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Together in the *encoding-assemblage*: A new materialist framework for examining knowledge production in journalism

Journalism's broken monopoly over the production of knowledge (Carlson, 2017; Ekström & Westlund, 2019) has led to an erosion of public trust in professional journalism and a general "epistemic crisis" of the present (Steensen, 2019). Pioneer journalism communities around the world have actively sought a redress by transforming journalism's relations with its audiences and the communities it serves, while reimagining journalistic epistemology writ large (Anderson, 2023). Pioneer journalists are the vanguard of journalistic change as they transform journalism and point to its *possible futures* (Hepp & Loosen, 2021). This paper presents a novel analytical framework applied in a comparative cross-national study of knowledge production in four pioneer journalism communities in Pakistan, Romania, Malaysia, and the UK.

Theoretically, the study is grounded in a new materialist re-reading of the encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1973), arguing that in the networked media ecosystem, the process of knowledge production has become more recursive and relational, where various actors and actants possess agency and "capacity to affect and be affected" (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 127-128). The process of encoding, or knowledge production, in pioneer journalism has been operationalised through the Deleuze-Guattarian concept of "assemblage" – a popular concept in the Digital Journalism literature in the last decade (De Maeyer & Le Cam, 2015; Domingo et al., 2015; Domingo & Wiard, 2016). Scholars have argued for seeing journalism as a series of "assemblages" of social and material artefacts, actors, actants and discourses (Anderson, 2016; Ryfe, 2021).

Thus, this paper will discuss a novel application of a relational, monist analytical framework to the study of knowledge-production in journalism, through the operationalising concept *encoding-assemblage*. Inspired by the Spinozo-Deleuzian ethological approach to data analysis (Fox & Alldred, 2021), the framework has been used to analyse the process of encoding in each of the pioneer journalism communities along four analytical categories:

- 1) the *relations* within the assemblage between various actors and actants (bodies, things, ideas).
- 2) the *affects* created in the encounters between actants and forces.
- 3) the *capacities* to affect and be affected produced by the affective flows within the *encoding-assemblage*.
- 4) the *micropolitics* of the encounters within the *encoding-assemblage*, in terms of the agentic capacities produced in the microprocess of encoding as they materialise in digital story artefacts, and the subsequent capacities to affect that these artefacts can produce in future events - i.e., in (the aftermath of) decoding.

A multi-method qualitative methodology has been applied, drawing from metajournalistic discourse analysis, interviews with 30 pioneer journalists, and multimodal discourse analysis of seven journalism stories, in a multiple case study design.

This relational analytical framework pays attention to the collective production of journalism by a variety of actants, human and nonhuman, physical or abstract (Domingo & Wiard, 2016), recognising and detailing the "plenum of agencies at play", and drawing the social, the material, and the discursive dimensions together (De Maeyer, 2016, p. 467). It can be applied to studies of knowledge production at either the encoding or decoding end, and epistemic practices in journalism more widely.