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Introduction: The Future of Journalism in a (Post?) Covid-19 World

Ceri Hughes ●[a], David Dunkley Gyimah[b] and César Jiménez-Martínez[c]

[a]Department of Media and Communication, Swansea University, Swansea, UK; [b]School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK; [c]The Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

ABSTRACT

The *Future of Journalism* conference—organised every two years by the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC) at Cardiff University—was radically different in 2021. For the first time ever, the conference was held virtually, because of the travelling restrictions and social distancing imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, the pandemic itself, and its implications for the practice and conceptualisation of journalism, was the focus of many papers submitted to the conference. The year 2020 witnessed the global outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 virus, and the murder of George Floyd which sparked Black Lives Matter protests across the world. It brought unprecedented challenges, a call for renewed understandings of diversity and inclusion, and obstacles for journalistic organisations and professionals who had to carry out their work under difficult, sensitive, and often dangerous circumstances. Yet journalism was never more important. In the context of continuous major breaking news events, misinformation and disinformation about the origins of the virus, and debates about the best way to control the pandemic, audiences around the world urgently required reliable information. Against this backdrop of great uncertainty, fear and confusion, people all over the world put back their trust in the information and news provided by legacy media organisations (Horowitz et al, 2021).

This environment was reflected in the more than 200 papers from both scholars and media practitioners, along with keynote presentations from Gary Younge (University of Manchester), Danielle K. Brown (University of Minnesota) and Cherian George (Hong Kong Baptist University) which examined, from different perspectives, the conference theme of "overcoming obstacles in journalism."

The call for papers asked for submissions including, but not limited to:

Transformations in Journalistic Practices

- How have news organisations around the world covered the pandemic? What have been the major logistical and ethical challenges in doing so?

- How have news organisations managed the coverage of major events beyond the pandemic (e.g., the Black Lives Matter movement and critical race theory, and the US presidential elections)?
- How have news organisations responded to unprecedented attacks on journalists as professionals and journalism as an institution?
- How have journalists changed their working routines and practices given the challenges of covering the news in a pandemic?
- How has journalism fared in holding governments to account?
- How have the experiences of journalists varied across national contexts and types of journalism?
- How has journalism responded to embrace greater diversity and inclusion?
- How has journalism's role changed?

Enhancing Storytelling

- What new storytelling formats, techniques and platforms have journalists developed to cover the pandemic?
- What has been the role of emerging practices (e.g., data journalism, fact-checking artificial intelligence, constructive journalism) in shaping storytelling?
- Which theoretical approaches can help us understand changes in storytelling techniques?

Engaging and Supporting Audiences

- How has audience engagement with the news changed?
- How have news organisations responded to the "infodemic" of misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories? What role have social media played in this context?
- How have audience members changed their news-seeking behaviour?
- What have we learned about news avoidance?

Building Resilience for the Future

- What has been the emotional impact of covering news in crisis, and how can news organisations ensure support for the mental health of journalists in the future?
- How have news organisations maintained their commitment to longer-standing projects (e.g., investigations and experimentation) in the face of the pandemic?
- How have business models in journalism coped with the pandemic?
- What are the most promising avenues for financial sustainability in the future?
- What research agendas and theoretical approaches are most helpful to understand the future of journalism?

- How can practising journalists and academics strengthen their ties and work to better inform audiences?

Authors responded thoughtfully and innovatively to the challenge laid out in this call for papers, at a time when everyone working within academia and the wider communication community were having to overcome the obstacles presented by the pandemic. However, Covid-19 also presented an opportunity for innovations in journalism which required new understandings and ways of working.

Though Covid-19 understandably dominates this special issue as a topic, themes through the issue pertain both specifically to the pandemic and apply more widely to research beyond the pandemic. Three central themes emerged from the articles chosen for this collection: *limitations and restrictions* to journalism, *challenges* to journalism and journalists, and *transformations* to the practice.

The first contribution by Neil Servallos and Marie Carisa Ordinario looks at some of these limitations and restrictions. Using Parks' (2017) non-representational theory and Boorstin's (1961) concept of pseudo-events, the authors examine how Filipino journalism changed during the pandemic. Concretely, they argue that the routine coverage of episodes such as the daily televised pandemic updates by authorities were pseudo-events, whose coverage was more favourable for newsmakers rather than Filipino communities. As the authors note, these pseudo-events emerged due to a combination of both editorial and non-editorial factors, such as the restrictions imposed by the government that limited journalists' physical mobility.

Another set of limitations is highlighted by Igor Vobič, who looks into the (re) negotiated visuality of television during Covid-19, and how the normal functioning of the public sphere was disrupted. Theoretically, Vobič frames the visuality of television within technological innovations of newsrooms and visual communication, and the conventionalised procedures towards visual-aural news (Epstein 1973; Ekström 2002; Griffin 2012). He also understands visibility as what is visible and accessible to the public (Dahlgren 1995, 90), with a dynamic tension in news to "see" and "be seen", as well as "seeing" and "being seen". Drawing on data from public television and the leading commercial broadcaster in Slovenia, Vobič reveals a shift in television journalism to what he describes as "kaleidoscopic vision" in the coverage of Covid-19, with journalists providing a fractured, shifted and scrambled vision of the pandemic. Hence, what emerges are conflicting, dysfunctional narratives which are problematic for the stated civic aims of journalism.

Cartoons have an established presence in media covering political and social issues, but their impact during the Covid-19 pandemic deserves further attention. Focusing on South African media, Marina Joubert and Herman Wasserman undertake an exploratory study of 1196 single-frame editorial cartoons, created by 19 cartoonists in three languages, and published in 24 publications over the course of 2020. Their findings highlight that the pandemic was not only a pertinent topic for South African cartoonists, but they also note that cartoons were dominated by the topic of "politics and government" and politicians, along with other themes such as "society and social consequences", "economic impacts" and "health". Of interest, science and scientists were represented only rarely. Joubert and Wasserman's findings point to the cartoons politicising the pandemic, with comparatively minor contributions to tackling misinformation and providing

public education. As they argue, the cartoons added fear and anxiety and were a significant part of the media discourse and hence likely had an impact on public sentiment.

Another set of contributions examines how the pandemic brought new challenges to the practice of journalism. Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas, Jhoana Paula Tuazon and Jeremaiah Opiniano look at the impact of the pandemic on the daily work stresses of journalists. Drawing on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, the authors research changes in work stresses and coping mechanisms among 13 Filipino journalists, paying attention to how the creative processes of these media professionals are affected. The authors outline various shifts in journalists' work stressors and their coping mechanisms, in the context of what has been called the "new normal". With their findings, they hope to help practitioners in easing potential negative stressors and improve newsroom environments in order to induce creativity.

In turn, Jana Rick and Thomas Hanitzch examine the changing working conditions of journalists in Germany during the pandemic and the perception of such changes. Using an online survey of journalists in Germany (n = 983), they look at the extent to which Covid-19 affected practitioners of different employment status. At the heart of their research is the issue of precarity (O´Donnell & Zion, 2019; Örnebring, 2018) and related working conditions, such as low wages and unpredictable remuneration made worse by the pandemic. The results show two types of changes, objective and subjective. Objective ones are income losses, short-time work, and the sudden shift to working at home. Subjective changes refer to journalists pointing to their personal financial fallouts and their resulting existential fears.

Lada Trifonova Price and Vesislava Antonova look at how Covid-19 curtailed journalists' abilities to hold the powerful to account in Bulgaria. The authors note that, in a context of a country that ranks poor in press freedoms, governments may use public health crises as an opportunity to further erode those freedoms. The authors' interviews with journalists reveal how normal journalistic practices were limited during the pandemic, with the ability to scrutinise government officials often overly restricted. Of further concern is the finding that the limited number of remaining independent outlets—which were often most critical of the government—suffered the most from lost revenues and struggled to survive.

Another difficult area for journalists to navigate is the coverage of minors, as illustrated by research from Carina Tenor and Marju Himma-Kadakas. These authors use case studies from Sweden and Estonia to examine the tension between trying to give a voice to youth whilst also protecting them from harm from appearing in the news. The authors find inconsistent, and often overly protective, measures adopted by media organisations to protect minors, which often result in them becoming "voiceless." Interviews with editors also show that concerns over protecting their own organisation from criticism impacts editorial decisions. However, such concerns are lessened when it comes to foreign reporting—coverage of "other" youth is perceived as carrying less responsibility.

One of the most significant challenges during the pandemic was the spread of misinformation and disinformation. As Fran Yeoman and Kate Morris note, against a backdrop of declining levels of trust in the news media, several major UK news providers—including the BBC, News UK, The Guardian, and The Economist—had begun engaging in news literacy education before Covid-19, thus expanding their own remit as educators about news. The authors focus on the role of news organisations in teaching news literacy to

children, and the attitudes towards media organisations among those involved in these projects. Yeoman and Morris find that news literacy projects carried out during the pandemic tended to teach a normative version of professional news content that was untainted by bias and framing. They also note that among those interviewed there was a widespread perception that only certain parts of the news media industry were acceptable participants in news literacy education.

Significantly, the pandemic was also perceived as the trigger of important transformations. Using Spain as the setting for their study, José García Avilés, Félix Arias-Robles, Alicia De Lara-González, Miguel Carvajal, José Maria Valero-Pastor and Dámaso Mondéjar interviewed working journalists along with experts on journalism innovation. Their findings shed light on the fact that, alongside inevitable increases in telework, the pandemic also accelerated several digital transformations. As the public clamoured for further information, science journalism found greater need to work in concert with data visualisation experts to educate the public about the pandemic. The authors note that many of the identified transformations were probably coming to news practices, but the pandemic accelerated trends that may have taken several years to mere weeks or even days.

Finally, Signe Ivask and Lenka Waschková Císařová, investigate experiences of local journalism in Estonia, focusing on the cases of the islands Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, both of which were isolated from the mainland because of the pandemic. Saaremaa, the authors note, was the epicentre of the first wave of Covid-19 in Estonia, whilst neighbouring island Hiiumaa was a (6 kilometres) ferry connection away. The authors focus on three newsrooms of the local newspapers—Meie Maa, Saarte Hääl, and Hiiu Leht—employing semi-structured interviews with eight local journalists on Saaremaa and Hiiumaa. They note that local journalistic practices were at the "intersection of changing routines", incorporating more digital tools. Ivask and Waschková Císařová find that, although it was business as usual in the way journalists went about their routines, the pandemic brought about different marked practices. Whilst print was the primary source of news, there were differences in publications' online versions and that local journalists failed to understand their importance in the shift to digital to disseminate news.

As seen above, the pandemic is a dominant topic in this special issue. This should not be surprising. Covid-19 was (or still is?) an extraordinary event that impacted on the lives of everybody across the globe. These thoughtful, rigorous and timely papers—which look at cases in Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, the Philippines, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom—are some of the first pieces of research to academically document the effects of the pandemic on the practice of journalism. We are therefore grateful to our contributors for their impressive work and we hope that readers will find their work engaging and intellectually rewarding.

It is also worthwhile pausing to reflect that perhaps the act of holding the conference online facilitated the submission and attendance by scholars who may otherwise have not been able to participate, with case studies going beyond the typically over researched localities. Had the conference been an in-person only event, this special issue may not have been able to reflect such diversity of people and thought. Academics should therefore consider how this (enforced) move enabled greater participation and exchange, and how to further afford such inclusivity in the future, especially when, in a supposedly post-

Covid world, discourses about the "new normal" have been abandoned for increasing calls to return to old, and structurally hierarchical and unequal, routines.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Ceri Hughes 🄳 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9538-6377

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