Journalistic legitimacy revisited: collapse or revival in the digital age?

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This is the final version submitted before publication.

To cite:

Tong, Jingrong (2017) "Journalistic legitimacy revisited: collapse or revival in the digital age?", in *Digital Journalism,* http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360785

Abstract:

Journalism in general – Anglo-American journalism in particular – has undergone a number of profound changes within and outside the newsroom. This paper explores whether these changes have weakened the basis of journalistic legitimacy, or have offered new grounds for journalistic legitimacy, and, in each case, to what extent. It is argued that a number of factors, including the financial difficulties of news media, the decentralisation of public communication as facilitated by the internet, the dual dilemmas faced by both objective and partisan journalism, and the belligerent public discourse about journalism are delegitimising journalism. However the relegitimatisation of journalism can be found in the efforts of news organisations – not only leading news organisations such as the Guardian *and* the New York Times *but also regional and local ones such as* the Trinity Mirror group *and* the Palm Beach Post *– in adopting and possessing digital and technological tools and skills, and in defending their journalism. The relegitimation of journalism reiterates and reinforces the historically shaped essence of journalism that reflects a continuity of legacy journalism; and this is an organisational and occupational response to, and boundary defence against, the trend of delegitimation of journalism in the digital era.*

KEWORDS: journalistic legitimacy; Anglo-American journalism; digital technologies; politics; market; boundary defence; professional norms; professional standards

Introduction

In recent years, journalism in general – Anglo-American journalism in particular – has undergone a number of profound changes within and outside the newsroom. The most prominent changes include digital media convergence, unsustainable media revenues, and recent political uncertainty. These changes interact with one another and have transformed not only the practice and professional norms of journalism, but also the entire environment in which journalism operates. The idea of what journalism is, should do, and can do has been challenged and (re)defined in the process.

This essay explores whether these changes in the context of journalism have weakened the basis of journalistic legitimacy or have offered new grounds for journalistic legitimacy, and, in each case, to what extent. It is argued that two contradictory but integrated trends have emerged in journalistic legitimacy: one of delegitimising journalism, and the other of relegitimising journalism. The former, which is more known to us, was first sparked by the failure of news media in securing sustainable revenues; as well as the decentralisation of public communication, as facilitated by the internet. This delegitimising trend was later fuelled by the dilemmas faced by both objective and partisan journalism, and the belligerent public discourse initiated by the recent political antagonism toward journalism, as exemplified in Trump declaring journalism the enemy. This trend, however, has appeared alongside the efforts of news organisations – not only leading news organisations such as the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* but also regional and local ones such as the *Trinity Mirror* group and the *Palm Beach Post* – in adopting and possessing digital and technological tools and skills, and in defending their journalism by connecting new tools with old journalistic values. Such adoption and acquisition of technologies can help strengthen the basis of journalistic legitimacy – especially in stressing journalism's ability and authority to speedily provide valid knowledge of reality, and ensure it serves its democratic role, which is extremely important in a politically uncertain era. The relegitimation of journalism reiterates and reinforces the historically shaped essence of journalism that reflects a continuity of, rather than changes in, legacy journalism; and this is an organisational and occupational response to, and boundary defence against, the trend of delegitimation of journalism in the digital era. The juxtaposition and integration of the two trends takes place in a process where news organisations and journalists compete to define what journalism is, should do and can do.

Conceptualising journalistic legitimacy

Legitimacy is the source of justification for the acts of social groups and organisations, and with it they can make their acts acceptable to other members in a society (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975). No institution or organisation can survive without legitimacy (Boulding 1967). Without exception, journalistic legitimacy makes it acceptable to the public that journalism has the cultural authority in collecting, producing and disseminating credible information, and in defining reality, and (Garman 2005; Bishop 1999; Winch 1997; Ward 2004). The cultural authority of journalism in turn consolidates its legitimacy. Journalistic legitimacy however is a dynamic process rather than a fixed one; it needs to be maintained and sustained (Clayman 2002).

Maintaining journalistic legitimacy first requires the establishment of professional norms and the public's acceptance of these norms. Unlike other conventional

professions such as medicine and law, journalism does not have clear traits to distinguish it from other occupations. It thus depends on discursively constructing professional norms and ideals to maintain its boundaries and legitimacy (Zelizer 1990; Zelizer 1992; Fakazis 2006; Carlson 2016). Historically shaped key professional norms and ideals include commitments to objectivity, balance and fact-based reporting so as to provide 'valid knowledge of events in the world', and its role of serving democracy (Carlson 2016: 350). These professional norms plus the trust of readers in journalism's ability to fulfil these norms, grant journalism legitimacy and cultural authority (Evetts 2003; Zelizer 1990; Zelizer 1992; Fakazis 2006; Karlsson 2011; Kohring and Matthes 2007; Carlson 2016).

Journalism claims legitimacy also through journalistic practice that meets certain professional standards, for which professional norms are the foundation (Skovsgaard and Bro 2011). By so doing, it wins the trust of the public and the authority so that it can gain independence from state control. Professions that practice according to their professional standards are trusted to regulate themselves. The trust in professions to regulate themselves is one source of power, as demonstrated in the discussions of Bayles in the context of North America (Bayles 1986). Journalism has to prove it has the ability to self-regulate by sticking to professional standards and thus gain the right of self-regulation (Schudson and Anderson 2009). This makes journalistic codes of ethics and an image of ethical journalism extremely important for the maintenance of journalistic legitimacy. To achieve this, news organisations and journalists need to work jointly to improve journalistic ethics and ensure the competency of their peers.

The market plays a complicated role in maintaining journalistic legitimacy. On the one hand, the occupation of journalism should be kept out of the influence of market forces in order to ensure its independence and ethical practice. Friedson (2001: 36–60) argues that professions control work through a combination of logics of profession, bureaucracy and the market, which sees the power of controlling professional work as being controlled respectively by the professionals, 'rational-legal authority' and consumers. Tensions between these three logics make it important to distinguish an occupationally controlled division of labour from those controlled by other logics. In journalism, journalism practitioners should be aware of the impact of commercialism on their practice; and it is crucial that advertising operation should be clearly separated from editorial operation so that editorial independence can be reserved and protected from the markets.

On the other hand, however, being successful or even monopolistic in commercial and job markets offers some important grounds for the professional status of a profession (Dooley 1997; Freidson 1972; Freidson 1994; Klegon 1978; Larson 1977; Macdonald 1995; Johnson 1972). A profession should have "the ability to close and control a market" and have "the occupational control of work" (Larson 1977; Evetts 1999: 120; Freidson 1994) so that they can advance their occupational self-interests, for example in salary (Evetts 2006). Professionals can also use market imperatives to resist state control in order to achieve and sustain their independence (Abel 1989). In simple terms, a strong material basis is an essential prerequisite for the professional prestige, status and independence of a profession. As a commodity and a business operating in the marketplace after all, journalism would find it impossible to fulfil its professional norms and stick to professional standards if it cannot survive. Journalism needs market success to maintain its legitimacy, as market failure would

leave journalism even more vulnerable to the interference of the state or market forces. However, this does not mean market success can guarantee high levels of journalistic legitimacy. A privileged status of journalism in the market therefore can only help maintain its legitimacy if its professional standards and norms can be sustained.

The collapsing of journalistic legitimacy

Journalistic legitimacy therefore originates from the ability of journalism to provide credible and valid knowledge of reality, serve democracy, and to practice ethically. This ability however is questioned in the emerging environment, resulting from the joint influences of digital media technologies and changes in social dynamics. The advance in digital media technologies is responsible directly for journalism losing the monopoly on information-producing and disseminating, and indirectly for the failure of news media in the marketplace. The current political uncertainty raises new expectations for the role of journalism in democracy but casts some doubts over the ethical practice and professional principles of journalists. As a consequence, overall a big question mark is put over whether journalism can still offer quality and reliable news in the digital era.

Accompanying the proliferation of digital media technologies, a breakdown in the monopoly and authority of journalism in disseminating and defining reality has been caused by non-professional journalists (Allen 2008; Blaagaard 2013; Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger 2007). The whole idea of journalism – from who produces news, to what news is, to how news is disseminated – has been rendered almost upside down by the augmented ability of non-professionals to produce and disseminate information. Amateur reporters publish stories on blogs, social media platforms, and even contribute their material to professional news reports (Nicey 2016). In most emergence events journalists cannot be the first to disseminate information about these events. This has shattered the assumption widely held in the past that it should be journalists who (first) inform the public of the happenings of the world and act as watchdogs for democracy. In addition, the content generated by ordinary internet users – and thereafter their participation in the news production process – can offer multiple versions of stories and thus challenge the truth claims of journalists that are central to the epistemic authority of journalists (Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger 2007; Hermida and Thurman 2007; Tong 2015).

However, the impact of the decentralisation of public communication on journalistic legitimacy is relatively moderate, as actually this is more about the breakdown of monopoly than the collapse of authority in information dissemination. This is because despite its prevalence, user-generated content (UGC) only offers different versions of a story rather than reliable stories. Although having lost their monopoly in communication, journalists can still retain authority if they provide credible and valid news. Especially, given the increasing proliferation of fake news on the internet, fact verification and the commitment to accuracy offers journalism an opportunity to rebuild its legitimacy and authority. The real challenges to journalistic legitimacy come from market failure, political uncertainty and hostility, and are associated ethical issues.

News media have failed to be profitable in the marketplace; first suffering from withering revenues and later encountering difficulty in turning their passions for digital media technologies into profits. The failure in the market leads to two

problems in relation to journalistic legitimacy. The first is that journalism and journalists are losing autonomy or power to defend their self-interests. The second is that quality journalism such as investigative journalism and factual reporting is under threat.

From the start of the new century, evidence from different parts of the globe suggests that the coming of the digital era seems to have deepened a decade-long financial crisis in journalism. The profound financial crisis worsened from 2008 when advertising migrated significantly to the Web (Curran 2010). Most recently, Pew's *State of the News Media 2017* report says the US newspaper sector continued to decline in 2016 (with advertising revenue declining 10% from 2015, which beat the 8% fall in 2016).[1] The dominant discourse about the future of journalism in Anglo-American societies is pessimistic; for example, McChesney exclaimed that "journalism is dead" (McChesney 2016). Such a discourse of crisis about journalism contributes to a loss in the occupational prestige of journalism and a failure in maintaining the self-interests of the occupation of journalism.

News organisations responded to their financial loss partly by cutting paid jobs and even closing down news outlets. Scholars (such as Curran 2010; Franklin 2014, 2012) reported misery and even apocalyptic scenarios for the current situation and future of Anglo-American journalism. Words such as "haemorrhaging" and "bleeding" are used to describe the number of paid job cuts and closures of news outlets due to their loss in media markets. Another major corporate response is the declining support for investigative journalism, which represents the highest professional ideals of journalism, and the reduction in investigation investment and newsroom budgets (as discussed in de Burgh 2008), which weakens the public scrutiny power of journalism and thus further impairs the legitimacy of journalism.

Advertising market turning its back on journalism is largely because in the digital age advertisers no longer need journalism as much as it did in the past. News media no longer serve as the major platforms where advertisers place advertisements. One prerequisite for news media to be profitable is that journalism should produce good reports that attract customers who wish to pay for journalism and whose presence advertisers would like to pay for (Quinn 2004); and the other precondition is that news media are the primary media where advertisers can get their information out and where advertisers' target consumers can receive that information. Where any one of these preconditions is missing, journalism would lose its markets.

The application of digital media technologies results in a two-way communication environment where information can get out without mediation by journalism, and this has eroded the boundaries between journalism and other public communication (Deuze 2008). On the one hand, advertisers can use online platforms and tools to disseminate information as they wish and thus reduce their reliance on news outlets for placing advertisements. On the other hand, the fact that news consumers may turn to the internet for free information may also reduce the incentives for advertisers to pay for advertising space. Excessive information on the internet can be deceptive in suggesting that the readers do not need to pay for information. Whilst some readers still cherish professional news reports, others will happily favour free information. Other important factors may be declining readership, as younger generations are abandoning newspapers (Wadbring and Bergström 2015), and there is audience fragmentation and generational changes in the tastes of readers that are

a result of the widespread use of digital media devices such as the iPad, iPhone and other tablets. In this sense, the adoption of digital technologies in the overall media environment is indirectly responsible for the bad times journalism is experiencing financially.

That news organisations actively adopt new digital technologies[2] is seen as being driven by profit (Quinn 2004). Most news organisations have expected being digital and going online – which represents a new business model – to help them revive markets. Except for a few such as the free Mirror app by the *Trinity Mirror* group, most news organisations' apps require certain access fees. The *Independent*'s online-only newspaper app, for example, requires subscribers to pay GDP12.99 per month, while the *Guardian* charges GDP11.99 per month for its iPad version of the newspaper. There has been some positive evidence for the new business models. In 2015, for example, advertisers in the *Times* agreed to pay the same rate for advertising in the paper's tablet version as they do in print,[3] which represented a victory for the newspaper.

However, the online strategies of traditional news organisations usually do not work well. Although there are some positive signs, such as the *Times* newspaper group having seen a rise of profits in 2015,[4] being digital and going online does not guarantee the survival of news organisations. For example, the *Guardian* and the *Independent* are still not profitable from their digital products. The *New York Times* continued to experience a loss of advertising revenue in 2016 although its digital subscriptions promisingly increased.[5] It is not only that online revenues increase slowly, but also that online business models such as paywalls are unsuccessful, which prevents these news organisations from increasing profitability (Myllylahti 2014).

New business models can also cause some difficulty for the old journalistic principles and values that are important for winning the trust of readers. As crowd-funding becomes a new business model, for example, it may trigger a clash between journalistic norms of objectivity and journalists' considerations toward the interests of their funders (Hunter 2015). What would worsen the situation is the challenges posed to the journalistic authority of online journalism by the emergence of native advertising on news websites, which blurs the distinction between advertising and media content, as demonstrated in the case of the Atlantic website (Carlson 2015).

Journalistic legitimacy is also impaired by the ethical problem faced by journalism. The ethical problem primarily originates from scepticism about journalism's capacity for self-regulation. Such scepticism is prominently reflected in the Leveson Inquiry and its aftermath which was triggered by a series of journalistic scandals – in particular phone hacking by the *News of the World*, where surveillance technologies were used to access private communications (Partridge 2015). Murdoch's newspapers have repeatedly been implicated in phone-hacking scandals, such as the 2011 scandal that led to the sudden closure of the *News of the World.* The phone-hacking scandals of the *News of the World* are a result of the ambition of the Murdoch empire in the digital era, and brought significant consequences for the empire (Kellner 2012). They potentially damage the overall general legitimacy of journalism in the Anglo-American news world, despite various news organisations trying to distinguish themselves from the *News of the World*, to reiterate journalistic

norms, and to maintain boundaries of journalism (Eldridge 2013; Carlson and Berkowitz 2014; Moloney, Jackson, and McQueen 2013).

Following these scandals were repeated debates about the importance of promoting high journalistic ethical standards, and the struggle between the press wanting to maintain autonomy and the authorities that want to increase regulatory control over the press. In the UK context, the ethics of the press have been put under scrutiny since the phone-hacking scandals and the subsequent Leveson Inquiry in 2012. Despite the press advocating for press freedom and setting up their own regulator, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) in 2014, there have been calls for greater press regulation (Dupéré 2015); and the tightening of control over the press through regulations and legislation looks inevitable as exemplified in the approval of IMPRESS by the Press Recognition Panel (PRP) in October 2016. Against such discourses, journalism struggles to maintain its self-regulatory power. An implication of this difficulty is that journalism is no longer trusted to practice good, ethically sound journalism without external regulatory control, let alone act as the custodian of consciousness, to use Ettema and Glasser's term (Ettema and Glasser 1998). In addition, in the US context, politicians such as Trump have publicly declared media and journalism his enemy. Such political antagonism towards journalism may further promote a hostile public discourse about journalism.

This problem is also associated with the ability of journalism to fulfil its democratic role. It is tricky for journalism to serve democracy within the current social context, characterised by political uncertainty, for two reasons. First, news media has long been accused of shifting attention away from political parties and policies to the personalities of political candidates, and therefore failing to properly inform the electorate (Aelst, Sheafer, and Stanyer 2011). Scholars blame journalism for failing to reveal the flaws in politics. Moreover, in the current digital environment, journalism is not the sole medium with a role to play in democracy. The emergence of citizen journalism on alternative online media, which may serve democracy well, as well as politicians directly talking to the public through social media without the mediation of journalism, reduces the importance of journalism in democracy. Citizen journalism, helping to complement the democratic role of professional journalism (Dahlgren 2016) brings into question whether professional journalism is the only "fourth estate" that is expected to shoulder democratic responsibilities.

Second, both partisan and objective journalism have defects and are facing dilemmas associated with current trends in politics. In the current circumstances, characterised by the Brexit vote and Trump winning the US presidential election, politics is extremely polarised. For partisan print journalism practised in the UK context, there are clear opposites of elites and the populace, and between "Remainers" and "Brexiters". How can the public who support Brexit trust journalism that advocates Remain? Will the legitimacy of journalism that promoted Remain still stand after they have been proved to oppose that part of the electorate that voted for Brexit?

Likewise, the situation does not look good for objective journalism practised in the US context. The principle of objectivity requires objective journalism to detach opinions from facts. However, the irregularity of Trump has led to a conflict between the coverage of Trump and the principle of objectivity in journalism, where there is an

obvious hostility between Trump and journalism.[6] Shall journalists still report neutrally in the face of Trump's controversial policies such as the travel bans that seem to run counter to democracy? The *New York Times* has been at the centre of the debate in light of it abandoning objectivity and strongly criticising Trump. Elite news media such as the *New York Times* overtly and strongly opposed Trump in the run-up to the US presidential election in 2016. What happens to journalistic legitimacy after Trump's victory, which suggested a huge group of people disagreed with the news media? The next question is what would happen to the legitimacy of journalism in the US if journalism has become the enemy of President Trump?

In these two cases, it is not only the basic journalistic principle that is tested but also the role of journalism: whether journalism should be the elite opinion leader whose views may run counter to those of the public, or it should be a neutral space where opinions are detached from facts?

Given the complexity of the circumstances discussed above, there has been a concern about the legitimacy of journalism. Splichal and Dahlgren, for example, report that trust in journalism among citizens has been dramatically reduced in many countries such as the United States and the United Kingdoms in the 21st century and there is a tendency towards the deprofessionalisation of journalism (Splichal and Dahlgren 2016). It is reported from both the United States (Lee 2010) and the UK (Schlesinger 2006; Gaber 2016) that the public has low trust in journalism and there is a lack of the credibility of news media and journalism. The occupation of journalism needs to renegotiate its grounds for legitimacy.

The revival of journalistic legitimacy? Rebranding journalism and defending boundaries

However, we cannot ignore the possibility that the dual dynamic of digital media technologies and societal change can also offer some new grounds for journalistic legitimacy. The efforts that some (both leading national and regional) news organisations and journalists are making to revive the legitimacy of journalism should not be overshined by the crisis discourse of journalism discussed above. In the face of pressures from the market, and issues with authority and ethics, news organisations and journalists are pushing back hard by turning to the basis of journalistic legitimacy for legitimacy rebuilding. They endeavour to reclaim journalistic legitimacy by rebranding the occupation of journalism in relation to what journalism is and can do, but also re-stressing what journalism *should* do. This rebranding process is far from straightforward but full of negotiations and debates about related ideas.

The rebranding process is facilitated by the adoption of digital media technologies and data by national, regional and local news organisations in the Anglo-American contexts, which have been enthusiastically adapting to the digital media environment. Their efforts and the according changes in news production and journalistic practices have redefined journalism as 24/7 multimedia journalism, celebrating the digital and data analytical skills of journalists, which augment their ability to verify facts, report on reality and serve democracy. Despite the uncertainty about profitability, being digital and adopting data-analytical skills has helped foster a new image for journalism (what journalism is): as an occupation that has acquired the *new* ability (what journalism can do) to produce and disseminate verified and valid information and the renovated potential of fulfilling its democratic role (what journalism should

do). In so doing, they are trying to reiterate their technology boosted ability to continue to be an authoritative valid knowledge provider which serves democracy.

This renewed ability to report on reality is first reflected in immediacy, which stresses their legitimate right to cover fast-changing reality. Immediacy has been used to transform and redeploy the cultural authority of journalism, as discussed in the case of living publishing of live events (Larson 2015). It has become a primary principle that online journalism should obey (Karlsson 2011; Deuze 2005; Mudhai 2011), and with immediacy journalism can claim it is able to offer fact-verified "non-stop" 24/7 real-time news with the up-to-date skills of journalists (Hall 2001). Together with its commitment to accuracy and fact-verification, journalism presents a new face to the world: although they may not be the first authors of history, they can be the first authoritative authors of history who supply speedily verified and valid fact-based news.

Immediacy, however, turns news to something ongoing and unfinished, which has two potential interrelated downsides for journalistic legitimacy. First, it can mean "that different provisory, incomplete and sometimes dubious news drafts are published" (Karlsson 2011: 279). That different facts and versions of truth may inevitably be offered by journalism in the process of news events evolving may harm journalistic authority as they may reduce the validity of news. Second, it may conflict with accuracy (Karlsson 2011; Lowrey 2006). Indeed especially on emergency events, journalists may have very little time to verify the facts to ensure the accuracy of their reports. Facing the conflict between immediacy and the validity and accuracy of news, however, news organisations such as the BBC would opt for the latter, as fact-verification and accuracy is still at the centre of journalistic ethos (Reiko 2015).

Despite these two negative consequences, news as ongoing process and unfinished product caused by immediacy is seen as prompting transparency, which restructures journalistic authority and legitimacy by argued by some scholars (such as Karlsson 2011). Over recent years, news media and journalists have started "exposing previously hidden journalistic processes" in pursuit of transparency in journalism, supposedly to increase the credibility of journalism (Karlsson 2011; Robinson 2011; Vos and Cra 2016; Allen 2008). Increasing transparency in news-gathering processes, such as allowing readers to ask questions and providing more information about sourcing, is believed to be an effective method to re-win the trust of the public in the credibility of journalism.[7] The *Palm Beach Post*, for example, is actively using Facebook to disseminate their data-driven investigative reports and the stories from the investigation team about how they made the investigation, which increases the transparency about their investigative reporting. Transparency that acts as an instrumental value however can damage the cultural authority of journalism (Allen 2008; Deuze 2005). More raw materials that might be multidimensional produce possibilities to reduce the readers' trust in journalistic text that usually focuses on one angle. The provision of raw materials also increases more challenges to journalistic verification of facts, included in these materials.

News organisations and journalism have turned to fact-verification for retaining authority and rebuilding legitimacy. In a time when fake news prevails, commitment to reality check would be most important for the credibility of any news organisation. Journalists have gradually shifted to take on the role as authoritative fact-verifiers, an extension of the traditional journalistic role of gatekeeper, and of journalists' elitist

scepticism about readers' ability to tell the true from the false. The new role of verifying the credibility of the non-journalistic material develops within a context in which user-generated content is popular, and within a framework of journalism struggling with ordinary internet users for discursive power.

The role of fact verification is particularly important against the backdrop of open data and big data. Open data and big data needs journalism and vice versa. This is partly because if journalists would not comb through the millions and millions of pieces of data, no one would and these datasets will sit there unexamined (Stoneman 2015). This is partly because the proliferation of data gives journalism enormous resources to fulfil its fact-verifying and democratic role.

The emergence of data(-driven) journalism furthers the claims of journalists to be mastering advanced technology and practising "'proper' journalism" (Hammond 2015). In the last few years, news outlets including leading ones such as the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, regional ones such as the *Trinity Mirror* group and the *Palm Beach Post* and (hyper)local news media such as *Urbs.London* have started practising data journalism. Simon Rogers of the *Guardian* used the idea that "facts are sacred" to describe the importance of data journalism. With its roots in computer-assisted reporting, data journalism stresses the necessity of using computer power for reporting (Bradshaw and Rohumaa 2011).

Data journalists greatly rely on data mining and digging stories out of large-scale datasets in areas such as finance, demography, census and geolocations. Along with the development of data journalism, the potential for interactivity on news websites expands every year, and coding and programming skills are needed in gathering, cleaning and analysing data. There is even the rise of the idea of the journo-coder, programmer-journalist, or even hacker-journalist, or journo-programmer (people use these alternative terms, the terminology is not decided) (Mair et al. 2013). Relevant training has been given, data journalism teams have been assembled, and in-newsroom developers have even been hired as an essential part of those teams. In spite of these changes, the essence of data journalism however remains the same: to provide verified and valid knowledge of the world that can serve democracy. By practising data-journalism, journalists and news organisations are able to connect new technologies and data to old and deeply rooted journalistic norms of providing fact-based and verified reports.

Data-driven investigative reports published in recent years, which revitalise journalism and meanwhile bring in controversial issues for journalism, have reiterated what journalists should do, and declared that democracy still needs journalism. Offshore leaks can involve huge databases, like, for example, the *Panama Papers*, which revealed the secrecy of "nearly 214,000 offshore entities created in 21 jurisdictions, from Nevada to Hong Kong and the British Virgin Islands".[8] Only with suitable data skills, can investigative journalists dig and mine databases on this scale and expose scandals in order to serve the public interest. The revelations of the unthinkable wrongdoings of regimes and powerful individuals by Snowdon and the Panama Papers suggests democracy still needs journalism and contributes to enhancing the image of journalism as the fourth estate or as the custodians of conscience. This gives good justification for the existence of journalism which is in the need of democracy. In addition, data journalism sometimes involves the participation of readers and crowd-sourced data or their ideas about how to

analyse data, as exemplified in the Counted crowd-sourcing project and the 2009 crowd-sourcing project on MPs' expenses in the *Guardian*. Such reader participation facilitated by adopting digital technology not only increase the public scrutiny ability of investigative journalism but also signals a high level of "transparency and openness", although this means journalists need to take a new role to assist discussion and verify information and raw materials provided by readers (Vehkoo 2013: 32) and although it suggests the rise of a new form of journalist-reader relationship where readers act as the co-guardians of democracy. The persistence in practising investigative journalism, which is the most prestigious journalism, contributes to maintaining or restoring the ethical image of journalism in the era where fake and entertaining news prevails and where commercial interests threaten quality journalism. Data journalism even gives news organisations a hope of finding a new business model that is linked back to the most original role of journalism: providing information, when journalism first appeared in human history. Gray and others put forward the concept "the business of information refinement" to describe this opportunity (Gray, Chambers, and Bounegru 2012), although to what extent this business model can be successful remains unclear at the moment.

However, overall there are challenges and dilemmas in relation to verifying facts not only for data journalism but also for daily reporting in the digital age. The active incorporation of UGC – especially material bearing witness to emergencies or disastrous events – in news reports however makes the credibility and verifiability of news less controllable than in the past. Difficulties have increased for journalists seeking to check the credibility of UGC such as videos, and, therefore, guarantee the credibility of news (Badran 2014). It is difficult for journalists to check the credibility of the websites to which their reports are linked (Deuze 1999) and to verify the credibility of data sources in data and computational journalism (Gray, Chambers, and Bounegru 2012; Bradshaw 2014). Even asking related organisations to provide metadata or data dictionaries is not an easy task at all, despite the Freedom of Information Acts on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, over recent years, especially since the Snowdon leak, intelligence materials have become important but it is indeed tricky for journalists who want to use these materials because they are often difficult to verify. This difficulty can present journalism with a dilemma: on the one hand, journalists may be unable to verify the credibility of the data, but if they choose not to publish the story because of that, they may miss a big story or fail in their democratic mission. But on the other hand, if journalists choose to publish the unverified material and increase transparency, they risk covering fake news and of losing their gatekeeper role and violating one of their basic journalistic principles and ethics: accuracy.

This dilemma is best shown in BuzzFeed and CNN's coverage of the Trump–Russia dossier in 2017, in which raw materials were published without proper verification by journalists. At the start of 2017, CNN broke the news that US intelligence chiefs had informed Obama and Trump that "Russian operatives claim to have compromising personal and financial information about Mr. Trump".[9] BuzzFeed even published the unverified full document of the "Russia dossier" on its website, which was hotly criticised by journalists and news media, including the *Guardian*, for violating basic journalistic ethics.[10] In the *New York Times*, Ben Smith, BuzzFeed editor-in-chief, defended his website by arguing the readers have a right to know and can be trusted to "reckon with a messy, sometimes uncertain reality".[11] In fact BuzzFeed publishing the raw material resulted not only from the willingness to

increase transparency, but also from the difficulty of verifying intelligence materials. In this case, the focus of the debate is related to the conflict between transparency and the key responsibility of journalists: fact verification in order to ensure the accuracy of the reports. This dispute can be seen as news organisations and journalism practised there compete to set and maintain the professional standards of journalism and to ensure their peers are working ethically so as to defend the boundaries and legitimacy of journalism.

News organisations and journalists grasp any chance to defend their journalistic boundaries and legitimacy through reiterating what journalism is, can and should do. An apt example of this is after the Brexit vote, on 29 June 2016, when Katharine Viner, editor-in-chief of *Guardian News & Media* sent an email statement to *Guardian* readers in which she wrote, "Whichever side of the Brexit debate you were on, we are entering a period of great political and economic uncertainty, and the *Guardian*'s role in producing fast, well-sourced, calm, accessible and intelligent journalism is more important than ever." She continued: "I want to make sure that the *Guardian*'s excellent journalists – from our political team and other reporters to Europe experts, opinion editors, commentators, leader writers, news editors, picture editors, subeditors, audience, video and visuals staff – along with our support and technology teams, continue to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, across the world, to provide the answers that people desperately need at this time of anxiety and confusion." This statement is triple-purposed: first is to define and re-stress what *Guardian* journalism is, should and can do; second is to mobilise *Guardian* readers to help to fund the journalism practised by the *Guardian*; and third is to convince readers that political stances about Brexit should not be used to judge the quality of journalism. This can be seen as a strategy by the *Guardian* to polish up the image of *Guardian* journalism, thereby helping to restore the legitimacy of its journalism. Similarly, a memo the *New York Times* executive editor Dean Baquet sent to staff in 2016 stated that: "In crucial ways, it will be much like The Times of the past – great writing, investigative reporting, scoops and beat coverage will be more valued than ever. No institution in American journalism is more committed to these ideals",[12] which reiterates the glorious past of the newspaper and its mission, ideals and commitment. Kevin Maguire, the editor of the *Daily Mail*, branded digital journalism as "the mother of all upheavals" and expressed his "unflinching belief in the essential value of journalism" (Glaze 2016). The *Guardian* declared its intention to tackle fake news and inaccurate reporting and re-stressed that "good journalism is a vital part of our democracy", refuting Donald Trump's accusations against journalism (Dugher 2017). In 2017, the *New York Times* launched "a new brand campaign" to highlight the significance of facts, strengthen its pursuit of truth and encourage the public to support independent journalism.[13] It introduces itself as "a global media organization dedicated to enhancing society by creating, collecting and distributing high-quality news and information … It is known globally for excellence in its journalism, and innovation in its print and digital storytelling and its business model." After Trump tweeted "the media 'is the enemy of the American people'", Michael Smerconish of CNN disagreed strongly and pointed to the democratic role of journalism: "The President is attacking one of our best checks on government, especially where Congress shows no interest in playing that role" and "this is actually a golden age of journalism" (King 2017).

The adoption of advanced digital technologies and data in tandem with news organisations endeavouring to redefine their journalism for the digital age reinforces

the position of news organisations and professional journalists as authoritative knowledge provider, by differentiating professional journalism from amateurs and by defending boundaries. The process however is not straightforward; and on some occasions where disputes and controversies exist, such as those surrounding immediacy, transparency and fact-verification, delegitimation and relegitimation is integrated. The importance of using digital technology by news organisations does not lie in the instrumental function of the technology: by ways in which journalism can make news products. What is more important is that the use of digital technology and the claims made by news organisations about their journalism has the potential to tell the world what journalism is, what journalists can and should do in the digital era, and of promoting a discourse of reinvented tech-savvy digital journalism with a mission to provide valid knowledge and to serve democracy. In other terms, journalists claim journalistic legitimacy through (making claims to) the mastering of digital technology and through reiterating professional norms and standards which are the basis of journalistic legitimacy.

Conclusion

Journalistic legitimacy is not static but flexible and needs to be maintained all the time. It can be constructed, deconstructed, challenged and transformed along with the changes in the context where journalism operates. The discussion in this essay echoes the main arguments of Carlson (2016) that meanings of journalism are developed in the competition between actors inside and outside of journalism for the definition of accepted journalistic practices. The juxtaposition and integration of the delegitimation and relegitimation trends discussed above exists within and beyond journalism. The former represents the challenges to journalistic legitimacy caused by the changes in technologies and social dynamics as well as in journalistic practice. The latter is the organisational and occupational response to such challenges with an attempt to relegitimate journalism and to defend the boundaries of journalism.

The new image of journalism being digital, tech- and data-savvy with democratic mission can contribute to repairing the authoritative and ethical storyteller image of journalism by telling the public what journalism is, should, and can do. Although there are some dilemmas surrounding fact-verification in the digital era, sticking to and re-stressing the mission of journalism to verify facts and to serve democracy can help to reassure the public about values in journalism and the importance of journalism for democracy. Meanwhile, the new image of technology-savvy journalism can convey to the public the technologically boosted ability of journalism to deliver valid knowledge of the world to the public and to serve the needs of democracy. In this sense, digital technology becomes a symbol of communication power. Although through rebranding journalism as technology- and data-savvy, the relegitimation of journalism actually relies on the reiteration of commitments to factual reporting and democratic role, which is the historically shaped basis of journalism. Therefore it is a continuity of, rather than changes in, legacy journalism.

It is however too early to conclude that the legitimacy of journalism has been rebuilt. We do not yet know whether and to what extent all the attempts to restore journalistic legitimacy will be successful, given the great pressures from politics and the market. This is also because after all journalistic legitimacy is an ongoing and fluid process rather than a fixed point or destination. However, one thing that is certain is that, like many other occupations, the occupation of journalism has the initiative to tackle the challenges it faces. News organisations also attempt to restore

journalistic legitimacy, especially when they share interests with journalism as exemplified in this case. Whilst their professional status and cultural authority is challenged, journalism would make every effort to construct boundaries and maintain its legitimacy (Gieryn 1983; Bishop 1999; Gutsche, Naranjo, and ínez-Bustos 2015). The concurrence and integration of the two trends of delegitimation and relegitimation exactly suggests such an interaction between the occupation of journalism and the changes in its context.

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[1] http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/.

[2] There have been reported some reluctance in adopting digital technologies in journalistic practices among journalists, despite the passions of news organisations for digital technologies (Spyridou et al. 2013).

[3] http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/digital-breakthrough-times-advertisers-agree-pay-same-rate-tablet-edition-print/.

[4] https://www.ft.com/content/ff5679dc-f0f8-11e5-9f20-c3a047354386.

[5] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/business/media/new-york-times-q4-earnings.html.

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