establishment and professionalization of the two social science disciplines in US academia. Even as communication science has now produced generations of graduates in its own doctoral programs, the intellectual centrality of the sociology of journalism continues and has been recently confirmed through post-financial crisis academic hires. This paper introduces some of the major strands of the sociology of journalism research from the beginning of the 20th century to today. It also argues that the sociology of journalism took on a new ideational and professional significance within the field.

**Keywords:** journalism studies, media sociology, news production, sociology of news

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 The early beginnings of a field

As a contested and constantly evolving field of study, since the 1970s, the sociology of journalism has gradually moved to communication and media studies and has been less populated by scholars employed by sociology departments. Today, the field is constituted of scholars who were trained as sociologists or were trained *by* sociologists and who draw mostly from sociological theory to frame research questions and explains empirical findings (Pooley & Katz 2008). Yet the study of the press as a central agent of social organization in modern societies can be traced back to one of the founding fathers of sociology: Max Weber. In 1910, at the first meeting of the German Sociological Society in Frankfurt, driven by his concern for the institutional character and role of the press in society, Weber proposed a large scale study of the press, titled *Soziologie des Zeitungswesens* (Sociology of the Press). In this proposal, which was published in English translation more than half a decade later (Weber 1976), Weber asked his colleagues to collaboratively study the social position of the press and its role in the formation of public opinion. To study these social phenomena, Weber suggested a longitudinal content analysis of newspapers to measure the quantitative impact of advertising or editorials on news

coverage. This study would have been accompanied by a qualitative analysis of stylistic approaches and the ways in which similar issues are discussed within and outside of newspapers. Meanwhile, Ferdinand Tönnies (1922 [1981]) in the book *Kritik der öffentlichen Meinung* (Critique of Public Opinion), Ludwig Salomon (1900–1906) in the four-volume work *Geschichte des deutschen Zeitungswesens* (History of the German Press), and Emil Löbl (1903) in *Kultur und Presse* (Culture and the Press) discussed the role of the press in shaping public discourse in Germany (cited in Lang 1996).

In the United States, the sociology of journalism has its earliest roots in urban sociology. In the early 1900s, Robert E. Park, a former reporter and central figure of the Chicago School of Sociology, advanced several works on the sociology of news (Park 1922, 1923, 1938, 1940, 1941). Park's interest in this field was based on recognizing the foreign language press as a key factor of integration of immigrant groups and Americanization (Park 1922). Other representatives of the Chicago School also published influential early works in media sociology, like Helen MacGill Hughes (1940) who considered the human interest story as a source of public education and self-understanding. She traced the rise of the human interest story journalistic form against the backdrop of broader social changes between the 19th and 20th centuries and conceived this journalistic form as a socially integrative force in the modern American city. Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang (1953) became known for their early study of television which found significant differences between mediated representations and 31 witness accounts of the 1951 MacArthur Parade in Chicago. Despite the co-emergence of the Chicago School and these important works of its second generation of scholars, on the one hand, and the professionalization of journalism in the Progressive Era in the US on the other, the sociology of journalism would really come to its own in the 1970s.

## 1.2 The postwar period

After World War II, important precursors of the sociology of journalism were the studies on mass communication and public opinion formation at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. These studies changed the conception of media effects by emphasizing the power of social networks (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955; Lazarsfeld & Berelson 1944; Merton 1996). The way scholars received this work generated a theory of "limited effects" of mass media which characterized empirical research until the 1970s. Because this theory implied that mass media had only a subsidiary role in public opinion formation, it was held responsible for sociology turning its focus away from mass media. This happened despite the fact that *Personal Influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955) found that half of observed opinion changes *were* direct media effects, even though the study mostly focused on social network effects. Todd Gitlin later criticized the limited effects hypothesis by arguing that this "dominant paradigm" in media sociology confirmed the institutional order and failed to ask important questions about the power of mass media in society (Gitlin 1978).

In 1962, building on the fundamental criticism of the *culture industry* by the founders of the Frankfurt School (Adorno & Horkheimer [1944] 1997), Jürgen Habermas published *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Critical debates in the US ensued after the delayed English translation of the book in 1989 (e.g., Calhoun 1992; see Fraser 1995; Cohen 1995 for feminist critique of Habermas). The concept of the public sphere serves as a normative reference point to evaluate the performance of journalism in Western democracies (cf. Dahlgren 2005; Ferree et al. 2002) as well as beyond. Focusing on India, Robin Jeffrey (1999) took it as a point of departure to explore how the Indian newspaper

industry transformed and enlarged public participation since the 1970s with increasing literacy and improved printing and communication technologies. Recently, scholars have argued that in India, while communication technologies such as social networking sites, may have enhanced the participatory nature of journalistic storytelling, this inclusiveness has remained exclusive to the urban, educated, connected middle, and upper classes (cf. Ninan 2007; Belair-Gagnon, Mishra & Agur 2014).

### **1.3 The golden era**

In the UK, sociological inquiries into journalism arrived in the mid-1950s in a few sociology departments. Jeremy Tunstall led this effort by conducting the first ethnographic study of British journalists (Tunstall 1970, 1971, 1977; Tunstall & Palmer 1991). *Journalists at Work* (1971) helped paved the way for the development of the sociology of journalism in the UK at a time when only a handful of social science studies of British journalism existed. Others, such as Denis McQuail (1969) and Philip Schlesinger (1978), led and followed a similar path. Tom Burns (1977) published an organizational analysis of the replacement of an ethos of professionalism with the public service ideal in the 1960s. In 1974, Brian Winston, Greg Philo, and John Eldridge formed the Glasgow University Media Group. The group published a series of studies on television news bias (Glasgow Media Group 1976, 1980, 1982) by conducting an empirical and semiotic news analysis of news bulletins to explore systematic class bias. Peter Golding and Philip Elliott (1979) conducted a comparative exploration of television newsrooms, which resulted in the book *Making the News*. Golding and Elliott's book laid the groundwork for further analysis of the process of news making in terms of planning, gathering, selection, and production. They argued that journalists use news values in two ways: criteria of selection of available newsworthy material and guidelines for presentation of items, suggesting what material to prioritize in news production. This perspective on the news contrasts with the way reporters viewed the news, who characterized journalistic work as reporting on real-life events. Sociologists of news contributed to the idea that journalists make the news in accordance with a set of professional values as well as organizational routines and structures that journalists hardly articulated explicitly. For example, in Spain, sociologists adopted this social constructivist view of news production and audience perceptions (e.g., Villafañe, Busamente & Prado 1987; Alsina 1989; Fontcuberta 1993). In other regions of the world, sociological inquiries into journalism took different shape, borrowing more from cultural studies, semiotics, and structuralism.

As the sociology of journalism gradually established itself in the second half of the 20th century, particularly in Europe and North America, various approaches and perspectives crystallized, focusing on different levels of analysis: the political economy of news, cultural logics of news making, gatekeeping, organizational studies of news, technologies of news production, occupational values, roles, and ethics, and media effects. The following sections will explore these major strands of research in the sociology of journalism.

## **2 Journalism as social institution**

### **2.1 Gatekeeping, social control, and news selectivity**

In the postwar era, gatekeeping research was one of the earliest strands of sociological studies of journalism. It was first established by journalism scholar and reporter David Manning White (1950) in a seminal study of newswire editors' selection process in news production where he found that in routine processes, gatekeepers choose which stories "makes it" in the newspaper based on their experiences, attitudes, and expectations of what news is. Decades later, Pamela Shoemaker (1991) argued for the continuing relevance of gatekeeping theory and distinguished between "knowledge control" and "information control" to further deconstruct the multiple influences of gatekeepers in the news production process. Shoemaker understood gatekeeping more broadly, as concerned with how, where, and when gatekeeping occurs, and what are its consequences. When the internet and social networking sites emerged as modes of communication, scholars increasingly explored the implications of the proliferation of gatekeepers (cf. Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker & Vos 2009; Shoemaker & Reese 2013; Vos 2015).

Following White's account of news production, a number of scholars took interest in social control and selectivity of news. Warren Breed (1955), a former journalist trained in sociology at Columbia University by Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld, demonstrated that the way news organizations socialize journalists conditions their understanding of policy. Following a functionalist perspective, Breed argued that several factors like institutional authority and sanctions, aspirations of mobility, and absence of group allegiance, kept news staffers from deviating from organizational norms. Breed argued that cultural practices in newsrooms harm democracy and that changes towards a more "free and responsible press" must start with pressure on publishers who have policy-making authority in news rooms.

Breed's work is significant for the sociology of journalism as it emphasizes the relations between the various components of social systems and ties between systems and everyday interactions in newsrooms (cf., Reese & Ballinger 2001). Lee Sigelman (1973) also emphasized the role of social control as a way to understand media bias as a consequence of the news production process rather than newsroom policy imposition. Sigelman conceived recruitment, socialization, and control as structured in a way that the "institutional mythology" of objective reporting remains intact (cf., Selznick 1957 on the connection between administrative leadership and institutional mythology). For Sigelman, these organizational mechanisms mediated the potential for conflict and its actualization. Borrowing from the symbolic interactionist tradition in sociology, Canadian sociologists Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan (1989) similarly understood social control as a determinant of news production. However, Ericson and colleagues' work also acknowledged the relative autonomy of journalists in the production of individual news items.

Scholars also insisted that journalism does not simply reflect the world out there. Journalism rather reveals the practices of the people who have the power to decide upon the experience of others. In defining journalism as "purposive behavior", Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester (1974) argued that news represents a constructed reality, based on certain typifications of news events journalists continuously work with – routine, accidents, scandals, and serendipitous events. This work connects to research focusing on the wider socio-political system in which reporters produce news and strategies that influence them, including analyses of reporting on war, conflict, and terrorism (Schlesinger, Murdock & Elliott 1983; Morrison & Tumber 1988) as well as foreign correspondence more generally (Batscha 1975; Pedelty 1995).

Journalism studies scholars have additionally produced numerous studies in interinstitutional settings which shed light on the power relations that shape news production. Stephen Hess's (1981) study on Washington reporters showed how news information often originates from the legislative branch of the government, although there are a greater number of news stories on the presidency which tend to dominate the news across the US. In his later work, Herbert Gans (2003) corroborated this finding by arguing that journalists suffer from assembly-line modes of production that, above all, value the US president and other top political officials, which implies that journalists cannot be trusted from the public's point of view.

Other research addressed international news starting with Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge's work (1965) which identified twelve news values influencing the way journalists select news items in this context. These values include reference to elite nations, elite people, personality, negativity, and consonance. Tony Harcup and Diedre O'Neil (2001) emphasized that Galtung and Ruge's work remained relevant, as it opened the field for the study of journalistic values beyond national borders. Following Galtung and Ruge, scholars have added alternative news values, such as numbers (Gans 1979) and continuing stories (Harcup & O'Neil 2001). Overall, gatekeeping theory enabled scholars to understand how news workers deal with and push back against external and internal pressures that undermine their professional autonomy.

## **2.2 Professional norms, ethics, and knowledge**

Much of the early sociological research considered journalism as a set of social interactions and ritual behaviors. Most of these works built on phenomenological sociology and the sociology of knowledge, including symbolic interactionism (associated with Erving Goffman and Herbert Blumer among others) and social constructivism (Alfred Schütz, Peter Berger, and Thomas Luckmann). David Altheide (1976) analyzed the structure of television production, arguing that organizational and practical factors in news production (e.g., organizational setting, news format, audience, scheduling, and newsgathering technology) foster a certain way of understanding events. Altheide and Robert Snow (1979, 1991) subsequently developed the concept of *media logic* which shed light on how technology, formats, actors, organizational structures, and communication processes pervade other areas of social life and generate biases of public perception.

Occupational analyses also shed light on values, ethics, and journalistic roles and ranged from analyses of journalistic behaviors in specific social settings to the development of global ethical standards of journalism. Scholars analyzed socio logically how ethical values take shape in newsrooms, as in John C. Merrill's (1974) philosophy of journalistic autonomy. Other studies analyzed the responses of editors, publishers, and journalists to ethical dilemmas (Meyer 1983) and explored how journalists compromised their ethics to shape the news (Goldstein 1986). Clifford Christians (2009) looked at media ethics and moral reasoning and Theodore Glasser and James Ettema (1998) considered investigative reporting as a form of social and moral inquiry using the ethical standard of vice and virtue to establish journalism as custodian of conscience and moral order. The anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (2004) followed foreign correspondents for ten years, whose work he considered as turning local knowledge into global imaginations.

Many scholars explored the role of ethical standards around the world, like John Hurst and Sally White (1994) studied ethics in Australian journalism, and Andrew Belsey and Ruth Chadwick (1992) in Britain. Christians and Traber (1997) edited a collection about occupational values in different regions of the world. The authors came to an understanding that some of these values are universal across nations, including justice, reciprocity, and human dignity. They also found that ethical standards evolved in similar ways. Other scholars argued that journalistic values are not absolute as roles and perceptions vary (cf., Roshco 1975). Internationally comparative survey of journalism students (Splichal & Sparks 1994) and practicing journalists (Weaver & Willnat 2012; Hanitzsch et al. 2011) also found significant variation of how pertinent different occupational values are in different journalism cultures. Silvio Waisbord (2013) argued that what becomes globalized is the professional logic of journalism, its unique epistemology and form of producing knowledge rather than the ethics of objectivity, independence, and fairness (cf., Weaver & Willnat 2012; Berglez 2015; Cottle 2003).

As the central occupational norm of journalism, objectivity (or impartiality) has received much scholarly attention, particularly in the US and UK (cf., Chalaby 1998). Michael Schudson (1978) took objectivity as the starting point for examining the professionalization of US journalism since the early 19th century. His historical analysis demonstrates that objectivity served as a polysemous point of reference and counterpoint for various emerging journalistic forms throughout the 20th century. Schudson showed that the ambiguity of the objectivity norm makes not less but even more of a central symbolic and discursive point of reference in journalism. Gaye Tuchman (1972) conceived objectivity as a strategic ritual. Tuchman argued that journalistic practices and norms, such as verification and objectivity, accommodate organizational constraints. Tuchman posited that different types of information have certain routines attached to them. In Tuchman's words: "individuals, groups, and organizations not only react to and characterize events by typifying *what* has happened, but also they may typify events by stressing the *way* 'things' happen" (Tuchman 1973: 129; cf., Schudson 1978). From news workers' point of view, typifications are means to control the objects of their work.

When serious violations of professional norms are committed by journalists, Stephen Reese (1990: 390) revealed three ways in which news organizations engage in *news paradigm repair*: "(a) disengaging and distancing the threatening values from the reporter's work, (b) reasserting the ability of journalistic routines to prevent threatening values from 'distorting' the news, and (c) marginalizing the man and his message, making both appear ineffective."

### **2.3 Newsroom ethnographies**

Many 1970s' sociology of journalism scholars increasingly employed ethnography as a way to understand journalistic routines and norms (cf., Tunstall 1971). Although newsroom ethnographies, based on participant observation, can be found in the academic literature of the UK, the list of US studies in this line of research is more exhaustive. Using observation and interviews with journalists at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Philip Schlesinger (1978) examined organizational conditioning of television news production by emphasizing the news workers' obsession with duration and sequence as key features of journalistic work. Consistent with Altheide (1976), Schlesinger argued that meanings change when formats and journalistic routines are altered (cf., Belair-Gagnon 2015). Philip Elliott's four months of observation of BBC News supports Schlesinger's work and raises concerns about the autonomy (and as a consequence "neutrality") of public service media. David Morrison and

Howard Tumber (1988) interviewed more than 30 journalists on personal, situational, and organizational news definitions to understand how war reports reflect contexts. They found that negotiating definitions and dimensions of information and facts are key tasks for reporters. In the US, the first notable scholar to take on the ethnographic study of news was Edward Epstein. In his seminal book which was the upshot of his doctoral dissertation in political science, *News From Nowhere* (1973), Epstein argued that what we know as news and news norms is the product of routines, which are conditioned by organizational structures and technical constraints. Epstein found that journalists managed the unexpected by covering routinized events such as press conferences.

The cultural historian and academic librarian Robert Darnton (1975) reflected on his brief career as a journalist for *The New York Times* and the *Newark Star Ledger*. Not intended to be a formal sociological study, "Writing the news and telling stories" eloquently summarized some of the objects of study that newsroom ethnographers have explored since the early 1970s. Intellectually indebted to Robert Merton, Elihu Katz, and Gabriel Tarde, "rather than the more voguish theories of Jürgen Habermas", as he later remarked (Darnton 2000), Darnton suggested that journalists' function as communicators depended on the structure of their milieu, their relation to their primary reference groups (e.g., editors or sources), their occupational socialization, and how standardized techniques of "telling" stories influenced "writing" the news (Darnton 1975, 176).

Substantively (see above) and methodologically, newsroom ethnographies lead back to the Chicago School of Sociology, which introduced the anthropological method in sociology in the 1920s and became known for workplace ethnographies of occupations in its second generation. This generation is mainly associated with Everett Hughes, Howard Becker, and Anselm Strauss. Following this rich sociological tradition, US sociologists Herbert Gans, Gaye Tuchman, and Mark Fishman published three seminal newsroom ethnographies, which Barbie Zelizer (2004) described as "realist tales". After ten years of research in newsrooms and two influential articles (1972, 1973), Tuchman published *Making News* (1978) which helped establish the idea that news is a social construction, based on typifications rooted in organizational routines and claiming objectivity for mere performative purposes.

In *Deciding What's News*, Gans (1979) explored the role of news values in news production at CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, *Newsweek*, and *TIME*. Gans looked at the organization of news stories, the relationship between journalists and sources, the concepts of values and ideology, the link between profits and audiences, and political censorship. Gans argued that in making news journalists draw on news values which not only originate from within journalism. In *Manufacturing the News*, Fishman (1980) focused on beat reporting. Based on two years of ethnography at a small California newspaper's crime beat, Fishman emphasized how the bureaucratic organization of activities on a newsbeat shapes newsgathering structures. In other words: the beat, which might be confined by a particular location, institution, or subject matter, fosters a certain kind of reporting. With some important exceptions (e.g., Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1989; Jacobs 1996b), in the 1980s and 1990s, newsroom ethnographies became rare. However, this research tradition experienced a revival in the early 21st century.

## **2.4 The second wave of newsroom observation**



In response to this shortage in the late 1990s and early days of the Internet, British sociologist Simon Cottle (2000) argued that a second wave of news ethnographies was needed. For Cottle, building on knowledge acquired in 1970s and early 1980s ethnographic work, such work would allow to map theoretically and explore empirically the fast-changing and differentiated news ecology. Following this call for newsroom ethnographies, ensuing studies took a different hold in the early 2000s. In contrast to the earlier generation, most of these scholars are employed at media studies, journalism, and communication departments. They generated a wealth of scholarship on how the internet and digital technologies affect the organization, norms, and practices of journalism as well as its position and role in democratic societies.

One of the seminal works is Pablo Boczkowski's (2004) book *Digitizing the News*. In this book, which is influenced by science and technology studies (STS), Boczkowski explored how daily newspapers developed electronic publishing ventures. The particular shape of these ventures is contingent and influenced by various organizational "cultures of innovation." Adding to this blooming literature, C. W. Anderson (2013) set the stage for studies on the changing media landscape by analyzing how emerging news networks (bloggers, so-called citizen journalists, and social networks) have been involved in changes in the business and ecology of news. Anderson encouraged news ethnographers to move away from a narrow focus on the newsroom as a bounded place and to look at the more sprawling network of news that defines the Internet age. In *Can Journalism Survive?*, David Ryfe (2012) suggested that processes of innovation in US-American newsrooms are inhibited by the resistance of established practices and norms. In her study of BBC News, Valerie Belair-Gagnon (2013, 2015) described how the BBC has normalized social media into journalistic norms and practices in its crisis reporting and how the emergence of social media has led to changes in power relations in the news room.

Caitlin Petre (2015) focused on the production, interpretation, and uses of audience metrics on news sites (e.g., page views or unique visitors) as a way to explore how new forms of quantitative data interact with the traditional journalistic sense of professional authority. Matthias Revers' ethnographic work on political reporters examined how the ethic of transparency that ascended on Twitter intersected with traditional norms of professionalism and reshaped the spatial and temporal structures of news making in the US (Revers 2014, 2015). Revers' (2016) comparative research explored change and stability of US and German professional cultures of journalism in the digital era. In her ethnographic research at the *New York Times*, Nikki Usher analyzed how emergent news values are reordering the fundamental processes of news production, and how immediacy, interactivity, and participation play a unique role in creating tensions between old and new practices and norms (Usher 2014). Together with Seth Lewis, Usher (2013) examined the conditions of innovation and collaboration between journalists and programmers which involves deviating from established journalistic norms.

## **2.5 News as institution**

Several scholars explored how different social institutions and the news media mutually shape each other. Colin Seymour-Ure (1974) wrote on the relation between British government circles and Fleet Street and the impact of mass media on the changes in the nature of the political system and political communication. This approach laid the foundation for the study of the effects of media in politics, later termed *mediatization of politics* (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). This research agenda, which is pronouncedly European, explored political imperatives of journalism in Latin America (Mattelart 1980; Mattelart &

Schmucler 1985; Serrano 2012). In a study of international news flows, Stig Hjarvard (2008) deployed the concept of mediatization in a broader sense to explore how media become intertwined with religion and family. Sociological inquiries of mediatization help unpack how media transform cultures and create alternative symbolic environments (cf., Eskjær, Hjarvard & Mortensen 2015).

Pierre Bourdieu's critique of television (1998), a posthumously published lecture on the intersection of journalism, politics, and social science (2005), and his theory of fields of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993; Bourdieu, Passeron and Saint Martin 1996) spurred works that conceived media and journalism as a field (e.g., Benson 1999; Benson & Neveu 2005; Couldry 2003; Hesmondhalgh 2006). Also building on Bourdieu's work, Jean Chalaby (1998) examined the development of discursive norms, practices, and strategies that are characteristic of journalism and journalistic discourse since the second half of the 19th century in Europe. Rodney Benson's (2013) work on immigration news in France and the US has been particularly influential in establishing a theory and comparative research agenda of journalistic fields. This perspective accounts for macro-forces while acknowledging variation and complexity between different news organizations.

A particularly influential work, not only for comparative media research but especially for institutional theorizing of journalism, is the book *Comparing Media Systems* (Hallin & Mancini 2004). This work conceived news media as subjected to competing influences of the economy, politics, and the state and as going through different paths of professionalization of journalism. Hallin and Mancini analytically construct three principal models of media system – liberal, democratic-corporatist, and polarized-pluralist – which they take to explain some fundamental differences between Anglo-American, Northern European, and Southern European democracies. Despite the fact that these institutional arrangements still produce distinctive kinds of journalism in different countries, Hallin and Mancini argued that media systems gradually homogenize over time and converge towards the liberal model. In 2012, Hallin and Mancini followed up in an effort to de-Westernize this approach by expanding media systems research beyond Europe and the US (Hallin & Mancini 2012).

The new institutionalist works by Timothy Cook (1998) and Bartholomew Sparrow (1999) linked the lack of diversity of news in the US to institutional forces that solidify in stable routines and practices that operate across organizations. While Cook conceived of media not only as entangled with politics but as a “governing institution,” Sparrow emphasized the role of economic forces shaping the media (cf., Ryfe 2006). Paul Starr (2004) depicted the history of mass media primarily as an institutional rather than technological transformation. He showed how a series of political decisions led to a state-run post office and private monopolies on the telegraph and telephone systems in the US. He argued that these choices had lasting effects not only on how the country evolved socially, economically, and militarily but also in terms of its leading position as a world economy in the information age. In contrast to political economic approaches to the media, which have ignored politics as an independent influence, Starr insisted that political and economic efficacies shaping news media have to be treated separately (cf., Schudson 2010). Though in his later work Bourdieu treated politics and the economy as separate forces, in his work on television (1998) he did not make this distinction. Rodney Benson carried the development of Bourdieu's theory forward to journalism in a conceptual and empirical sense.

Another problem highlighted by journalism research today is how various factors (e.g., economic and political pressures, changes in newsgathering and production technology, and the role of sources and

“source strategies”) shape the form, content, and style of journalism which are thus considered as more contingent than ever and subject to less professional and organizational control. British sociologist Brian McNair (1998, 2006) suggested a shift towards a “chaotic flow” model of journalism production rather than “control,” which “preserved recognition of the existence of social inequality as a key feature of contemporary capitalism while incorporating the possibility, the self-evident fact, of constant challenge to, event subversion of, established power through the routine work of journalists in main stream capitalist media” (McNair 1998: 162). This analytical approach provides a way to explore the changing relationship between journalism and power in a globalized news culture.

### 3 Audience studies

The purpose of journalism scholarship is to better understand how institutional, technological, and cultural conditions of news production and the information and meanings journalism generates affect the public. Early work emphasized *media effects* while later research stressed the importance of active engagement and assignment of meaning by the audience to mediated communication. Concurrently, there was a major push for developing scientific methods of empirical social research during the postwar era in the US. In emphasizing the power of social networks, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at the Bureau of Applied Social Research explored the role of mass communications in making decisions on how to vote and which commercial and cultural products to consume, and in changing opinions. They argued that the “effects of the media are mitigated by the processes of selectivity in attention, perception, and recall, and that these, in turn, are a function of pre-dispositional and situational variables such as age, family history, political affiliation, and so on” (Katz 1987: 26).

In contrast, emphasizing human agency does not mean denying media effects. Rather, human agency shifts the attention to how audiences manage this influence, or what Roger Silverstone (1994) called the embeddedness of television in everyday life and relationships. This insight relates to *uses and gratifications* theory (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch 1973), which argues that people use media differently to fulfill various needs, and *cultivation theory* (Gerbner & Gross 1976), which conceived media as socializing agents. Scholars have more recently explored how changes in technologies enable geographic mobility (cf., Lull 1990) and diasporic publics, as defined by David Morley, people who “belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home and have learned to negotiate and translate between cultures” (Morley 2000: 207).

Within audience studies, political economy scholars pointed to the changes and power relations which construct ideas of publics and audience. In exploring the US cultural and political history of audiences from the nineteenth century to the present, Richard Butsch (2007) demonstrated that, while mass media attitudes toward audiences have shifted over time, US-Americans writ large have judged audiences consistently against standards of good citizenship. Paddy Scannell (1991, 1996; Scannell, Schlesinger & Sparks 1992) shed light on the interactions between viewers/listeners, the intentions of broadcaster, and the understanding of those intentions by the audience. Toby Miller (1998, 2007) developed a theory *cultural citizenship*, looking at the coverage of September 11th, the Iraq invasion, and infotainment (such as Food and Weather channels) to see how citizens become part of “the global

commodity chain” through television. With more and more people seeking to belong but not considered as belonging, Miller (1998, 2007) argued that cultural citizenship is a web of practices of government, consumption, risk, and moral panic in popular culture, which is particularly generated by television. Similarly, Timothy Havens (2006) envisioned television viewers’ choices of programs as outcomes of relationships between transnational conglomerates and the viewing pleasures of audiences in the international program market (cf., Chalaby 2005, 2009, 2015).

Newsroom ethnographers were also concerned about the interaction between publics and media producers. Herbert Gans (1979) coined the term *imagined audience*, which denotes journalists’ mental constructs of people they are serving. He argued that, while journalists had little knowledge about their audience and dismissed its feedback in practice, they assumed they resembled themselves and their own topical interests. But the emergence of new spaces in which journalists and audiences interact (e.g., social media platforms) prompted new questions about this relationship (cf. Litt 2012). With site metrics allowing journalists to know more about who reads and listens to them than they could have in the past, C. W. Anderson (2011) posited that a fundamental transformation has occurred in journalists’ understanding in the form of an algorithmic conception of the audience. This journalistic responsiveness to the “agenda of the audience”, has multiple and contradictory meanings, which is prone to be viewed from a political economy perspective.

#### **4 The political economy of journalism**

As sociological studies of news organizations and occupations subsided in the 1980s, a body of work emerged which examined news media from a political economy perspective. This scholarship emphasized how market forces lead to media concentration and economic globalization which shape working conditions and, above all, compromise the independence of journalistic practice.

Thus, the underlying theme of this strand of research is the interrelation between market forces and journalism-enabled ideology. Robert McChesney (2008: 229) captured this common thread by arguing that a “political economic analysis stresses that the reasons for lousy journalism stem not from morally bankrupt or untalented journalists, but from a structure that makes such journalism the rational result of its operations.” Jeremy Tunstall and Michael Palmer (1991) linked the control of large sections of mass communication industries by few powerful individuals with world-wide media de-regulation. Ben Bagdikian (1983) discussed the chilling effects of corporate ownership and mass advertising and Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) examined how the underlying economics of publishing distort the news (see also Herman & McChesney 1997). Armand Mattelart (1994) argued that modern media is the result of state control.

Regarding the influence of structure of media ownership, McChesney (2008) showed how organizations mobilize powers to consolidate private control of media and increase profits. Similarly, media economist Gillian Doyle (2002) explored how media companies have been shaping the transnational and competitive communications marketplace. For Doyle, this dynamic has been a challenge for regulators and state authorities in terms of the volume and scale of mergers and alliances involving media players (cf., Klinenberg 2007). A lack of diversity of organizational structures compromises the democratic responsibility of the media, C. Edwin Baker (2002) argued, which is to foster a variety of debates and

public deliberation over issues of common concern. Along similar lines, political economy studies of journalism explored the nature of truth in the news (McManus 2009). While political economy research emphasized market and ownership forces impinging on news media, studies concerned with the cultural logics of journalism focused more on the symbolic structures driving journalism.

## 5 The cultural logics of journalism

In contrast to political economy approaches, cultural studies and cultural sociology stress that journalism is not only enabled and constrained by material conditions but also occupational traditions, civic virtues, and ideologies, which they take as more important to explain news outcomes. They argue that the occupation's history solidifies in professional norms and values that guide journalistic practice. Scholars of this tradition also recognize that journalism – a source not only of information but imagination – is closely connected to popular culture. Jacobs (2009) claimed the work of Park as a classical foundation of this perspective at the intersection of media sociology and cultural sociology. Park's early work on the *Immigrant Press* (1922) and subsequent articles on news media (1923, 1938, 1940, 1941) are often forgotten in light of his more prominent legacy in urban sociology, particularly on migration, race, and the social ecology of cities. In his work on print media, Park emphasized the distinctive epistemic quality of news, its role in public opinion formation, and the relationship between factual and fictional media.

On the other side of the pond, British sociologists developed a theory which emphasized the ideological character of public discourse. This ideology limits and shapes social imaginations (Hall, Morley & Chen 1996). However, the public is not conceived as helplessly subjected to these imaginations in the research tradition of cultural studies, which formed around the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, founded by Richard Hoggart in 1964. This school of thought is known for using participant observation to study how the British working class assigns meanings to the products of mass culture and how the media creates culture.

More recent work has explored the notion of media representation and journalistic authority. Barbie Zelizer explored the way audiences came to learn about the assassination of John F. Kennedy through journalistic representation of the events. She shows how journalists who have not seen the event live employed the news coverage to address issues they saw as central to their occupation and highlighted their cultural authority in collective interpretation (cf., Carlson 2011; Zelizer 1992). In a subsequent article, Zelizer (1993) argued that journalistic authority unfolds in double-time: between instantaneous, first-hand accounts and retrospective retelling and interpretation of these accounts. Around the same time, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992) published *Media Events*, which focused on the ritual qualities of televised events that follow three basic templates: coronations (purely ceremonial rites of passage), contests (achievements in rule-governed games), and conquests (rare instances of giant leaps and radical transformations). It took two decades after this influential book was published and the "iconic turn" in social sciences to reconsider the cultural power of events which rests in news images (cf., Zelizer 2010; Sonnevend 2016). Interestingly these works focused on still rather than moving images.

Several scholars also suggested that the organizational structure of news organizations, routine framing of issues, and occurrences of particular stories direct media attention and resources to the places and

institutions generating newsworthy events (Klinenberg 2002, 2007). Ellis Krauss (2000) argued that the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) played a crucial role in the symbolic legitimation of Japan while remaining free from formal government intervention and regulation. Shani Orgad (2012) demonstrated that processes of representation in a global media environment consist of complex and contested power relations over storytelling. Focusing on the struggles around the cultural imperatives around gender, Deborah Chambers et al. (2004) explored the role, status, and experiences of women in journalism.

Narrative genres have different implications for public sentiment and collective action, Ronald Jacobs demonstrated. He took the Rodney King crisis as a case study to explore the influence of mass mediation on US race relations (1996a, 2000). With Eleanor Townsley, Jacobs analyzed opinion commentary in newspapers and on television, presenting a theoretical model of mediated deliberation that emphasizes the role of symbolic discourse and performance in the public sphere (Jacobs & Townsley 2011). Following this line of research, in a cross-national comparative study Revers (2017) explored the cultural logic of US and German journalistic traditions on the level of performances and discourses of professionalism. Reconciling field theoretical and cultural sociological concerns, this work conceives journalism as institutionally situated and culturally driven to provide a more comprehensive sociological analysis of news.

Recent social movement scholarship showed how collective action has to be understood as the relation between framing processes, resource mobilization, and political opportunity structures. Within that sub-field, news media are seen as a major factor in shaping collective understandings. Myra Marx Ferree and colleagues (2002) conducted a comparative study of abortion discourse in US and Germany. Among other things, this study analyzed how social movements, political parties, churches, news media, and other social actors negotiate meaning (cf., Gamson 1998; Kielbowicz & Scherer 1986). Todd Gitlin (2003) discussed the role of media in shaping collective action and the trajectory of social movements and their leaders. Cultural sociologies and cultural studies of journalism explored how journalists produce and reproduce collective representations with important implications for understandings of our social world. In contrast to most other areas discussed in this chapter, many scholars in this field were able to secure positions in sociology departments.

## **6 Conclusion**

Starting in the late 1950s, the relocation of the sociology of journalism's relocation to journalism schools and media and communication departments coincides with the establishment and professionalization of these academic disciplines. Media sociologists provided useful insights into journalism as a social institution, in relation to audience (e.g., media effects or active audience), the political economy of journalism (e.g., market or ownership influence on the media), and the cultural logic of journalism and media representations (e.g., occupational ideologies, framing, narrativity, and performativity of news). Though these subdivisions have continual value, not only for practical necessities (i.e., division of labor), the future of sociology of journalism consists in cross-linkage between the different approaches we have mapped out and in abandoning rigid theoretical and methodological approaches.

The notion of a crisis of journalism, which has been dominating many expert panels in the early 2000s, itself has become a subject of critical scrutiny (Alexander, Breese & Luengo 2016; Zelizer 2015). Theoretical frameworks such as mediatization (Hepp 2013; Hepp & Krotz 2014), networked society (Castells 1996) or networked public sphere (Benkler 2006) have also recently influenced sociologists of journalism and led to the blurring of specialty areas. Reese (2016) pointed out that there is a new geography of journalism research and a rethinking of the still relevant linear process of influence in favor of constantly changing interest clusters driven by information entrepreneurs (Anderson 2013; Chadwick 2011). Recent sociological inquiries have moved from a rationalized to a networked approach to study journalism (e.g., van de Haak, Parks & Castells 2012). Works by the younger generation of journalism scholars, such as Seth Lewis, Nikki Usher, C. W. Anderson, assigns more agency to journalists relative to the older generation of scholars in the 1970s and 1980s when organizational structures, routines, and hierarchies seemed much more firmly in place.

The sociology of journalism, like journalism itself, faces challenges of an ever changing media ecology. Many edited collections, books, and papers have addressed these challenges and sorted debates in this field of inquiry (Anderson & Schudson 2008; Brienza & Revers 2016; Schudson 2011; Waisbord 2014; Zelizer 2004). The field needs to continuously adapt its analytical concepts and methods in order to capture their ever transforming object of study. If successful, it will continue to provide an integrated understanding of how institutional efficacies, power relationships, and social inequalities operate through journalism in shaping public discourse and public opinion.

### Further reading

A good overview of the field of media sociology can be found in *Media Sociology: A Reappraisal* by Silvio Waisbord (2014). In *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy* (2004), Barbie Zelizer positions the sociology of journalism relative to other fields (e.g., history, language studies, political science, and cultural analysis). In the edited volume, *Remaking the News: Essays on the Future of Journalism Scholarship in the Digital Age*, Pablo J. Boczkowski and C. W. Anderson explore the ways journalistic uses of digital technology has transformed the production, distribution, and reception of news. Roger Dickinson's article "Accomplishing Journalism: Towards a Revived Sociology of a Media Occupation" (2007) offers a call for a revised sociology of journalists rather than journalism that turns the focus back on news as the result of occupational practice. *The Sociology of News* by Michael Schudson (2011) and Brian McNair's book *The Sociology of Journalism* (1998) provide sociological analyses on the role of news making in democratic societies, focusing particularly on the US and Great Britain, respectively.

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