

ANDERSON, B. and HALABI, N. 2024. *Who's the "pioneer"? A critical examination of "pioneer journalism" from an indigenous perspective*. Presented at the 2024 International Association for Media and Communication Research conference (IAMCR 2024): weaving people together: communicative projects of decolonising, engaging and listening, 30 June - 4 July 2024, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Who's the "pioneer"? A critical examination of "pioneer journalism" from an indigenous perspective.

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Who's the 'pioneer'?

A critical examination of “pioneer journalism” from an indigenous perspective

Journalism scholarship has been preoccupied with discourses of *futures thinking* and reimagining *what journalism could be* (Zelizer, Boczkowski, & Anderson, 2022), leading to the emergence of new conceptual frameworks such as “pioneer journalism”, which seeks to explain “the re-figurations of [journalism’s] foundations” in a deeply mediatized ecosystem (Hepp & Loosen, 2021). Studies of “pioneers” - or transformation-focused collective and individual actors - in journalism (Anderson, 2021; Hepp & Loosen, 2021; Ruotsalainen et al., 2023) have examined how they reimagine journalism through their use of technology, their experimental practices, and novel ways of engaging audiences in their mission to “bring about media-related change” (Hepp, 2016, p. 927). The notion “pioneer journalism”, however, has been almost exclusively applied to future-focused journalism communities in the Global North.

Meanwhile, indigenous journalism has experienced a pronounced expansion across the world, and indigenous communities around the world have launched numerous journalistic organizations (Hanusch, 2013) that are steeped in the languages, epistemologies and cultural knowledge of their people. Increasingly, indigenous journalists and scholars have called for the critical examination of journalistic norms and practices to critique ways in which journalistic training reflects the White-centric and Western-settler-centric ideologies that originated the field (Sterritt, 2020, 2023). Callison and Young (2019), for example, call for a reckoning with established journalistic epistemic practices, which, they claim, are “rooted in sedimented power relations” (p. 202). This project attends to the critiques set forth by critically examining the concept of “pioneer journalism” in the context of indigenous journalists who experiment in their journalistic praxis. It problematizes and challenges the concept “pioneer journalism” from the perspective of indigenous journalists and against the background of the problematic colonialist legacy of the ‘pioneer’ in the history of settler-colonialism. It follows calls for 1) examining indigenous journalism cultures, epistemologies, and conceptions of innovation (Bhroin, Sand, & Rasmussen, 2021; Hanusch, 2014; Ross, 2023) and 2) broadening the conceptual lens in Journalism Studies beyond dominant Western norms, cultures and epistemologies of journalism (Rao & Wasserman, 2007; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014; Ward, 2008; Wasserman & de Beer, 2009).

The study will specifically look at indigenous journalists’ knowledge production practices – in terms of how they position themselves in relation to their audiences and the world, how they make editorial decisions, and the material products of their epistemic praxis. To achieve that, the co-investigators will apply a multi-method design, which includes interviews with 20-30 indigenous journalists working for digital journalism outlets in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, metajournalistic discourse analysis of the outlets’ manifestos and “About” webpages, and multimodal discourse analysis of several stories produced by the interviewed participants. The aim is to determine how indigenous epistemic praxes feed into wider debates about reimagining journalistic epistemologies and to question, evaluate and critique the application of the concept of “pioneer journalism” in the context, and from the perspective, of indigenous journalists.

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