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Dimensions of Peripherality in Journalism: A Typology for Studying New Actors in the Journalistic Field

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of an increasingly complex variety of digital actors who may be considered as engaging in journalism has led to a veritable explosion of scholarship on peripheral actors in the field. Numerous cases have been analyzed, yet we currently lack a systematic understanding of the shapes and forms in which such actors can be studied. To better account for the increasing complexity in this area of scholarship, this article conducts a systematic literature review of 63 articles published in English-language peer-reviewed journals. Through this review, we identify and propose a framework for assessing and classifying the peripherality of actors that is composed of three dimensions – identities, practices, and structures. These are further divided into ten components, which we have termed: values, experience, belongingness, professionalism, competencies, formats, transformativity, autonomy, audience-centricity, and organization. Together, these may help scholars better understand the diversity of peripheral activities in journalism.

Introduction

The past two decades have been a significant turning point in journalism with a multitude of political, economic, societal, and technological changes that have impacted the journalistic field. Decreasing audience numbers, financial pressures, and new communication technologies have forced the field to innovate (Nielsen, Cornia, and Kalogeropoulos 2016), either from the inside or with the help of outsiders, or so-called peripheral actors (Eldridge 2017, Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018). These changes have not only impacted the field itself but also led to significant shifts in journalism scholarship at a time when it is no longer possible to draw clear boundaries between what is journalism and what is not. Journalism has turned into an "increasingly messy, definitional space" (Eldridge 2016) and is constantly being challenged to demarcate itself from non-journalism and legitimize the profession as such (Carlson 2015).

These developments have seen journalism scholarship pay increasingly close attention to how journalists distinguish themselves from outside actors who operate, at least initially, on the periphery of the field (Eldridge 2019a). With journalistic innovation often the key context, scholars have therefore acknowledged "the inadequacy of the insider/outsider distinction and turned their attention towards how the interplay between traditional actors at the core and non-traditional players at the periphery shape the manner in which journalists innovate" (Chua and Duffy 2019, 113). Others have conceptualized these fading boundaries as "twilight zones," or areas where the journalistic and other societal fields overlap (Maares and Hanusch 2020a, 264).

Yet, the considerable growth of research on these developments has also led to an increasingly varied range of terminology and definitions, arguably leading to some conceptual confusion in the literature. To address these issues, this article takes stock of how journalism scholarship approaches the concept of peripheral actors. Through a comprehensive literature review of 63 English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles, our study develops a typology that may allow scholars to better classify peripheral actors in the journalistic field. Through an enhanced, universally applicable terminology to refer to different dimensions of peripheral actors, we hope to contribute to improved communication among journalism scholars and more comprehensive knowledge accumulation on peripheral actors (Hill, Kern, and White 2012; Sageder 2010).

The Concept of Boundaries in Journalistic Cultures

Regardless of how scholars eventually refer to the struggle between traditional journalistic actors and those on the periphery of the field, the vast majority of studies commonly depart from the theory of boundary work, concerned with the "simple question of how journalism comes to be demarcated from non-journalism" (Carlson 2015, 2). Boundary work is grounded in the sociology of professions, which no longer follows a traits approach that asks whether an occupation is a profession, but rather what the circumstances are "in which people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession, and thus themselves into professional people" (Hughes 1971, 340). Thus, professions are seen as collective social actors who "attempt to translate one order of scarce resources – special knowledge and skills – into another – social and economic rewards" (Sarfatti Larson 1977, xiii). This move to examining "professional struggles" instead of "professional traits" was refined by Abbott (2014), who focused on professional work as the main object of analysis, arguing that a key aspect of professional struggle was the struggle over jurisdiction – the claims by social actors over who has the right to engage in a particular task.

It is this contestation and transformation of professional boundaries (Lewis 2012) that is at the heart of Gieryn's (1983) concept of boundary work, which he used to examine the discursive distinction between academic science and non-academic intellectual work. Whereas academic fields have more solid boundaries through structural barriers of entry, the boundaries of the journalistic field are more permeable (Lewis 2012). This makes discursive or rhetorical struggles ever more important in these groups' competition for "epistemic authority" – "the legitimate power to define, describe, and explain bounded domains of reality" (Gieryn 1983, 1). The concept thus

allows us to understand how journalists define who counts as a journalist (and who does not), what counts as journalism (and what does not) and what is appropriate behavior (and what is deviant) (Carlson 2015).

Given the unprecedented pace of change in the journalistic field, including the emergence of a rapidly increasing number of actors who may be engaging in work that at least partly resembles journalism, the boundaries in journalism have become increasingly blurred and contested (Loosen 2015). Journalism is considered especially susceptible to possible outside threats to its authority in its democratic service by peripheral actors (Hermida and Young 2019; Tandoc 2019; Schapals, Maares, and Hanusch 2019) as the profession itself is often only considered a hybrid semi-profession with permeable boundaries (Witschge and Nygren 2009). Nevertheless, journalism strives for "the benefits of [a] professional status [such as] internal cohesion and the right to enforce its own exclusivity" (Carlson 2015, 8). As a result, journalists struggle to set themselves and their profession apart from society and started to develop self-policing mechanisms of ethical codes to claim their authority (Lewis 2012).

Peripheral Actors in Journalism

Despite journalists' efforts to enforce exclusivity and to establish structural boundaries around the field, new actors continue to emerge and claim membership in the journalistic field. They challenge traditional definitions of journalistic cultures (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018) and innovate the field through new technologies and practices. Traditional journalists often try to banish these "strangers" to the periphery of the field, outside of the traditional newsroom despite their potential to not only preserve the field but to transform it (Benson 1999).

Throughout the past decade, numerous studies have investigated peripheral actors and institutions in journalism, such as bloggers, and micro-bloggers (Nielsen 2012; Maares and Hanusch 2020a), citizen journalists (Wall 2015; Allan and Thorsen 2009), web-developers (Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018), for-profit journalistic start-ups (Carlson and Usher 2016), satirical news anchors (Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2009), mobile news app designers (Ananny and Crawford 2015), web analytics companies (Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2019), pioneer journalists (Hepp 2018; Hepp and Loosen 2021), and organizations such as *WikiLeaks* (Wahl-Jorgensen 2014). All have tried to conceptualize these actors and their role in the innovation process of traditional newsrooms. This has, among other things, led to a number of terms given to the phenomenon. Among more widely known recent conceptualizations, Eldridge's (2014) description of interloper media stands out. It refers to the "subset of digitally native media and journalistic actors who originate from outside the boundaries of the traditional journalistic field, but whose work nevertheless reflects the socio-informative functions, identities, and roles of journalism" (Eldridge 2019b, 858). Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018) have extended this term, arguing that not all non-traditional journalistic actors are perceived as "outsiders" but are instead increasingly embraced by traditional newsrooms. They distinguish between three different types of interlopers: (1) Explicit interlopers; (2) Implicit interlopers; and (3) Intralopers. *Explicit interlopers* are defined as non-traditional journalistic actors "who may not necessarily be welcomed or defined as journalists and work on the periphery of the profession

while directly contributing content or products to the creation and distribution of news" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018, 73). Consisting mainly of bloggers and cititzen journalists, they are known to challenge journalistic norms in order to improve current practices. *Implicit interlopers* are non-traditional actors who contribute to journalism but do not challenge its authority. They are more accepted by traditional journalists than *explicit interlopers*, as they often help journalism succeed and contribute to potential improvements. *Intralopers* are individuals that work within traditional newsrooms but without "embracing the full role or label of a journalist" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018, 75). These individuals are often trained in journalism, but tend to focus on the "in-house production of emerging technology meant to supplement or complement journalists' work" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018, 75). They are often considered "distant strangers" in the newsroom "less […] by proximity than they are by the work they perform in relation to news production" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018, 75).

The Art of Terminology

More broadly, the digital transformations in the field have not only reignited the debate on journalistic boundaries, but also sparked a debate on the terminology researchers use to describe the new actors in the journalistic field. Currently, scholarship on peripheral actors uses various terms to describe similar concepts of new actors in the journalistic field. In a quest to name these, scholars have used terms such as *interlopers* (Eldridge 2014), *in-betweeners* (Ahva 2017), *pioneer journalists* (Hepp and Loosen 2021), *strangers* (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018) or *outsiders to the field* (Eldridge 2017, Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018), *intermediaries of change* (Heft and Baack 2022), or *simply insurgents* (Perreault and Bell 2020).

While such an influx of new concepts may be expected as different scholars struggle with a new phenomenon, scholarly fields not only require "the naming of new concepts, but also agreement on the terms used" (Cabré 1999, 2). In this way, they can foster "conversations across disciplinary and domain boundaries and develop measures that converge on the constructs that we are discussing so that the understanding developed is valid" (Hill, Kern, and White 2012, 187). When a new phenomenon emerges, the question of what is appropriate terminology to conceptualize it arises. Scholars often try to propose a universally applicable terminology for phenomena as a way of claiming "psychological ownership," which relates to how "an individual perceives that an object is 'theirs' regardless of actual physical or legal ownership" (Stoner, Loken, and Stadler Blank 2018, 130). Scholars argue that one of the reasons for this practice lies in the range of external pressures modern-day academics often face, such as universities' expectations of high citation and publication counts in order to be seen as "authoritative" in the field (Gruber, 2014). These metrics have become crucially important in academia as research has often come to be considered as only valuable and contributing to society "when the influence is upon another academic author, researcher, or university organization" (LSE Public Policy Group 2011, 11).

On the other hand, the use of inconsistent terminology can "inhibit the accumulation of knowledge and understanding regarding [a new] phenomenon" (Hill, Kern, and White 2012, 187). Especially in times like these, where journalism's boundaries become

more and more permeable (Deuze and Witschge 2016) and scholarship is presented with endless "questions of who can still be considered a journalist'" (Maares and Hanusch 2020a, 263), the quest for consistent terminology becomes crucial. Consistency enables scholars to build upon earlier works and to "communicate with each other systematically" (Hill, Kern, and White 2012, 190), which requires standardization of terminology (Sageder 2010).

With so many different approaches to terminology and boundary actors, and thus confusion about what makes a peripheral actor, we decided to take stock of existing journalism scholarship with a view to identifying key facets of peripherality as raised in the literature. The overall aim was to arrive at a list of dimensions that could be used in future scholarship to more comprehensively identify, classify, and compare actors on the periphery. Ideally, and in response to related calls (e.g. Eldridge 2019a; Ryfe 2019), this would allow for a more nuanced and differentiated understanding of peripheral actors in journalism, and also point the way forward for future studies when trying to identify such peripheral actors. Based on these considerations, we developed the following research question:

> RQ1: What dimensions of peripherality can be identified in the journalism studies literature on peripheral actors?

Methodological Approach

We conducted a systematic literature review, allowing us to "synthesize primary scholarship on a specific subject in order to both disclose the status quo and identify research gaps regarding this subject" (Engelke 2019, 34). This offers an opportunity to systematically and reproducibly identify and evaluate "the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners" (Fink 2005, 3). Our research design combines a quantitative content analysis with a qualitative in-depth textual analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles carefully curated through several predefined criteria. One key criterion was that articles had to be published in English-language, peer-reviewed journals, and deal with peripheral actors inside and outside traditional journalistic newsrooms (Eldridge 2017; Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018). As a consequence, our study excludes several influential books on peripheral actors – most notably Carlson and Lewis (2015) and Hutchison and O'Donnell (2011). We made this decision for pragmatic reasons to ensure a more systematic procedure for identifying relevant works, as well as to leave the scope of studies somewhat constant. We are aware that our focus also excludes some book chapters as well as studies not published in English, but accept this as a limitation that we believe does not unduly disadvantage our core purpose, which is to qualitatively identify the range of dimensions through which peripheral actors in journalism may be examined. Hence, our study does not aim to be a census, but rather a reasonably close approximation of a representative sample of English-language, peer-reviewed work.

Content Analysis

Following other researchers (e.g. Engelke 2019; Flew and McWaters 2020), we identified relevant articles directly through journals via the Social Science Citation Index

(SSCI). This approach was chosen as it allows researchers to widen the scope of the study beyond the widely known "North American- and European- dominated major and high-ranking journals" (Engelke 2019, 34), even though we do acknowledge a bias here given we were only examining English-language articles. The search strings used were developed by scanning the keywords of widely known publications on peripheral actors (e.g. Hermida and Young 2019; Tandoc 2019: Schapals, Maares, and Hanusch 2019; Chua and Duffy 2019) and contained several different combinations of the terms "peripher*," "journalis*," "boundari*," "news*," "core*," "interloper*," "intraloper*," "pione*," "media*," "stranger*," "blo*," and "in-between*." We searched the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the individual articles in the database, resulting in an initial 2636 articles published until May 2021. Once duplicates were filtered out, this left 1334 articles which were scanned and filtered for journalism-related journals, reducing the number to 706 articles. One coder then read all the abstracts and excluded all articles that did not specifically deal with peripheral actors in journalism. This resulted in a final amount of 63 articles from the following 16 journals: *African Journalism Studies, Communication Theory, Convergence-the International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, Digital Journalism, Information Communication & Society, International Journal of Communication, Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, Journal of Media Ethics, Journalism, Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, Journalism Practice, Journalism Studies, Mass Communication and Society, Media & Communication, New Media & Society,* and *Social Media + Society.*

To analyze these articles, we developed a codebook containing quantitative and open qualitative variables. The codebook contained 23 predefined coding categories with a total of 24 sub-categories. Initial categories were adapted from previous systematic literature analyses in journalism research (see Maares and Hanusch 2020b; Engelke 2019). The predefined categories consisted of several manifest variables: publication, title, publication year, authors, and more latent categories such as level of analysis, type of article, and method. The codebook was complemented by open qualitative variables such as definitions drawn upon to describe peripheral actors and the terminology used to refer to actors on the periphery of the journalistic field. The coding process started at the end of May 2021 and was completed in the middle of July 2021.

The 63 articles were published between 2009 and 2021, with an emphasis on the past four years (2018 = 7; 2019 = 14; 2020 = 13; 2021 = 6). The majority (28.6%) were published in *Digital Journalism,* followed by *Journalism* (22.2%), and *Media & Communication* (19%). Authors with an affiliation in the United States dominated (30.9%), followed by Sweden (8.1%), Australia (6.5%), and Singapore (6.5%). The vast majority of studies were empirical (80.6%) and a comparative approach was employed in just over half the studies (54.8%). Of those, a majority (58.8%) examined more than one country, with the US most prominent (included in 55% per cent of studies), followed by the UK (50%), and Germany (40%). About three-quarters (74.6%) of all studies employed qualitative methods, with case studies (31.7% overall) most common, followed by interviews (22.2%). Quantitative studies were comparatively rare, with only two purely quantitative studies and two mixed-methods studies, all of which employed content analysis (6.3%). Overall, the analysis of the journal articles revealed

that "peripheral actor" is the most common term to describe the new entrants to the field (22.6% of all articles), followed by "interloper" (9.7%) and interloper media (8%).

Following the basic content analysis, our qualitative variables – specifically the direct and indirect definitions of peripheral actors in journalism – were inspected more closely via qualitative textual analysis. Every definition was inspected in detail and inductively grouped by definitional dimensions, which synthesized the main characteristics of peripheral actors in the journalistic field. In total, 21 articles had an explicit definition of peripheral actors, and 39 had an implicit definition. Three did not offer even an implicit definition, yet we were still able to identify certain key characteristics in their approach to identifying peripheral actors. To identify the range of considerations that journalism scholarship has offered in defining – explicitly or implicitly – peripheral actors, we undertook multiple iterations of a qualitative coding process to tease out these characteristics. As noted earlier, the aim here was to mainly draw out what aspects of peripherality scholarship had identified. We did not set out to here compare or critique the often widely differing and inconsistent uses of the notion of peripheral actors by scholars – even though this would doubtlessly be a very worthwhile undertaking in itself. Rather, with the aim of unifying approaches, we wanted to develop a framework that would allow us to identify, classify, and compare actors on the periphery based on the literature, both amongst each other but also in comparison to traditional journalists.

Through these multiple iterations of analysis and extensive discussion among ourselves, we gathered a broad list of themes that were present in the literature. Following a process of trying to condense these themes into a manageable list of items that would convey the range of approaches present, we identified ten areas that we believe speak to the vast majority of studies and which seem to cover the key ingredients of what scholars regard as components of peripherality. These ten components can be grouped into three dimensions (Table 1), which were formed inductively from the analyzed literature and deductively from pre-existing research on the journalistic field. This was done in order to later compare peripheral actors to the core of journalism; hence it was crucial to offer signposts against which to do such comparisons. The aim was to provide a framework which scholars could use to place peripheral actors along the dimensions, enabling them to identify different constellations of these actors in relation to the core of journalism. In the remainder of this article, we discuss each of these dimensions and their components, in the hope that on a broader level they may allow for identifying, classifying and comparing different types of peripheral actors in the journalistic field, leading to a more nuanced understanding of what happens on the periphery of journalism.

Identities

Our first constituent operates on the micro-level and concerns individual identity-markers of peripheral actors. Questions of identity have been a central concern for journalism scholarship for a long time, and they are widely considered crucial components of journalistic culture (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). The three components we identified in our analysis as falling under questions of identity relate to actors' values, the

Table 1. Dimensions of peripherality in journalism.

Identities	Values	The extent to which peripheral actors espouse traditional values of journalism
	Experience	The extent to which peripheral actors have journalism-specific training and experience
	Belongingness	The extent of peripheral actors' claims to membership in the journalistic field
Practices	Professionalism	The extent to which peripheral actors use traditional journalistic skills and routines
	Competencies	The extent to which peripheral actors possess skills beyond traditional journalistic ones
	Formats	The extent to which peripheral actors employ innovative formats or distribution channels for content
Structures	Transformativity	The extent to which peripherals actors aim to actively transform journalism
	Autonomy	The extent to which peripheral actors are independent from political or economic forces
	Audience-Centricity	The extent to which peripheral actors focus on and engage with their audiences
	Organization	The extent to which peripheral actors work in an organizational context for content production

extent of their journalistic training or experience, as well as the extent to which they actively identify as members of the journalistic field.

Journalistic *values* are a key ideological component of journalism cultures, have been studied widely through role perceptions, ethical views, and epistemologies, and thus go to the heart of journalistic identity (Hanitzsch 2007). The literature on peripheral actors similarly examines in detail how and why these actors adopt, adapt to or interpret these values. The continuum on values ranges from one pole which espouses existing mainstream journalistic values, while at the other end we see actors rejecting or challenging established values and perhaps bringing in new ones. In their study of fact-checking practitioners in Africa, for example, Cheruiyot and Ferrer-Conill (2018) noted that even though they operated at the periphery, they ascribed to the dominant journalistic culture: "They adhered to journalistic norms and values, both in terms of service to the citizen and holding the powerful to account". Similarly, lifestyle Instagram influencers were found to be sharing many of the same role perceptions as professional lifestyle journalists (Maares and Hanusch 2020a). At the other end of the pole, we might find actors who do not adhere to journalistic norms, such as the UK-based non-profit mySociety, whose members see themselves more as facilitators for journalists to take action (Baack 2018). We also found examples of peripheral actors located somewhere between the two poles, emphasizing the need to think of our dimensions as continuums. One prominent example is the whistleblowing platform WikiLeaks, which on the one hand adheres to journalistic values of being a watchdog of those in power and disclosing their findings to the public (e.g. the video of U.S. soldiers killing Iraqi civilians or the release of classified documents from the war in Afghanistan). However, the platform also "violates [several other] elements of the professional journalistic paradigm", such as objectivity, source-based reporting routines, and institutionality (Coddington 2012, 383). Other examples include bloggers in the US Midwest who harbor similar missions for information production to journalists (Robinson and DeShano 2011).

A second component of the identity dimension relates to peripheral actors' prior exposure to and background in journalism. What we refer to here as *experience* encapsulates actors' journalistic training – including formal education at universities or training institutes – as well as the extent to which they may have worked in mainstream journalism previously. Journalism scholarship has long examined the role of journalism

education and professional socialization in shaping journalists' values (see, for example, Mellado et al. 2013; Splichal and Sparks 1994). Whether peripheral actors possess such backgrounds may thus shape their attitudes to mainstream journalism. Again, we would think of training to exist on a continuum, ranging from those peripheral actors who have had no previous training or experience in journalism, to those who have been trained and worked in journalism for large amounts of time. Examples at one end may be long-time journalists who have left the industry to pursue other opportunities, such as the content producers for US sports team' websites (Mirer 2018) or those now working for the Korean independent newsroom *Newstapa* (Shin 2015). Hence, while this component is somewhat related to our first, it is also distinct because of these possible different constellations. At the other extreme, we find actors who have no training at all in journalism and who come from completely different fields, such as web analytics companies (Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018) or news app designers (Ananny and Crawford 2015). In between, we find peripheral actors who have at least dabbled in journalism or who may have had a journalism education but never actually worked in the industry. From our reading of the literature, it appears that over time fewer peripheral actors have a training background in journalism, which could be explained through the increasing precarity and the "culture of job insecurity" (Ekdale et al. 2015) that has made it less attractive for people to study journalism. Increasingly, too, we see training projects emerge which aim to bridge the gap between the periphery and core of journalism, such as joint degrees in journalism and computer science, or scholarships for programmers' interested in journalism (Lewis and Usher 2016).

The third component relates to the extent to which peripheral actors articulate discursive claims of membership in the journalistic field, something we term *belongingness*, drawing on Eldridge (2017). As our review indicates, the extent to which actors identify explicitly as journalists is of much concern. At one end of the continuum, actors may disavow any association with journalism, or at least journalism in its traditionally understood sense. This includes Instagram influencers who do not typically link their work to journalism (Maares and Hanusch 2020a), but also web analytics companies who locate themselves outside of journalism, even though they see the impact they have on the field (Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018). At the other end of the spectrum, Lichtenstein, Herbers, and Bause (2021) found that the journalistic YouTubers they interviewed laid claims to membership by describing themselves as journalists at least to some extent, similar to the in-house team sports reporters interviewed by Mirer (2018). In some countries, of course, membership is determined by legal restrictions, such as in Egypt, where only those with "full- time contracts, an endorsement letter from the print media organization, a minimum of two years of experience, and a portfolio" (Badr 2022, 4) can join the Journalists Syndicate. Those who cannot join, such as freelancers and peripheral journalists, are excluded and pushed outside the field, unable to access the Syndicate's financial advantages, access to sources, and legal protection.

Practices

In addition to questions of identity and values, practices are also widely considered a crucial constituent of cultures, and by extension journalistic culture (Hanitzsch 2007).

Through our analysis of the scholarship, we were thus able to identify three components which relate to this dimension: professionalism, competencies, and formats.

The first component, which we have termed *professionalism*, taps into a long line of wider research on the topic (Waisbord 2013), and is, in regard to scholarship on peripheral journalism concerned with the traditional journalistic skills and routines actors may exhibit. Similar to the aforementioned component of values, existing studies have identified differences in the extent of peripheral actors' knowledge and practice of such skills and routines. While some actors may practice routines that are very much in line with those of professional journalists, such as the use of particular news values, topics or sources, others may deviate quite extensively from these. An example of the former includes Buzzfeed, which despite some differences to traditional practices, "is playing by the rules, which might explain its legitimation as a recognized agent in the field" (Tandoc 2018, 200). Other examples include mobile journalists who follow very similar journalistic routines to their mainstream counterparts (Salzmann, Guribye, and Gynnild 2021). At the other end of the spectrum, we can identify actors such as WikiLeaks, which engages in few, if any, of the reporting routines that traditional journalists use to define themselves (Coddington 2012). Again, we find different constellations along such a continuum. An interesting example relates to a comparison of professional and citizen photojournalists, the latter of whom often possess the "journalistic skills to communicate stories to a broad audience" (Ferrucci, Taylor, and Alaimo 2020, 371). At the same time, they are generally "not socialized into a professional world, and therefore are unbound by an enforceable code of ethics" (Ferrucci, Taylor, and Alaimo 2020, 371). Similarly, this complexity can also be found within certain media, such as when bloggers follow professional journalistic practices in collecting, analyzing or interpreting current events, but also do so in a different tone and with a different mission (Shanahan 2011).

Professionalism as a concept does not, however, fully grasp the range of practices among peripheral actors, as these may not engage in any traditional journalistic production per se. The component of *competencies* thus relates to the depth of non-journalistic skills and knowledge which peripheral actors may have at their disposal. At one end of the continuum, we find those who have a large amount of non-journalistic skills, such as peripheral actors who do programming or data analysis, or who may possess a high amount of topic-specific knowledge. This resonates in the literature with so-called intralopers, who "bring non-traditional journalistic expertise and perspectives to news organizations and disrupt news production through advancements in digital and social media" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018, 75). For instance, data journalists often "blend the technical domain of coding with the artistic domain of visual expression, incorporating interdisciplinary knowledge from the fields of visual art and graphic design, as well as from statistics, mathematics, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), psychology, and computer engineering" (Boyles and Meyer 2016, 946). In doing so, they create visually appealing and interactive data-driven news stories. Topic-specific, expert knowledge is also part of this component, such as in the case of *The Conversation*, which produces "explanatory journalism written by academics, who have historically participated as sources and op-ed writers, and edited by journalists" (Hermida and Young 2019, 93). We should note that while both professionalism and competencies deal with skills, routines, and knowledge, we decided to separate these

out as it is possible, and indeed not rare, for peripheral actors to be high in both professional journalistic skills, as well as non-journalistic skills, such as in the case of some Australian data journalists (Wright and Doyle 2019).

The third component of the practices dimensions relates to the *formats* in which peripheral actors produce and distribute their content. The digital age and increasingly hybrid nature of media systems (Chadwick 2013) has allowed for an increasing range of formats and distribution channels through which journalists and peripheral actors can reach their audiences. Rather than categorizing here along different formats, we conceptualize this component as capturing the extent to which formats and distribution channels are similar or dissimilar to traditional journalistic formats (for example, in the form of newspapers, or television or radio stations). Hence, at one end of the continuum we would locate those actors who use such traditional formats, while at the other end are those who publish and distribute through new, innovative, and perhaps even disruptive formats, such as blogs or a TikTok or Instagram account. We acknowledge that there is a certain fluidity here in terms of what is traditional or innovative, given that over time, traditional news organizations have been known to adopt formats which may have been peripheral previously, such as in the case of blogs (Shanahan 2011). Hence, it is important to examine whether certain formats are innovative *at the time*. Our review of the literature shows there are several different constellations. While some peripheral actors, such as data journalists and newsgame developers, produce content for legacy media such as *the Guardian* or the *New York Times* (Wright and Doyle 2019; Plewe and Fursich 2020), other peripheral actors publish on independent fashion blogs (Cheng and Tandoc 2022) or work for non-governmental organizations' publications (Spyksma 2019).

Structures

Our third dimension deals mostly with issues on the structural level, taking account of broader notions of what in journalism scholarship is referred to as the media organizations, social institutions, and social systems levels (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). Here we find four components that are of concern in scholarship on peripheral actors, which we refer to as transformativity, autonomy, audience-centricity, and organization.

Transformativity relates to the extent to which actors consciously or unconsciously transform the journalistic field – a topic of discussion in many studies of our sample. This is perhaps not surprising, giving it is at the heart of boundary work (Carlson 2015), which is the conceptual background for so many of the studies. After all, peripheral actors have the "potential to simultaneously contribute to the evolution of journalism and to disrupt its boundaries" (Chua and Duffy 2019, 112). Viewed again as a continuum, we see at one end those actors who want to transform the journalistic field and news like new entrants, such as for-profit digital news startups (Carlson and Usher 2016), mobile news app designers (Ananny and Crawford 2015) or "pioneer journalists" (Hepp and Loosen 2021). A useful differentiation towards this end of the continuum, also, is Eldridge's use of "agonists," who aim to transform constructively, and "antagonists" who "use the guise of journalism to disguise more antagonistic ambitions, serving political agendas rather than public ones" (Eldridge 2019a, 15). In the

middle are those who may contribute to transformation, but do so unconsciously or only to limited extent, while at the other end we find actors who aim to preserve the field. In the literature, these have been theorized as implicit interlopers and intralopers, who tend to follow journalistic routines or work for mainstream outlets. As a result, they "do not generally challenge journalistic authority" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018, 73). Those who aim to transform the field are often referred to as explicit interlopers, who "frequently and overtly challenge journalistic norms, calling for improved practices" (Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018, 73).

Our second component relates to a key concept that has received substantial attention in journalism scholarship at large, and which is often considered a precondition for actors to be called journalists. *Autonomy* in journalism has been discussed quite extensively, and is often considered as essential for professional journalism (Merrill 1974; Waisbord 2013). Indeed, as Carlson (2017) notes, it is used to fend off outside influences on journalism and is a key boundary marker in journalists' discourses. The use of the concept of autonomy in studies of peripheral actors operates often on the organizational level, ranging from highly autonomous to actors who are strongly influenced by economic or political interests. More autonomous actors tend to be financed through crowdfunding or donations, such as the Korean independent newsroom Newstapa (Shin 2015), where "citizens are willing to donate their money because they 'trust the sincerity of Newstapa journalists towards their job as a journalist'" (Shin 2015, 699). At the other end of the spectrum – which can be termed the heteronomous pole in line with Bourdieusian (1996) field theory, we find so-called influencers or bloggers, who attract "the interest of marketing agencies, who assume they are able to reach and persuade consumers easily [enabling them to] cash in on their popularity by overtly or covertly promoting goods and services in their Instagram posts" (Maares and Hanusch 2020a, 267). Other examples for heteronomous peripheral actors include entrepreneurial journalism outlets such as Axios, MustRead, National Observer, The Skimm or the Voice of San Diego, who are primarily interested in "develop[ing] new communicative registers that express the private subjectivity of a journalist and are deployed to bridge the distance between audience members' private life worlds, the general public and journalists" and therefore to gain economic prestige (Ruotsalainen, Hujanen, and Villi 2021, 3). In between we might find organizations like NGOs, who are producing independent news, but often are influenced by their political motives (Spyksma 2019).

A further important concern in studies of peripheral actors in journalism is the extent to which they aim to engage with their audiences, something we have termed *audience-centricity*. In line with the broader audience turn in journalism studies (Costera Meijer 2020), attention is given here to the participatory possibilities that emerge for peripheral actors. The rapid development of such technologies has allowed a vast range of peripheral formats to emerge, and the literature discusses actors as ranging from more traditional producer-audience relationships found in traditional journalism, to highly innovative approaches that prioritize audiences. An example of the former are media which can be understood as "information disseminators who engage in a top-down form of communication with their readers" (Cheng and Tandoc 2022, 13), while the latter includes formats such as blogs which "actively try to show that they prioritize their readers' desires" (Cheng and Tandoc 2022, 14). Another

approach to audience-centricity was taken by Baack, who introduced a figurational approach to the professional self-understanding of data journalists and civic technologists as either facilitators, meaning they "provide users with services that help them to take action themselves [e.g.] exploring how an issue affects their personal situation [or] offering decision-making tools engaging them with their government" (Baack 2018, 679). But, there were also gatekeepers, who curate publicly relevant information and "want to inform their audiences about important events, provide guidance for public debate and affect policy-making by amplifying public issues or misconduct" (Baack 2018, 680). One prominent example of facilitators would be a fact-checking organization in Africa, as they "make use of their technological capacities to bypass news media and address the public by creating tools that are built to empower citizens to inform themselves" (Cheruiyot and Ferrer-Conill 2018, 971).

A final component of the structural dimension relates to the *organization* of peripheral actors, i.e. the extent to which actors are organized, for example tightly and formally such as in traditional newsrooms, or loosely as networks or interest groups of freelancers or bloggers. Hence, at the one end of the spectrum, we find peripheral actors working mostly outside organizational structures and by themselves as individuals. This is, for example, the case with most bloggers, as blogs traditionally "are created and maintained by a single individual" (Cheng and Tandoc 2022, 12). At the same time, some blogs nowadays also demonstrate "bureaucratic characteristics" (Cheng and Tandoc 2022, 13) and can be managed by an external organization. This would shift those actors towards the other end of the spectrum, where we found highly organized groups of actors. These can often be found in formal organizations such as the traditional newsroom where actors such as *intermediaries of change* "facilitate the adoption of new, experimental practices within the constraints of the media organisations in which they operate" (Heft and Baack 2022, 2). But they may also exist across countries, such as the Environmental Data & Governance Initiative (EDGI), which is an international network of nearly 200 members from over 30 different academic institutions and 10 non-profit or grassroots organizations" (Russell and Tegelberg 2020, 328). Again, there are different degrees of organization which need to be considered as a dimension. Some YouTubers in Germany, for example, may be individually producing and distributing content, but, in the case of the German public broadcasters' network "funk," they operate within professional editorial structures, which at least to some extent impose "newsroom journalism's professional norms and routines on social media" (Lichtenstein, Herbers, and Bause 2021, 3)

We should emphasize here that the boundaries between our three dimensions are somewhat blurred in themselves and not always mutually exclusive. The notion of transformativity, for example, obviously has an orientation toward action and can exist on a micro- or meso-level. Peripheral actors who actively challenge traditional journalistic values, for example, would likely also score high on transformativity. Hence, the model we have developed here should not be seen as hierarchical, but rather, what is of interest are the different constellations in which we might identify peripheral actors.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our systematic review of the diverse literature on peripheral actors has aimed to identify what are the most prominent and relevant aspects that may help scholars going

forward in assessing peripheral actors. We did not here seek out to critique the definitions themselves or how they may have been applied, but rather what were the key characteristics that scholars have examined in relation to peripheral work. By drawing out the three dimensions and ten components presented here, we believe that future studies may find it a useful framework for identifying, classifying, and comparing peripheral actors. Such assessments may lead us to better assess degrees of peripherality, for example, and answer questions such as whether peripheral actors could or should be seen as meaningfully relevant to journalism, or merely digital actors with little relationship to journalism.

We would hence envisage application of our model in the form of a relational matrix, where cases can be assessed individually and comparatively. This may allow us to identify different constellations across the components of our dimensions depending on types of actors. For example, different peripheral actors such as Instagram influencers (Maares and Hanusch 2020a), NGOs (Spyksma 2019; Powers 2016) and data journalists (Baack 2018; Wright and Doyle 2019) could be classified using our components in relation to their distance from the core. Based on the literature, one might expect Instagram influencers to be quite distant from the core in terms of their articulated identity, which includes their values, journalistic experience and sense of belongingness – placing them towards the outer periphery. Data journalists, on the other hand, might be expected to be closer to the core on the identity dimension, given they more commonly espouse traditional journalistic values and have a sense of belonging to journalism. NGO workers may be somewhere in the middle. Additional mapping could be done for the remaining dimensions, but our aim here is to merely illustrate how the matrix could be applied – original, empirical research is needed for a more accurate placement. This mapping can therefore alert us, in a more nuanced way than previous core-periphery distinctions, to the different degrees of peripherality that exist among non-traditional journalistic actors. Hence, we hope to contribute here a theoretical model that can help scholars in identifying actors, classifying them along these dimensions, and comparing different actors both within and across national settings. After all, the vast majority of the studies we reviewed in our systematic literature tended to focus on specific cases of peripheral actors. By drawing connections between these studies, we hope our framework can allow scholars to take a more comprehensive and comparative approach in future studies, mapping fields of peripheral journalism, but also examining more closely or specifically some of the components we propose.

To do so, we realize the need to develop more concrete indicators or measures for each of our proposed components and dimensions. This could be done both qualitatively and, subsequently, quantitatively. Scholars could develop questions for interviews or survey items to measure where a particular actor might place themselves in terms of their journalistic values, to what extent they want to transform journalism, or whether they have journalistic experience. Similarly, through case studies one could assess actors' degree of organization, or measure their autonomy. In these ways, one could then more accurately place actors on the continuums of our dimensions. One example for such analyses that springs to mind would be the use of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), which, despite some attention (for example, Büchel et al. 2016), has still only rarely been employed in journalism studies.

Above all, however, we hope that because the dimensions developed here are also related to longstanding identities, practices and structures in traditional journalism, classifying peripheral actors along them would allow us to identify their degree of peripherality, such as whether and how close they may be to what Ryfe (2019) refers to journalism's warp threads, and also identify the range of woof threads that may exist in a journalistic culture. Important in all this, too, is that peripherality is not seen as a static phenomenon. Built as it is on relational aspects, the degree of peripherality, and actors' placement along various dimensions, is never static and can and will evolve. There are various examples of this in the literature (e.g. Konieczna 2018; Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2009) where actors' placement on our components would have changed over time. Indeed, as the core of journalism changes in response to peripheral actors' impact on the field, so does their relative location towards it. Hence, future studies of peripheral actors need to take account of the dynamic nature of the periphery, and our classifications must be approached with this in mind.

Of course, we are aware that there are some limitations to our approach. First, it is important to note that our sample of studies was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English, which would have excluded possibly relevant findings from studies published in other languages, as well as those published in books. We focused on journal articles for pragmatic reasons outlined earlier, and in a sense our study does not claim to be a census of all studies of peripheral actors, but rather we believe to have captured a sufficiently substantial amount of studies to provide a reasonably good overview of the field. However, we would call for scholars to apply our dimensional framework in different national settings, which may further complicate the typology developed here. Furthermore, our study only focused on scholarship that tended to be more explicit about peripheral actors in terminology, and thus we may have missed some studies that may have engaged with similar phenomena, but used different terminology. Nevertheless, we believe we have captured a sufficiently wide range of relevant studies that at least allowed us this qualitative exploration of the literature and the development of the dimensions we have proposed.

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