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WHO’S GOT THE POWER?
Journalists’ perceptions of changing influences over the news

Jesper Strömbäck and Michael Karlsson

Over the last decades, media environments have become radically transformed. Among the most significant changes is the rise of interactive media technologies, which raise new questions about how influence over media content has changed. At the same time, changes in media technologies and how they may change the influence over the news should not be understood in isolation from other changes in media environments. Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to investigate how much influence journalists ascribe to different sets of actors; how they perceive changes over time; and whether journalists working with online publishing differ in these respects from other journalists. Among other things, the study shows that the most influential group is perceived to be journalists, followed by the audience and media owners. The group that is perceived to have increased their influence the most is media owners. All investigated groups—except journalists—are perceived to have increased their influence at least somewhat. The results are discussed in the light of research on how interactive media technologies may reshape the influence over the news.

KEYWORDS interactive media; influence over the media; media commercialization; media content; online news

Introduction

Over the last decades, media environments across the world have become radically transformed. Media globalization and concentration has increased (Hachten and Scotton, 2007), as has the number of television channels (Prior, 2007; Rai and Cottle, 2010). New and interactive media technologies such as the Internet have developed, which have undermined the traditional business model of newspapers, increased the number of media competing for audience share; contributed to an ever-more fragmented media landscape (Doyle, 2001; Prior, 2007); and given audiences the potential to influence the news through, for example, citizen journalism, e-mail, and commenting on news stories at the media’s websites (Atton, 2009; Jenkins, 2006).

Traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio not only face fiercer competition for audience and revenue shares than ever, they also face more pressure from the bottom line than ever (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 2009). Some newspapers have closed down, and others have downsized their staffs (Jones, 2009). At the same time, political organizations, interest groups, corporations and other source organizations have increased their efforts at news management (Davis, 2002; Kumar, 2007), putting leaner news organizations under increased pressure to accept their news subsidies (Gandy, 1982).

All this raises many questions, among them how the influence over media content has changed. This is an important question, not least since evidence clearly shows that the media may have profound effects on people’s knowledge and perceptions of the world.
around them (Preiss et al., 2007; Shah et al., 2009). If news media are a source of power and influence in society, then the question of who has influence over the media—and changes in that respect—is important for journalism as both theory and practice.

From a democratic as well as theoretical perspective, it is also important to investigate whether the rise of new, interactive media technologies have empowered ordinary audience members and increased their influence over the media. Many have claimed so (Chung, 2007; Gillmor, 2004; Jenkins, 2006; Muthukumaraswamy, 2010), but systematic evidence is still rather scarce.

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is threefold. First, to investigate how much influence over media content journalists ascribe to different sets of actors; second, to investigate how journalists perceive changes in the influence over media content that different sets of actors have; and third, to investigate whether there are differences across journalists working with online news publishing and journalists working in traditional media formats. To investigate these issues, the study will make use of a representative survey of Swedish journalists, focusing on the influence of journalists themselves, media owners, politicians, the audience, interest organizations, and advertisers. Hence, the study focuses on journalists’ perceptions of different groups’ influences over media content, not their actual influences. This distinction is important to keep in mind. At the same time, we believe that these perceptions are important in themselves, and that there is no other group in a better position to assess the influence different groups have over media content. In these respects, we believe journalists’ perceptions of influence over media content should be taken seriously and as—at least roughly—valid indicators of actual influence.

**Shaping Media Content**

News is never produced in a vacuum. It is produced by journalists within media organizations with complex relationships and interactions with different sets of actors, both internal and external (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). For political or economic reasons, and because of the media’s influence in public opinion formation processes, many of these sets of actors intentionally strive to influence the news, while others may do so unintentionally. Among the most important groups with potential to influence the news are journalists, media owners, politicians, interest groups, advertisers, and the audience (Bennett, 2011; McManus, 1994; Schudson, 2003; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Journalists and editors are at the core of the news production processes, and obviously have an influence over media content. Media owners decide budgets, set editorial guidelines and policies, and appoint editors and staff, and thus influence the news production processes albeit not necessarily individual news stories. Politicians and interest groups both make consistent efforts to influence and manage the news, through various news management and agenda-building strategies and tactics (Franklin, 2004; Lieber and Golan, 2011; Tedesco, 2011; Zoch and Molleda, 2006). Advertisers may threaten to pull their ads if they do not like particular stories, but the more common form of influence may be their demands for greater audiences in segments they find particularly attractive (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 2009). The audience, last but not least, is the key group for all media companies. Success in the battle for audience attention is a prerequisite for success.
in all other respects; in informing people, shaping public opinion, garnering advertising revenue, attracting investments, and recruiting talented people.

Of these groups, the audience is traditionally considered to be the perhaps least influential group. In the media economics literature, investors and advertisers are most commonly held to be the most influential groups. A good example of this view is McManus (1994, p. 197), who writes: “rational market journalism must serve the market for investors, advertisers, and powerful sources before—and often at the expense of—the public market for readers and viewers. To think of it as truly reader or viewer driven is naïve”. In the journalism and political communication literature, the focus is usually on the relationship with sources, and although research results and interpretations of them diverge, many would agree with Bennett’s indexing hypothesis, stating that journalists, “from the boardroom to the beat, tend to ‘index’ the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic” (Bennett, 1990, p. 106). Gans (2003, p. 46) similarly writes that: “journalists respect their official sources, reporting what these sources tell them”. The implication is that sources, rather than viewers and readers, are those who influence the news.

The rise of new, interactive media technologies has, however, challenged the traditional perception of disempowered audiences. Not only do blogs and social media allow ordinary people greater opportunities to express themselves and pursue citizen journalism, mainstream media have increasingly adapted to the rise of different forms of interactivity through, for example, allowing users to gather information, forward news, comment on news, and re-tweet the news—thereby moving online news reporting towards participatory journalism (Deuze, 2003; Domingo et al., 2008; Karlsson, 2011; Nip, 2006). It has also become easier for users to contact journalists and to criticize journalists or journalism on blogs or other social media. In addition, through research into what news people choose to read or watch online, media companies can track what stories people find most interesting (MacGregor, 2007; Turow, 2005). Through their consumption patterns, audiences hence also influence media content, albeit indirectly. All this contributes to a situation where media and journalists receive much greater feedback from their audiences than ever before, and it is hard to imagine that this would not affect them at least to some extent. Some observers even foresee a future where users collaborate with and have substantive power in the production of news (Gillmor, 2004; Muthukumaraswamy, 2010).

This raises two questions. First, how much influence do journalists ascribe to journalists, editors, politicians, interest groups, advertisers, and the audience? Which group is considered most influential, and what is the rank-order among the groups? Second, do journalists believe that audience influence has increased over the last years?

Whatever the answer to the second question, potential changes in audience influence should not be seen in isolation from other transformations of media environments and how these may have re-shaped the influence over media content that different sets of actors have. While the rise of new, interactive media technologies may have increased audience influence (see below), other developments may have contributed to greater influence on the part of other groups as well, and these changes may be even greater than the changes directly related to the influence of audiences.
Changing Patterns of Influence

The transformations of media environments and the conditions under which news media operate suggest changing patterns of influence related not only to audiences, but also to journalists, media owners, politicians and interest groups, and advertisers. One of the most important trends during the last couple of decades is the increasing number of media channels, which has increased competition for audience and revenue share (Bennett, 2011; Hamilton, 2004; Prior, 2007). This increasing competition and commercialization, coupled with the fact that newspapers in particular have lost revenue due to declining readership and advertising lost to the Web, has forced media owners to take greater control of media operations. It has also led to cuts in staff size and leaner news organizations. Together this may have decreased journalists’ influence, but it may also have increased the influence of media owners (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 2009; Underwood, 1995). On the other hand, research suggests that journalism has become more interpretive and less descriptive across time, which may have increased the influence of journalists over media content (Barnhurst and Mutz, 1997; Patterson, 1993). With respect to advertisers, most research suggests that they have become more influential the more pressed economically media organizations have become, and the more media there are to choose between (Baker, 2002; Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994, 2009). Advances in audience measurements have also given them greater and more precise knowledge of audience metrics than before, which have made them more influential when negotiating ad rates with the media. From this perspective, advertisers’ influence over media content can be expected to have increased over the last decades.

With respect to politicians and interest groups, working to influence public opinion through influencing the media, there are contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, a greater number of media afford professional source organizations greater choices of media as targets for news management and agenda-building efforts. The same development has also encouraged professional source organizations to increase the resources devoted to news management and media relations, and over time, there is little doubt that such organizations devote more resources than before to attempts to shape media content (Kumar, 2007; Maltese, 1994; Negrine, 2008; Nord, 2007). Working against ever-leaner news departments, this may have increased the influence of professional source organizations over media content. On the other hand, in many countries journalism takes a less sacerdotal and a more pragmatic and critical approach to politics than before (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, 2001). Political parallelism has declined (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), and increasing commercialization has made the media less interested in covering politics when audience interest is perceived to be low. In essence, the media coverage of politics and society has, according to many accounts, become increasingly mediatized, that is, shaped by the media’s own needs, standards of newsworthiness, and logics (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011). This may have decreased the influence that politicians, interest groups, and other professional source organizations have over media content.

Returning to audiences’ influence, this may have increased not only because of the rise of new and interactive media technologies, but also because of increasing competition and increasing audience-orientation on the part of the media. Greater choices make it easier for audiences to exercise influence through “exit” rather than “voice” (Hirschman, 1970), which has created strong incentives for the media to monitor and try to meet the wants and demands of existing or targeted audiences.
Thus, the transformations of media environments over the last decades may have increased audiences’ influence over media content, but it may also have increased the influence of other groups such as advertisers and media owners. In some cases, there are contradictory tendencies—for example, with respect to the influence of journalists and professional source organizations—while in other cases, it appears plausible to expect increasing influence—for example, with respect to the influence of media owners. This leads to two questions. First, how do journalists perceive the influence that journalists, media owners, politicians, interest groups, advertisers and the audience have over editorial content at the media that journalists are working for. Second, which groups are perceived to have increased and decreased, respectively, their influence during the last 10 years?

The one transformation that has attracted most speculations—and hope—is however related to the development of new, interactive media technologies and the greater opportunities this affords for audience influence. In the next section, we will review this literature in more detail, focusing on how new media technologies have changed the potential of audience participation and interactivity; what evidence there is that this potential has been realized; and what evidence there is that audience participation and interactivity has had an impact on the influence over media content.

New Media Technologies and Audiences’ Influences Over Media Content

Two of the main features of digital communication technologies, compared to analogue communication technologies, are that they allow for greater interactivity and input from audiences, and that they allow media companies to track what news or other features audiences click on. Both features suggest a tangible impact on the control of communication both as a process and a product, and suggest that user participation and influence can be direct as well as indirect.

A large body of research has focused on how users directly and actively take part in the news production process. Early research reported that such practices were nonexistent, but more recent research suggests that users are increasingly encouraged to, and do take part, in news-making processes (Domingo et al., 2008; Karlsson, 2011; Massey and Levy, 1999; Riley et al., 1998; Schultz, 1999). Examples of user participation and “media work” that users now execute include commenting on news stories, sending in pictures, participating in polls, and sharing news stories through various social media. However, research also suggests that most user participation is restricted either to the more peripheral processes of journalism—thus excluding the selection and processing of news stories—or to soft news stories (Domingo et al., 2008; Örnebring, 2008; Pantti and Bakker, 2009), although there is some evidence that users, over time, perform more and more tasks previously reserved for journalists (Karlsson, 2011).

Digital communication technologies in addition allow media companies to track what news stories, ads or other features users click on while on their websites. This creates a scenario where news sites have the technological capacity to track all user clicks in real time (Gynnild, 2008; MacGregor, 2007; Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009). While this may increase the media’s control over audience behavior, it also means that the media have greater knowledge than before about what audiences are interested in. This may shift the logic of news production from being driven by internal logics and standards of newsworthiness (Gieber, 1999; Schlesinger, 1987), to being driven more by audience
preferences. In essence, online publishing gives news media unprecedented knowledge about users’ preferences and, as a consequence, unprecedented opportunities to instantly feed the audience what they, apparently, want rather than guessing or knowing what they liked last month (Beam, 1995; Philips et al., 2010; Turow, 2005). Thus, while only a minority of users may be actively attempting to influence and participate in news production processes (Bergström, 2008; Chung and Yoo, 2008), all users of online news media may be indirectly involved through their choice of online news stories. Overall this suggests that users, directly and indirectly, potentially have increased their influence in shaping news.

The journalists that are most likely to have direct experience of direct and indirect user participation are journalists working with online journalism. Investigating whether journalists working in online journalism have different perceptions concerning which sets of actors have influence over editorial content than journalists working in traditional formats may thus allow inferences about the direction of current developments.

Research Questions, Methodology and Data

Against this background, this research is guided by three research questions. First, how much influence over editorial content do journalists ascribe to journalists themselves, media owners, politicians, interest groups, advertisers and the audience? Second, how do journalists perceive changes in the influence of these groups over media content during the last 10 years? Third, are there any differences between journalists working with online news publishing and journalists working in traditional media formats in these respects?

To investigate these questions, this study draws upon a national mail survey among journalists in Sweden. In this context, Sweden is an interesting case to study, as 90 percent have access to the Internet in their homes (Nordicom-Sverige, 2010) and 34 percent read newspapers online at least three times a week (Sternvik, 2009). In terms of Internet use, both in general and with respect to news consumption, Sweden is thus at the forefront.

The sample was generated in collaboration with the Swedish Union of Journalists, organizing about 85 percent of Swedish journalists. From the member rolls of the union, a sample of 1200 journalists was randomly drawn. Retired journalists, still members of the union, were identified and excluded from the sample. Excluding respondents who had left the profession or could not participate due to illness resulted in a net sample of 1187 journalists.

The survey went into the field on October 5, 2009, and fieldwork continued until December 31, 2009. Within this period, two reminders were sent out. Altogether 632 valid questionnaires were returned, resulting in a net response rate of 53 percent.

In terms of gender, 50 percent of respondents are male and 50 percent female; 15 percent are or have at least one parent born in another country, while 85 percent are born in Sweden with Swedish parents. The vast majority has some variant of higher education: 79 percent has some kind of university education, mostly in journalism (47 percent) or other media-related programs (6 percent). The mean number of years working as a journalist is 17 (SD = 11), while the median number of years is 15. In terms of online publishing, respondents were asked: “How often do you work with online publishing?” Results show that 27 percent work with online publishing on a daily basis; 19 percent several times a week; 29 percent more seldom than several times a week; and that 24 percent never work with online
publishing. Thus, approximately half the sample (46 percent) works with online publishing at least several times a week.

In the next section, the results are presented. In these analyses, journalists that are currently unemployed or free-lancers are excluded, leaving us with a sample of 492 journalists.

**Results**

The first research question deals with how much influence journalists perceive that different sets of actors—and more specifically journalists themselves, media owners, politicians, interest groups, advertisers and the audience—have over editorial content. To investigate this, respondents were asked: “When it comes to the media company where you work, how would you evaluate how much influence the following groups have over editorial content?” The response alternatives ranged from 1 (No influence) to 5 (Great influence).

The results show that the group perceived to have the greatest influence are journalists (mean = 4.27, SD = 0.83), followed by the audience (mean = 3.17, SD = 0.92), media owners (mean = 2.81, SD = 1.18), interest groups (mean = 2.36, SD = 0.94), advertisers (mean = 2.12, SD = 1.18) and, lastly, politicians (mean = 2.11, SD = 0.98). Thus, while much of the literature on different groups influencing journalism focuses on politicians and official sources (Bennett, 1990, 2011; Gans, 1980; Shehata, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2011), these results suggest that politicians—according to journalists—have less influence than journalists themselves as well as the audience, media owners, interest groups and advertisers.

Turning to the third research question and whether there are any differences depending on how often journalists work with online publishing, we first investigated whether there are any differences between journalists working with online publishing at least several times a week, and those working more seldom or never with online publishing. Here the results show no significant differences. Distinguishing between journalists working with online publishing on a daily basis and other journalists, an independent samples t-test (t = 2.06, p = 0.040, df = 473) indicates that journalists working with online publishing on a daily basis perceive media owners to be slightly less influential (mean = 2.64, SD = 1.15) than journalists working with online publishing less often (mean = 2.89, SD = 1.20). This is, however, the only significant difference. There are consequently no significant differences depending on how often journalists work with online publishing in terms of how they perceive the influence of the audience. This holds true also when distinguishing between those working daily with online publishing (mean = 3.28, SD = 0.92) and other journalists (mean = 3.11, SD = 0.92) (t = 1.88, p = 0.060, df = 474), although it comes close to significance.

The second research question asked how journalists perceive changes in the influence of journalists, media owners, politicians, the audience, interest groups and advertisers. To investigate this, respondents were asked: “If you think about the development within Swedish media during the last 10 years, how do you evaluate the development of the following groups’ influence over the overall media supply?” The response alternatives ranged from 1 (Much less influence) over the 3 (No change) to 5 (Much greater influence).

The results show that journalists perceive that all groups—with one albeit important exception—have increased their influence. The one exception is related to the influence of journalists (mean = 2.61, SD = 1.01), where 56 percent state that journalists now have
somewhat or much less influence. The group that is perceived to have increased their influence the most are media owners (mean = 3.98, SD = 0.81), followed by the audience (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.91), advertisers (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.83), interest groups (mean = 3.30, SD = 0.80) and politicians (mean = 3.16, SD = 0.73). Unfortunately, the questions about current influence and changes over the last 10 years are not completely corresponding, as the former asks about the influence over editorial content at the media company where respondents are working, while the latter asks about changes in the influence over the overall media supply. Nevertheless, the responses suggest an interesting imbalance. While journalists are perceived to be the group with the greatest influence over editorial content, it is also the only group whose influence is perceived to have decreased during the last 10 years. The audience, on the other hand, is perceived of as the second most influential group (of the ones asked about), and they are also perceived to have increased their influence. Media owners are perceived as less influential than journalists as well as the audience, but their influence is perceived to have increased substantively over time. According to fully 75 percent of the journalists, the influence of media owners has increased over the last 10 years. Politicians, on the other hand, are not perceived of as very influential, and their influence is perceived to have increased only slightly. A majority (58 percent) state that the influence of politicians has not changed at all, more than for interest groups (48 percent), advertisers (34 percent), the audience (26 percent), journalists (21 percent), and media owners (21 percent).

Turning again to the third research question, are there any differences depending on how often journalists work with online publishing? Comparing those who work with online publishing at least several times a week with those who do it less often shows one significant difference ($t = -2.67, p = 0.008, df = 468$): those who work with online publishing at least several times a week are less likely to think that advertisers have increased their influence (mean = 3.67, SD = 0.82) than those who work with online publishing less often (mean = 3.88, SD = 0.82). The other differences are insignificant. Comparing those who work with online publishing daily with the others, reveals no significant differences in perceptions of how the influence of different groups have changed over the last 10 years. In other words, how often journalists work with online publishing does not appear to have an impact on perceptions of changes in the influence that journalists, media owners, politicians, the audience, interest organizations or advertisers have over the overall media supply.

Additional Analyses

To further probe possible antecedents of perceptions of the different groups’ influence, we investigated whether it matters if journalists are working for newspapers or other types of media such as television. The only significant effect appeared for the influence of advertisers ($t = 5.329, p = 0.000, df = 452$), with those working for newspapers perceiving advertisers to have more influence (mean = 2.39, SD = 1.12) than those working for other media (mean = 1.82, SD = 1.17). In terms of perceptions regarding changes over time, the only significant effect again appears for the influence of advertisers ($t = -3.077, p = 0.002, df = 452$), but here those working for media other than newspapers perceive a greater increase in the influence of advertisers (mean = 3.89, SD = 0.82) than those working for newspapers (mean = 3.65, SD = 0.82).
Finally, we also probed whether those who work as online editors have different perceptions of the different groups’ influence than those holding other positions, such as reporters and photographers. The group working as online editors is very small (N = 27), however, and there are no significant differences with respect to perceptions of the different groups’ influence over editorial content where respondents are working. With respect to perceptions of changes over time, online editors are, however, significantly (t = 2.382, p = 0.018, df = 471) more likely to think that audience influence has increased (mean = 4.18, SD = 0.83) compared with other journalists (mean = 3.76, SD = 0.91).

Conclusions

How much influence over editorial content or the overall media supply do different groups of actors have, and what changes over time can be discerned? Recognizing that perceptions are not necessarily accurate, the group that is in the best position to experience how much influence different groups have over media content and supply is arguably journalists. In their daily work, they interact with audience members, politicians, interest groups, and although they may not interact directly as often with media owners and advertisers, the influence from these groups are channeled by advertising departments and managers. Hence, we believe journalists’ perceptions of influence over media content and supply should be taken seriously and as valid indicators of actual influence.

In the Swedish case, this study has shown that the groups perceived to have the greatest influence over editorial content at the media where respondents are working are journalists themselves, followed by the audience, media owners, interest groups, advertisers and politicians. Looking at changes over time, journalists think that most groups have increased their influence over the overall media supply. The group that is perceived to have increased their influence the most is media owners, followed by the audience, advertisers, interest groups and politicians. The one and only group that is perceived to be less influential today than before are journalists. From a theoretical perspective, this suggests that increasing commercialism (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994, 2009) has increased the influence of media owners and advertisers at the expense of journalists.

Despite the rise of online media technologies, which allow for greater interactivity and both direct and indirect audience influence, the results with respect to audience influence are mixed. While journalists do perceive that audience influence has increased, the group of journalists that are closest to experiencing this influence by their work with online publishing do not perceive audience influence as greater than other journalists, although the difference comes close to significance. In terms of changes in audience influence over time, it does not appear to matter how often journalists work with online publishing. The only exception is related to those who work as online editors. This group does perceive audience influence to have increased more than other journalists, but it is at the same time a very small and exclusive group. If they, but not those who work with online publishing on a daily basis or several times a week, experience that audience influence has increased, any such increase should be interpreted as—thus far at least—being rather limited in scope.

The perhaps most important result, then, is not related to increasing audience influence, but rather to increasing influence of media owners and advertisers. Also
noteworthy, in particular in light of the extensive literature on the influence from politicians and other professional or official sources (Gans, 1980; Manning, 2001; Reich, 2009), is that these groups’ influence overall is considered as rather limited and not increasing particularly much over time. This does of course not imply that politicians and other sources do not matter—they do—but rather that they may matter less than they are often believed to do, and less than journalists themselves, the audience and media owners.

Discussion

Much theory and research about technology and user participation claims that interactivity, at least to some degree, will level the playing field when it comes to influencing the news. Looking at the results of this study, such claims receive only qualified support. On the one hand, journalists perceive audience influence as large and increasing. On the other hand, news is never formed in a void and when the perceived increase in audience influence is reviewed in a broader context, assessment of the results is altered. Audiences are perceived to have increased their influence, but this holds true also for media owners, advertisers, interests groups and politicians.

The extent to which these results can be generalized beyond Sweden is of course an open question that can only be answered through replications in other countries and comparative research. Nevertheless, the results accentuate the danger of having a too narrow research focus centering on the inherit logic of interactive technology, how this comes to life and alters the relationship between journalists and media audiences. Instead, this study highlights the importance of approaching the news production process broadly and of understanding the changing relationship between journalists and audiences within a wider context.

Rather than being driven by logic of participation, or professionalism, or stakeholders working through public relations, the development of the influence over the overall media supply appears to be driven increasingly by economic factors, as owners and to some extent advertisers are perceived to be those who have increased their influence the most.

In this context some of the results concerning user influence are intriguing. Online news editors, compared to other journalists, view the audience as having increased their influence more. This finding, although based on a small sample, suggests that it might not be the direct participation between journalists producing the news stories and users giving direct feedback about them that is the most important dimension of user participation. Since news editors are the ones monitoring and directing the overall news flow on the news sites, this might be an indication that it is the collective and indirect user activities that have the greatest impact, in turn implying that audience metrics, and in the prolongation economic factors, are the key drivers of changing patterns of influence. In addition, the general lack of significant differences in perceived audience influence between journalists working in a non-interactive offline or interactive online environment also suggest that audience influence may be more abstract than direct.

In sum, the influence over the news seems to be changing and reshaping, but it appears to be largely a myth that online journalism with its distinct characteristics is decisive in
this process. This study rather suggests that the shaping of news cannot be ascribed solely, or even most prominently, to interactive technology or audience influence but rather to an intricate web of forces where economic factors appear to be more in the center than other factors, and where journalistic professionalism is under intense pressure and may be moving towards the periphery. Furthermore, there are no substantial differences between off- and online journalists, suggesting that the journalistic field as a whole is going through a transition—a transition that depends less on the development of digital media per se and more on larger processes of commercialization. If anything, economic forces appear to be even stronger in the online environment where pressure from the bottom line trumps the, through technology, empowered audience. Hence, future studies investigating, or emphasizing, the connection between digital media and audience influence over news production need to carefully address the issues pertaining to the role of other agents of influence as well.

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that journalists are still considering themselves to be in the driver’s seat of news production. Then again, if the results can be extrapolated, future journalism might be less influenced by journalists and more by other actors in the complex web of relationships that ultimately shapes the news.

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