

Meaning-ful encounters: theorising knowledge production in community-centred pioneer journalism

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Extended Abstract

Journalism's eroding epistemic authority and the diminishing public trust in journalism as a knowledge-producing institution have become increasingly critical topics of scholarly debate in the field of Journalism Studies since the advent of the network society (Carlson, 2017; Castells, 2010; Ekström and Westlund, 2019). Some scholars have issued calls for journalism to reckon with its legacy and to rethink core strategic rituals and epistemic practices it has traditionally relied on to substantiate its truth-claims (Callison and Young, 2019). Community-centred journalism has been hailed as one of several solutions to journalism's deepening "epistemic crisis" (Steensen, 2019), motivating scholarly interest in how community-focused journalists around the world reimagine knowledge production in their networks of networks (Author; Callison and Young, 2019; Wenzel, 2019).

This paper presents a conceptual framework of meaning-ful encounters, based on a comparative case study of community-focused journalism startups/collectives in different parts of the world. The study contributes to our understanding of the relational production of knowledge in "pioneering" community-centred journalism networks, illuminating how community-centred journalists co-produce knowledge vis-à-vis their communities, audiences, and the public. Empirically grounded in metajournalistic discourse analysis of manifestos and "mission" webpages, and interviews with 30 journalism producers, from four journalism startups/collectives in Malaysia, Pakistan, Romania and the UK (New Naratif, The Current, DoR, and Bureau Local, respectively), as well as qualitative multimodal discourse analysis of seven stories produced by the above-mentioned organisations, this novel conceptual framework theorises "pioneering" community journalism's epistemic praxis along three dimensions - the production level, the story level, and the social level.

The study has applied methodological triangulation and followed an abductive approach to data analysis, tagging between the empirical data (three datasets across four case studies) and existing theories before reaching theoretical saturation (Tracy, 2018). The conceptual framework is rooted in new materialist ontologies (Barad, 2007; Delanda, 2016; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 2015), more specifically the concept of "encounters" (Fox and Alldred, 2017; Massumi, 2015) - which is the level at which power operates

in new materialist views of social and creative production. The theoretical construct is consistent with empirical observation found in the cross-case analysis and the theoretical saturation of 1st level codes and 2nd level concepts through the comparative analysis of metajournalistic, interview and story artefact data across the four case studies. Through using replication logic (Eisenhardt, 1989), the emergent concepts were refined and synthesised into the three-dimensional theoretical construct meaning-ful encounters (Table 1).

Meaning-ful encounters is defined as the capacity-producing, enactive or transformational relations and interactions at all stages of journalistic knowledge production that create the conditions of possibility for agency, action, and impact on a personal, interpersonal, and social level. In the proposed conceptualisation, meaning-ful does not only relate to having or producing meaning, or to being socially meaningful, but to being agency-producing, transformational and enactive - i.e., the encounters that are material and consequential to the knowledge production process, that make possible what community journalists can do. The meaning-ful encounters in community-focused knowledge production point to a productive collectivity, as actors, actants, communities and networks come together to co-produce knowledge - a relationship that goes beyond the duty to inform and extends to a circle of care that promises a nourishing, empowering and even transformational experience - for both communities and journalists themselves. Meaning-ful encounters goes beyond the production of meaning and knowledge in journalistic representations of reality, and extends to giving agency and voice, and empowering people and communities by telling "stories that matter" (Bureau Local slogan), thus pushing the boundaries of journalistic epistemology through shifting the focus to the social impact and value of journalism.

The study that this paper presents makes a theoretical and methodological contribution to the field. First, it proposes an enactive, relational framework that could be extrapolated theoretically to examine journalistic knowledge production in various contexts. Second, through the critical analysis of story designs, including their encoded agentic capacities vis-à-vis audiences and wider world, it connects methodologically meaning production and reception. The study also has some normative potential as it offers recommendations for a meaningful and relational industry practice, thus feeding into both academic and practice debates on journalism's changing epistemologies (Callison and Young, 2019). Beyond that, through its cross-border focus, it contributes to ongoing efforts to develop cross-national, global-comparative understandings of journalistic practice, ethics, and epistemologies (Berglez, 2008; Ward, 2008, 2018).