

# Facts & Frictions:

Emerging Debates,  
Pedagogies and Practices  
in Contemporary Journalism



# Faits & Frictions:

Débats, pédagogies et  
pratiques émergentes en  
journalisme contemporain

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# WELCOME TO FACTS & FRICTIONS



**T**he need for strong journalism to counter disinformation has never been more apparent. This issue of *Facts & Frictions* troubles the waters of this statement. Are we doing a good enough job? How can we finance our work? Are we teaching the right skills? Are we challenging the storytelling status quo?

Our opening article, *Technology and Journalism: The Experience of Recent Graduates from Two Canadian Journalism Schools*, shines a spotlight on pedagogy. Journalism educators Aneurin Bosley and Fred Vallance-Jones observe that “graduates of journalism programs begin their working lives in a world awash in digital technology and data.” Their survey of 122 journalism school graduates poses the question: Should journalism schools focus on the basics, or on cutting edge technology? The authors’ clear-eyed analysis of responses gets to the heart of what matters in journalism education.

To be sure, graduates will face a lifetime of decision-making about the high-stakes information needs of the public. Environmental journalism researcher Sean Holman argues that when newsroom leaders default to ‘free speech’ in their editorial choices, they too often forgo responsibility to provide accurate, evidence-based information, giving rise to public distrust in science. *At the Gate of Disaster: A Case Study on the Promotion of Climate Science Rejectionism by Mainstream News Outlets and E-commerce Companies* dives deep into the consequences of amplifying scientific claims without close scrutiny of their independence and validity. The article issues a strong call for accuracy as the core guidepost for publishing decisions.

As the public flocks toward free-of-charge information (and misinformation) on the web and social media, maintaining spaces where Holman’s call can be answered has become a major challenge. Kenneth Gibson’s article, *Addressing Deficits with Crowdfunded Journalism*, draws on the experience of 10 journalists who have engaged in crowdfunding to finance their work. The motivations, successes and failures of these enterprises serve as helpful examples, with a forward-looking consensus that, despite declining revenues, audience demand for high quality news reporting remains high.

Not all that is digital is disruptive. The boundaries of how we tell stories are expanding, including in the world of academic publishing. We are very pleased to present a multimedia element in this issue—perhaps *de rigueur* in today’s newsrooms but new ground for research journals. Media ethnographer Chantal Francoeur explores multilayered dimensions of storytelling in an embedded podcast titled *Journalisme multiplateforme, journaliste fragmenté*. We hope this audio submission and accompanying research brief sparks future multimedia contributions from our readers, creating a distinct feature for your *Facts & Frictions* journal.

*Patricia W. Elliott*  
Editor-in-Chief

# BIENVENUE À FAITS & FRICTIONS



**L**a nécessité d'un journalisme solide pour combattre la désinformation n'a jamais été aussi évidente. Ce numéro de *Faits & Frictions* trouble les eaux de cette affirmation. Faisons-nous un travail suffisamment bon ? Comment pouvons-nous financer notre travail ? Enseignons-nous les bonnes compétences ? Remettons-nous en question le statu quo en matière de narration ?

Notre article d'ouverture, *Technology and Journalism: The Experience of Recent Graduates from Two Canadian Journalism Schools* (*Technologie et journalisme : L'expérience de récents diplômés de deux écoles de journalisme canadiennes*), met l'accent sur la pédagogie. Les professeurs de journalisme Aneurin Bosley et Fred Vallance-Jones observent que « les diplômés des programmes de journalisme commencent leur vie professionnelle dans un monde inondé de technologies et de données numériques. » Leur enquête auprès de 122 diplômés d'écoles de journalisme pose la question : Les écoles de journalisme doivent-elles se concentrer sur les bases ou sur les technologies de pointe ? L'analyse lucide des réponses par les auteurs va au cœur de ce qui importe dans l'enseignement du journalisme.

Il est certain que les diplômés seront confrontés toute leur vie à la prise de décisions concernant les besoins en information du public, dont les enjeux sont importants. Sean Holman, chercheur en journalisme environnemental, affirme que lorsque les responsables des salles de rédaction optent pour la « liberté d'expression » dans leurs choix éditoriaux, ils renoncent trop souvent à leur responsabilité de fournir des informations exactes et fondées sur des preuves, ce qui suscite la méfiance du public envers la science. *At the Gate of Disaster : A Case Study on the Promotion of Climate Science Rejectionism by Mainstream News Outlets and E-commerce Companies* (*À la porte du désastre : Une étude de cas sur la promotion du rejet de la science du climat par les grands médias et les sociétés de commerce électronique*) plonge dans les conséquences de l'amplification des affirmations scientifiques sans examen minutieux de leur indépendance et de leur validité. L'article lance un appel fort pour que l'exactitude soit le principal critère de décision en matière de publication.

Alors que le public afflue vers les informations gratuites (et la désinformation) sur le web et les médias sociaux, maintenir des espaces où l'appel de Holman peut être entendu est devenu un défi majeur. L'article de Kenneth Gibson, *Addressing Deficits with Crowdfunded Journalism* (*Remédier aux déficits grâce au journalisme financé par le public*), s'appuie sur l'expérience de dix journalistes qui ont eu recours au crowdfunding pour financer leur travail. Les motivations, les succès et les échecs de ces entreprises servent d'exemples utiles, avec un consensus tourné vers l'avenir selon lequel, malgré la baisse des revenus, la demande du public pour des reportages de haute qualité reste élevée.

Tout ce qui est numérique n'est pas forcément perturbateur. Les frontières de notre façon de raconter des histoires s'élargissent, y compris dans le monde de l'édition universitaire. Nous sommes très heureux de présenter un élément multimédia dans ce numéro, peut-être de rigueur dans les salles de presse d'aujourd'hui mais nouveau pour les revues de recherche. L'ethnographe des médias Chantal Francoeur explore les dimensions multicouches de la narration dans un podcast intégré intitulé *Journalisme multiplateforme, journaliste fragmenté*. Nous espérons que cette soumission audio et le mémoire de recherche qui l'accompagne susciteront de futures contributions multimédias de la part de nos lecteurs, créant ainsi un élément distinct pour votre journal *Faits & Frictions*.

Patricia W. Elliott  
Rédactrice en chef



# Technology and Journalism: The Experience of Recent Graduates from Two Canadian Journalism Schools

*Aneurin Bosley, Carleton University*  
*Fred Vallance-Jones, University of King's College*

## Abstract

Recent graduates of two Canadian journalism schools were surveyed on their attitudes toward what constitutes useful technology in journalism. Both those working in journalism and those in communications felt a wide range of innovative technologies were useful and would use them more in their jobs in an ideal world. A narrower range was used in practice. Journalism respondents favoured use of tools that could be applied to traditional tasks such as finding stories. Those in communications were more likely than journalists to perform tasks such as collecting and organizing data in a spreadsheet, although the basics of data journalism are taught in both programs. The results raise questions about the appropriate mix of technological instruction in journalism curricula.

*Keywords:* journalism, education, technology, innovation

## Résumé

*Technologie et journalisme : L'expérience de diplômés récents de deux  
départements de journalisme canadiens*

Un sondage effectué parmi les étudiants récemment diplômés de deux départements de journalisme canadiens avait comme but d'évaluer leur attitude sur ce qui constitue une technologie utile en journalisme. Et ceux qui sont employés comme journalistes et employés en communications estiment qu'un grand éventail de technologies innovantes est utile et ils les utiliseraient plus fréquemment dans un monde idéal. En réalité, c'est un éventail plus restreint qui est utilisé. Les journalistes montraient une préférence pour les outils qui les aident dans les tâches traditionnelles, telles que la recherche d'histoires. Ceux en communications sont plus aptes à les utiliser pour recueillir et organiser les données dans des feuilles de calcul, ceci malgré le fait que l'enseignement des éléments de base du journalisme des données fait partie de leur formation dans les deux départements. Les résultats de ce sondage pourraient mener éventuellement à une réévaluation du poids accordé à l'instruction technologique dans les programmes de journalisme.

*Mots clés :* journalisme, éducation, technologie, innovation

## INTRODUCTION

Graduates of journalism programs begin their working lives in a world awash in digital technology and data. Since the popularization of the internet and the World Wide Web in particular, many commentators have identified the importance of technological fluency among journalists as a means to tell stories differently, reach new audiences and potentially develop new business models. The ability to use different technologies is one dimension of the concept of innovation. Journalism educators need to prepare students for this world but with time in curricula limited, they always face the question of what to teach and how much.

In this empirical study, we offer an analysis of technology use among recent graduates. A group of recent graduates from two leading Canadian university-based journalism schools was surveyed to determine what technologies the graduates are using early in their careers and for what tasks, as well as technologies they believe would be useful and that they would use more if they could. Both programs offer undergraduate and master's degree programs. Graduates from both the undergraduate and graduate programs were invited to participate. We identify two different groups of survey respondents: those who are working in journalism; and those who are working in other communications-related fields. This comparative data provides insight into the state of technological innovation in entry-level journalism positions.

## JOURNALISM AND TECHNOLOGY

Some level of technological competence has long been associated with journalism work. Dooley (2007) writes that different technologies have long been “part of a complex mix of conditions affecting the speed with which news is delivered, how and why certain new forms of journalism have developed, and how and why certain extant forms of news have changed and others have disappeared from use” (p. 25).

But Dooley notes that the “technologies most associated with journalism — the printing press, telegraph, camera, radio, television, computer,

and Internet — were invented for purposes that had little to do with the news” (p. 61). Furthermore, Dooley says that the lesson from history is that news publishers rarely change the way they do business unless they have no other choice. Ryfe (2012) described U.S. newspaper newsrooms as places where new journalists are quickly socialized into the accepted habits of the profession, which is resistant to change and in which even a young reporter, keen on trying new things “will find himself doing journalism mostly in conventional ways” (p. 24). The traditional forms of journalism typical of the 20th-century newspaper were, according to Ryfe, appropriate for the age of ‘mass media,’ where information was relatively scarce and journalists acted as gatekeepers. But this model may not be a good fit for the modern world. “Dressed up as a professional filter for a mass-mediated ball, journalism finds itself dancing to the tune of an increasingly networked world” (p. 36).

The widespread adoption of the internet and of social media platforms are just two of the more recent examples of the many technological changes to which journalists have had to adapt. But it has come at a cost, as digital platforms hollowed out formerly lucrative advertising revenues. The decline of many news outlets in Canada and the U.S., particularly newspapers, has been well documented (Lindgren, n.d.; Pew, *State of the Media reports*, 2014-2018).

The move to digital journalism has also put pressure on journalism programs to offer training in a broad range of digital skills so they can help produce multiskilled journalists who can perform a “greater variety of tasks – including those that were traditionally performed by others (whether designers, marketers, publishers, or editors)” (Deuze & Witschge, 2020, p. 32).

These multiskilled journalists may be more employable, as job advertisements increasingly highlight multimedia skills (Wenger et al., 2018). Journalism students may also perceive the importance of technology to their own career prospects. A study in Britain and the Netherlands (Singer & Broersma, 2019) found that journalism students felt there would be more opportunities awaiting those who are more technically savvy. Multiskilled, technologically savvy journalists have also been cast in ‘idealized’ ways, seen in

terms of people who will “emerge, thrive, and hopefully bring profits back into newsrooms” (Creech & Mendelson, 2015, p. 151).

Prescriptions for what kind of skills are needed have varied widely but include areas as relatively complex as writing HTML and computer code. Royal (2014) posed a series of questions to journalism educators about how much their programs were oriented towards technological competence: “Do you know how to: Make a basic website from scratch using HTML/CSS? Register a domain and get web hosting? Customize a blog platform like WordPress? Do basic video and audio editing?”

The need for journalists to have high-level skills has also been identified by other scholars. “If there are two significant language barriers that journalism needs to traverse, one is statistics and data skills and the other is technical aptitude. Journalists should learn to code ... [e]ven for journalists who never end up writing a line of code meant for daily use, basic technology literacy is as important a skill as basic business literacy” (Anderson et al., 2013, p. 38).

Writing computer code has also been highlighted by others as an important addition to a journalist’s skillset. Folkerts et al. (2013) argue, “A number of other research and analytic skills can usefully be adapted to the work of journalists, including ethnography, performing literature reviews, and writing computer code” (p. 66).

This potentially places a heavy burden on journalism educators and Lynch (2015) argued that the academic system is too rigid to help support the development of 21st-century journalists. Nevertheless, in a series of interviews with deans and directors of U.S. universities, Richards and Fitzpatrick (2018) identified “five core elements that stood out as essential to the creation and sustainability of cultures of innovation in JMC schools and colleges,” including considering whether the “curriculum integrate(s) new technologies and emerging issues” (pp. 142-143).

There has long been some debate about how much technical instruction students actually need, as well as a tension between technical instruction and the development of ‘softer’ skills such as critical thinking and interviewing. Lynch (2007) argued that journalism programs should stop teaching software, because students come to

journalism school knowing it already (or knowing how to learn it), but in a study about teaching social media, Bor (2014) concluded that “millennial students still require some instruction on using web-based platforms” (p. 252).

On the other hand, many scholars warn that digital skills, while important and necessary, do not constitute professional journalism (Folkerts et al., 2013). Zelizer (2019) argued the tendency to cast journalism as this set of skills may explain why “much of current news falls short in covering the multiple political, economic and social ills that plague today’s increasingly dark times” (p. 346). Reardon (2016) warns that skills will relegate the value of intellectual debate to second fiddle. Other critiques have focused on broader social issues. “In the research on journalistic innovation, there is a striking lack of attention to socioeconomic inequities in digital news participation and to audiences underserved by digital initiatives,” write Creech and Nadler (2018, p. 188).

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that technology has been an integral part of journalism since the printing press and before, something that is not likely to change. Deuze and Witschge (2020) highlight four major trends that suggest a shift towards a more dynamic notion of journalism. “These four trends are: a concurrent reorganization of working environments; fragmentation of news work; an emerging redactional society; and the ubiquity of media-making technologies. These trends point to a more networked (rather than an institutional) perspective of the journalist” (p. 31).

The role of social media in news work, for example, has been studied by many scholars. Hermida (2010) described Twitter as an “awareness system” and noted “it can be seen as a system that alerts journalists to trends or issues hovering under the news radar” (p. 302). But some have found that the platforms are often used to perform relatively traditional tasks. Powers and Vera-Zambrano (2018) interviewed journalists in the United States and France and found that while there were some differences in how journalists in the two countries used social media, “[i]n both countries, social media are used to accomplish routine tasks: French and US journalists alike report using such tools to collect information, monitor sources, and develop story ideas” (p. 2729). Larsson and Ihlebæk (2017) surveyed



Norwegian journalists on the use of a number of social media platforms. They found the journalists used Facebook the most, and social media were used primarily for traditional journalistic tasks such as gathering information and “spread[ing] content,” with younger journalists more likely to use these tools (p. 699).

In a 10-year longitudinal study of reporting practices, Reich (2013) used interviews with Israeli journalists to reconstruct where story ideas and information came from and found “remarkable stability,” with the telephone the dominant news gathering tool. He found that new technologies were either marginal in their uptake or were displacing older technologies “in the same cluster of textual technologies. More specifically, the pager and the fax made way primarily for e-mail.” Newer technology such as social media was more likely to be used during the “news discovery” than during the “information gathering” phase of reporting (p. 424).

At the same time, Stalph and Borges-Rey (2018) noted that the practices that have come to be known as ‘data journalism,’ for example, were failing to expand in a significant way beyond mainstream news organizations in large urban areas, “which calls into question the ability of data journalists to hold the powerful to account at local level” (p. 1079).

The ability to leverage social media platforms effectively or engage in more computational, data-oriented tasks are just a couple examples of how ‘innovation’ might be manifest in journalism work, though innovation can also be associated with new story forms or more participatory-oriented news work. However, ‘innovation’ is often characterized as journalists harnessing new technologies, which may be related to cultural changes in news work. One ethnographic analysis of news startup manifestos in the U.S. (Carlson & Usher, 2016) found that while those manifestos “generally stayed close to the legitimizing conventions underlying journalism, efforts to differentiate themselves as technologically sophisticated led to an embrace of the core conventions of startup culture” (p. 574), which emphasizes experimentation, prototyping, and an appetite for change.

Steensen (2009) identified five factors highlighted in previous research that constitute a grounded theory of innovation in online newsrooms:

Newsroom autonomy; newsroom work culture; the role of management; the relevance of new technology; and innovative individuals. According to Steensen, “studies of innovation in new media tend to highlight structural factors of media organizations rather than instances of individual practice as being most decisive for processes of innovation” (p. 822). Steensen argues that “[a] question therefore arises of whether individual practice has been downplayed as a determinant for innovation in online newsrooms” (p. 822). In the context of this individual practice, the ability to work with technology is a contributing factor and is related to the ‘relevance of new technology,’ which Steensen describes as whether technology is “perceived as relevant, i.e. efficient and useful” (p. 833). But Steensen also identified friction points around technology usage, noting that “technical restraints were mentioned as the direct cause of why new features were discarded” in the Norwegian newsroom that was observed (p. 830). Steensen’s study describes an unstable and complex content management system (CMS) in the newsroom as well as deliberations over whether to develop interactive features in Adobe Flash, a complex, programming-based environment that has since become obsolete. (A Flash developer was never hired in the newsroom.)

A great deal of theoretical work has been done in recent years around innovation in journalism, in which different production practices are key factors (García-Avilés, 2021). As highlighted by Steensen, some of those practices rely on ‘useful’ technologies that journalists can harness in order to produce work for a digital landscape.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to an empirical understanding of what currently constitutes ‘useful’ technology and to explore possible friction points in technology usage. Journalism educators have long been urged by some scholars and commentators to enhance their technology-based offerings to better prepare program graduates for increasingly digital work (Mulligan, 2012; Anderson et al., 2013; Bor, 2014). This study will add to an understanding of what that work looks like for young journalists in Canadian newsrooms.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the process of preparing young journalists to employ new or emerging technologies for news work will

not be static; what constitutes ‘new’ or ‘relevant’ technology will change over time. Even within the domain of social media, change is a given. According to Pew (2021), while regular usage of social media in the U.S. appears to be dropping for those aged 18 to 29, 21% of U.S. adults say they use TikTok, a relative newcomer to the social media mix, and one which is more visual than platforms such as Twitter.

Using a variety of survey analysis methods, we explore the use of and attitudes towards technology in news work. We also look at responses from two separate groups, those who reported working in journalism, and those who reported working in communications. It is well established that journalism program graduates tend to pursue career paths in communications industries unrelated to journalism. A British study (Hanna & Sanders, 2007), for example, found that only 53% of graduating students said they were “sure” they wanted to work in journalism. (See Hanusch et al., 2015, for a more global review.) This presents an opportunity to compare the responses from those working in journalism with those working in other fields. This comparison will provide an additional measure of the state of technological innovation in contemporary news work.

The development of the survey used in this study was guided by four research questions:

**RQ1:** What kinds of technologies do recent journalism graduates evaluate as being useful for the practice of journalism?

**RQ2:** To what extent are they employing useful technologies as a regular part of their work routines?

**RQ3:** Would they use the technologies more in their work in an ideal world?

**RQ4:** If they say they would use useful technology areas more in their jobs in an ideal world, what factors help explain why they do not?

## METHODS

**T**his study is based upon survey data gathered from recent graduates of two Canadian journalism programs. Prospective respondents were selected who had graduated from their programs one-to-two years prior to the

survey.

Invitations to complete the survey, which was developed using SurveyMonkey, were sent by email to 290 individuals. Recruitment emails indicated that survey responses would be anonymous and that while some demographic data would be collected, no names or IP addresses would be gathered. Questions were a combination of Likert-scale, single-item selection and open-ended text responses (see Appendix A). The names of respondents were not collected, but general demographic details such as age, gender, and racial identity were. Due to the relatively small numbers, particularly of racialized respondents, we have not associated demographic details with the responses, but do report on the general demographic breakdown below. The raw data has been kept secure consistently by the two researchers, and has not been shared with any third parties. Response data was analyzed using Tableau and MySQL and the results were compared to one another to ensure consistency.

The study was conducted under ethics approval granted by the research ethics board of a large Canadian university. The survey was in the field between May and July, 2020. There were 122 responses, for a response rate of 42%. Of those, 55 indicated they had graduated from the larger of the two programs, and 40 from the smaller. Another 27 respondents declined to indicate their program. As those who did respond were not a random sample of the overall pool of graduates but could choose whether to respond, it is not possible to estimate how representative the results are compared to what would have been obtained had all responded. The results, therefore, should be seen as representative of the group that answered the survey and not generalizable to the pool of all journalism program graduates in the two years, or indeed to all young journalists.

We examine a range of different technology applications through analysis of different questions addressing the following issues: whether a technology application was perceived to be useful in the context of news work; the frequency with which it is used in the workplace; and whether it would be used more or less under ideal conditions. We then examine some of the reported reasons that the technology applications are not used more frequently.

The questions about technology were asked in two different ways. One was more general, in order to gauge whether respondents thought a technology area could be useful without presupposing how it might be applied to news and information work. For example, respondents were asked whether they thought ‘databases’ are useful for journalism work, which does not presuppose the different ways in which a database might be used to support that work. Nor does it suppose a particular database platform (i.e. MySQL vs. Microsoft Access).

On the other hand, when asking about current technology practices in day-to-day work, questions were asked in more specific ways so that they might be more directly relatable to that work. These questions were originally developed in 2018 (though slightly revised since) and pilot tested on six recent journalism graduates at the time to help ensure relevance. None of those graduates was invited to participate in this survey.

Responses to agree/disagree questions may be subject to acquiescence response bias (see Encyclopedia of Research Methods, 2008). Two methods have been employed to try to minimize this bias. First, all respondents are anonymous, which should reduce any desire on the part of respondents to be motivated to agree with or please the study authors. Second, research has found that ‘satisficing’ is more likely when respondents’ ability and motivation is low and when question difficulty is high. While the study authors cannot attest to the respondents’ motivation, the questions have been framed using simple and straightforward language. Furthermore, since the respondents are all graduates of a university-based journalism program and employed in journalism and communications fields, we hypothesize that their ability – and their willingness to offer independent, critical assessments – are reasonably high.

Throughout this analysis, we acknowledge that the issue of whether Likert-scale data can be treated as interval or ordinal data is somewhat controversial (see Wigley 2013; and Wu & Leung 2017). However, these values are assigned only for comparison and not for any formal statistical purposes.

## RESULTS

Out of the whole pool of respondents, 64 identified as female, 27 as male, and 31 either did not indicate their gender identity or indicated an identity other than male or female. Sixty-four indicated they were of white ethnic or racialized background, and 31 indicated other identities, while 27 declined to answer this question. Eighty-seven respondents were under 30 years old, seven 30 or older and 28 did not indicate their age.

Respondents were asked whether they are working in areas that use the skills acquired in their journalism programs. In total, 14 indicated that they were not, leaving 108 who indicated that they were. Of the 14 who reported not working in a related field, seven indicated that they were continuing their education. This might suggest an encouraging picture of employment prospects, though it might also suggest that the nature of the survey is biased in favour of those who are working in their fields.

When respondents were asked what field they were working in, possible responses included check boxes for journalism, communications, public relations, etc., plus an open-ended text field. Some respondents indicated multiple, overlapping fields. For example, one respondent checked the boxes for ‘advertising,’ ‘communications,’ ‘journalism,’ and ‘public relations.’ Respondents with multiple, overlapping fields have been excluded from the analysis, leaving 103 respondents who indicated a particular field. Of those, 62 reported working in journalism, 37 in communications and public relations and four in “other” areas (including education and research). Only the 99 respondents who indicated either journalism or communications are included in the analysis.

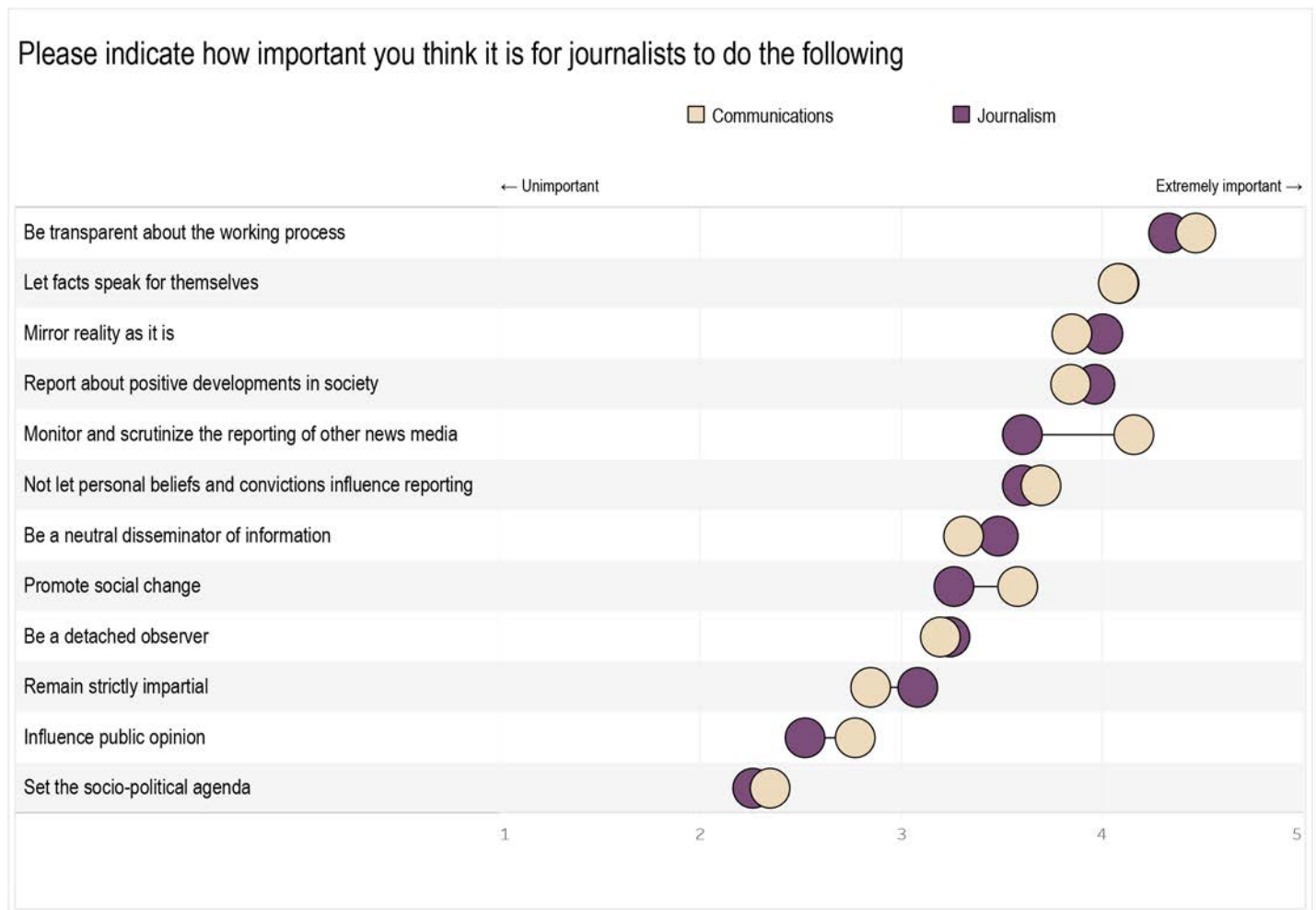
In order to try and establish that the two groups did not have wildly different views on the role of journalism in society (despite all having graduated from two broadly similar programs), all respondents were asked to rate a series of different values on a Likert scale from 1 (unimportant) to 5 (extremely important).<sup>1</sup> In Fig. 1 these responses are represented as averages of the numerical values.

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<sup>1</sup> This question was developed by the European Journalism Training Association: <https://www.ejta.eu/publications>.



Figure 1



As illustrated in Fig. 1, the values of transparency, neutrality, and impartiality were more or less equally ranked and valued by respondents working in journalism and in communications.

Those working in communications attached a somewhat higher importance to promoting social change and influencing public opinion than the journalism group, though the largest point of divergence was on the issue of monitoring and scrutinizing other news media. However, these responses suggest that both the journalism and communications groups have a shared conception of some of the functions and values of journalism despite having found employment in different fields.

## USEFULNESS

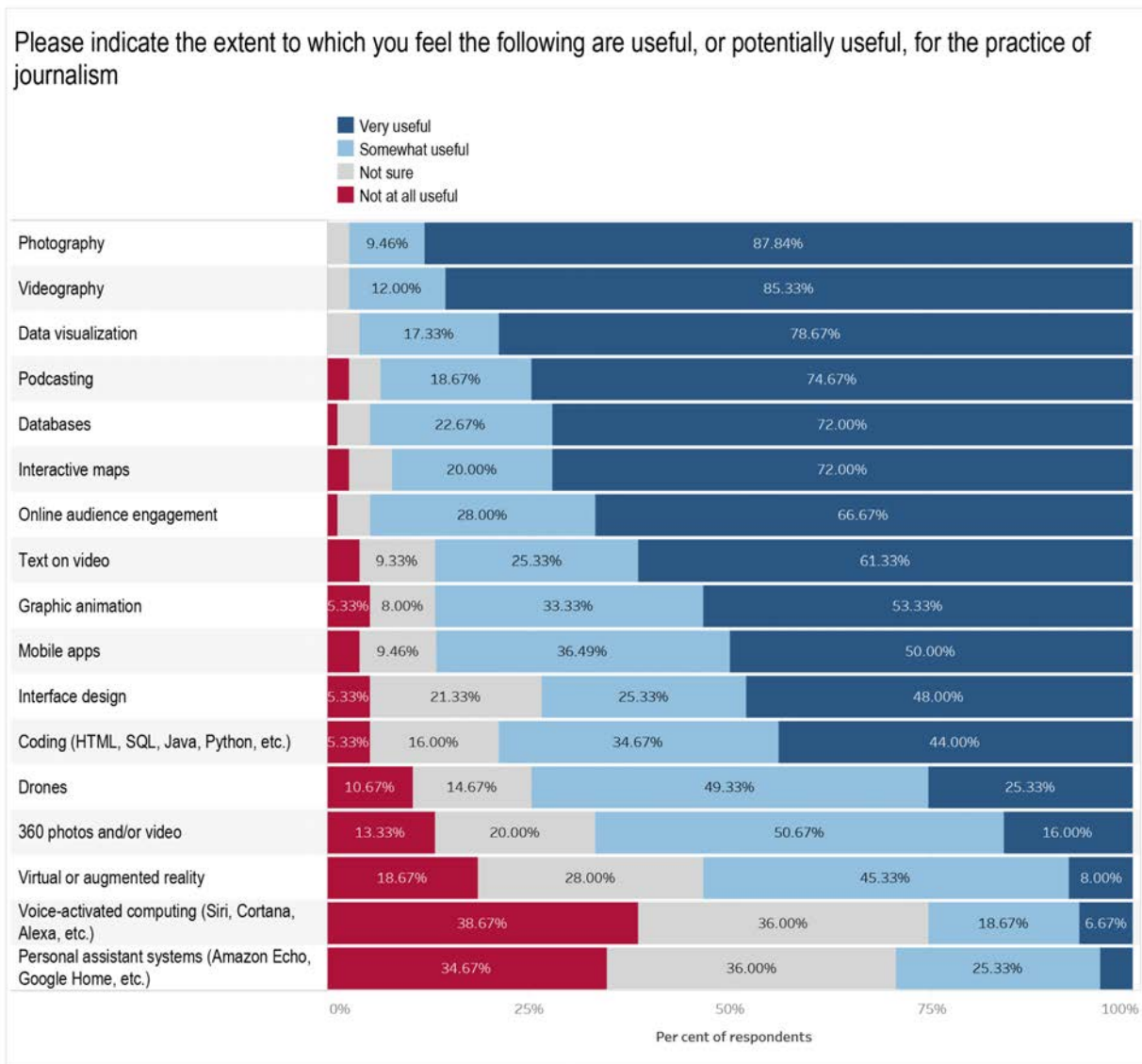
Recent graduates were asked to indicate whether they felt that different technology areas were useful for doing journalism work. Responses were provided on a Likert scale from 1 (not at all useful) to 4 (very useful). As illustrated in Fig. 2, a large proportion of respondents indicated that many of the technology areas were either somewhat useful or very useful.

Photography was seen as very useful by 88% of respondents, followed by videography (85%) and data visualization (79%). Of those three areas, none of the respondents indicated that they were not at all useful.

Some of the more advanced technology areas were also rated as being useful. For example,



Figure 2



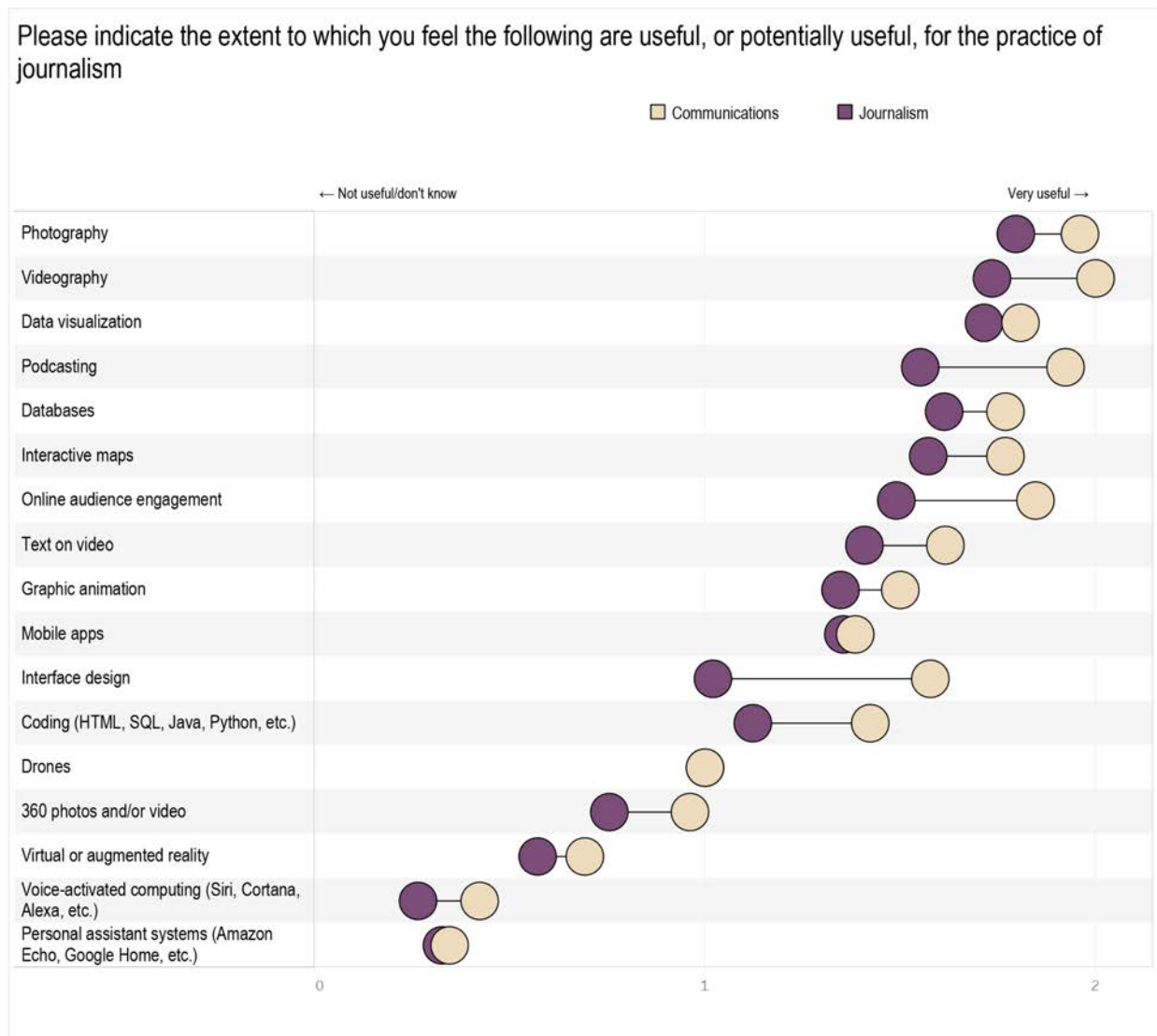
360-degree photography and video was deemed to be somewhat useful by just over 50% of the program graduates and as very useful by 16%. Virtual and/or augmented reality garnered somewhat lower numbers but just over half of the respondents deemed it to be either somewhat or very useful.

But this broader picture conceals differences between the journalism and communications groups in the extent to which they see these areas as useful. In Fig. 3 the responses have been assigned the following values: 0 for 'not at all useful' and for 'not sure'; 1 for 'somewhat useful'; and 2 for 'very useful.' (The purpose of this value assignment is to compare responses along the two 'useful' measures.)

While the overall ranking of the technology

areas between these two groups is quite similar, some differences are notable. For example, the communications group almost universally viewed the different areas as more useful but the differences were much smaller in the areas of data visualization and mobile apps. Perhaps somewhat puzzlingly, the communications group was more likely to view podcasting as useful for the purpose of journalism, despite the popularity of the medium (Newman et al., 2020) and its similarity to traditional radio broadcasting. This may simply reflect the non-random nature of the survey, making it difficult to reach absolute conclusions on the relative proportions of answers given by the two groups. (Note that the number of respondents who indicated that the bottom three areas are somewhat or very useful is relatively small, so the

Figure 3



responses on these items should be interpreted with caution.)

## USING TECHNOLOGY MORE

As one way to ascertain whether respondents have some level of enthusiasm for embracing technology-related tasks, they were asked whether, in an ideal world, they would use these same technology areas more or less for their own work (whether in journalism or in communications).

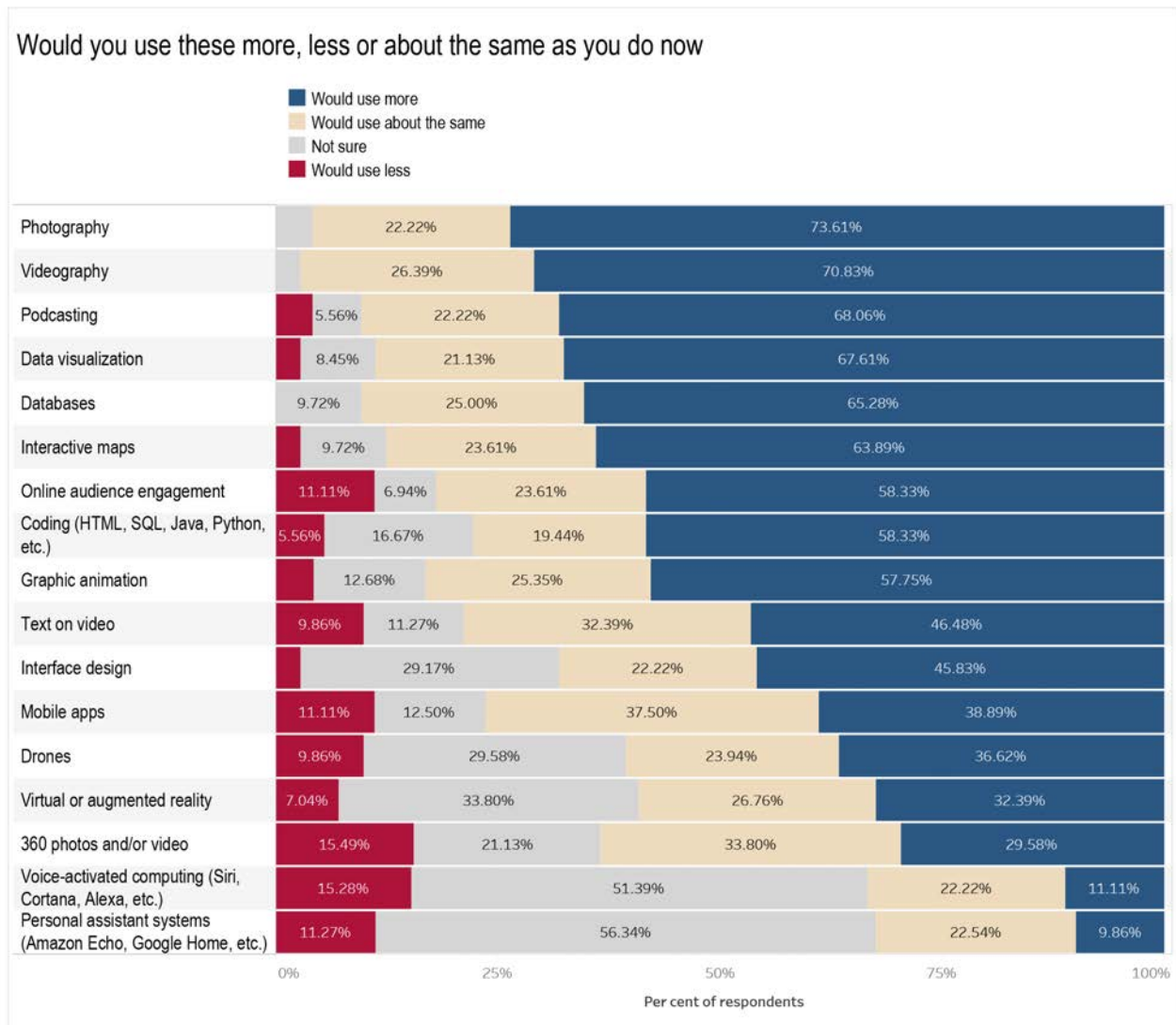
As illustrated in Fig. 4, respondents appeared to be less enthusiastic about some of the ‘leading-edge’ areas, including virtual/augmented reality, 360-degree photos/video, voice-activated computing, and personal assistant systems. (As illustrated in Fig. 6, it appears that almost no respondents are actually using these, so we would suggest that the ‘would use about the same’

response effectively means they will continue not using them. However, a rough majority of respondents were “not sure” about the final two, which might suggest that the respondents just haven’t made up their minds about them.)

As illustrated in Fig. 5, there appears to be a desire among both the journalism and communications groups to use the technology areas more, particularly in those areas generally rated as being the most useful. (In order to avoid having ‘about the same’ and ‘not sure’ responses skew the ‘more’ and ‘less’ responses, numeric values have been assigned as follows: Would use more: 1; Would use about the same: 0; Not sure: 0; Would use less: -1.)

In this case, the respondents in the two different groups appear to have more synchronicity. Those working in communications express a

Figure 4



desire to use coding and animation more as compared with their journalism counterparts, while the journalism workers appear to be more bullish on 360 photos/video. But both groups express a desire to work more with photography, videography, data visualization, podcasting, and databases in more or less equal measure. The areas of voice-activated computing and personal assistant systems had a small proportion of ‘more’ and ‘less’ respondents so those results should be viewed with some caution. As noted in Fig. 2, the majority of respondents appear to be on the fence about these.

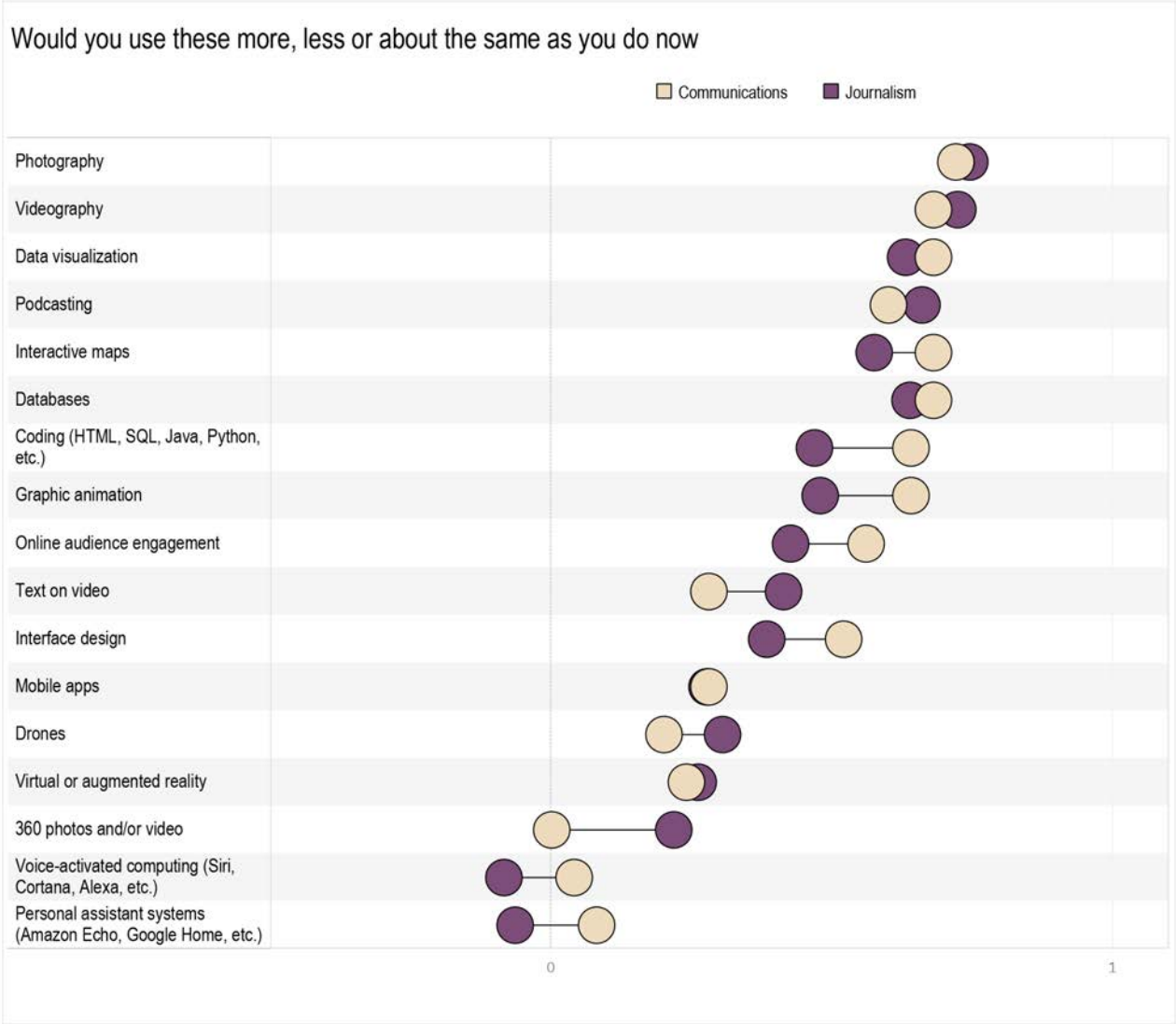
## PREVALENCE OF USE

But what graduates may wish to do is at odds with what they are doing in practice. In order to gauge

real-world technology use, respondents were asked specific questions about their job-related technology use. Responses were provided on a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (several times per week), as illustrated in Fig. 6.

Respondents reported performing tasks related to social media the most frequently, particularly for research and finding contacts and sources, with nearly 60% indicating doing so at least once per week or several times per week. Indeed, some indicated they wish they had learned more about using social media this way, while in their journalism programs. Said one of what would have better prepared them for the technological demands of their job: “Understanding that you are constantly checked in to social media, and that you are therefore expected to know what is going on at all times. I wish I had learned how to use it more as

Figure 5



a tool.” Said another: “I think it would have helped if I’d had more training on how to properly search social media for story ideas/information.”

More than half of respondents also indicated recording audio, writing SEO headlines, interacting with the public on social media, and collecting/organizing data in a spreadsheet at least a few times per month. More ‘leading edge’ tasks, such as visualizing data, writing code (for either presentation or analysis), creating maps from points or polygons, or working with 360 photos/video were much less common, with at least 50% of respondents indicating they never perform these tasks. As illustrated in Fig. 7, those working in non-journalism areas appear much more likely to perform some ‘leading-edge’ tasks than those working in journalism.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the journalism

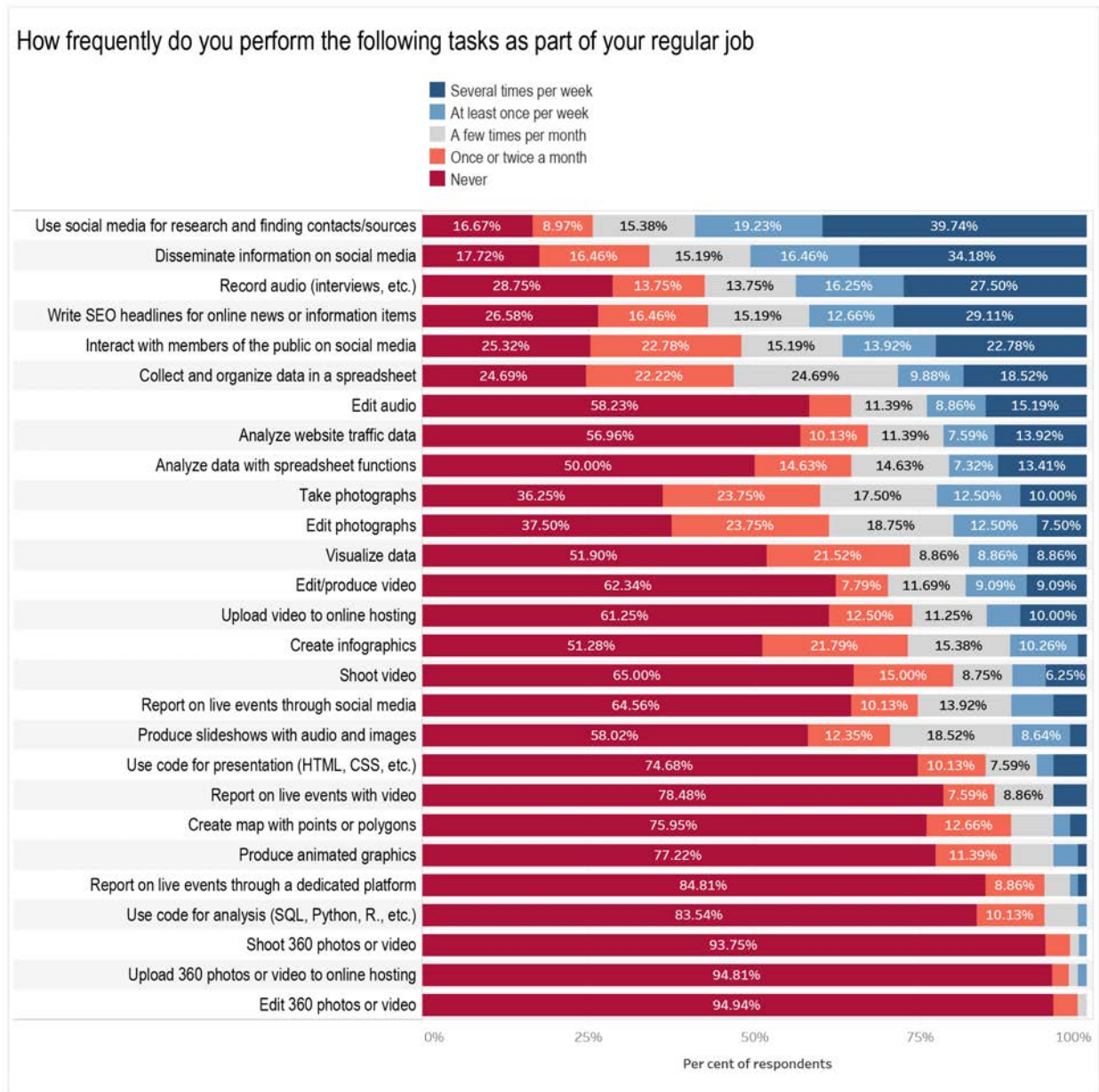
respondents reported frequent use of audio recording, with 40% saying they did this very frequently (i.e. several times per week) and another 20% reporting they did this frequently (at least once per week). By contrast, just over 53% of the non-journalist respondents said they never did this. The journalism group was also more likely to edit photographs, audio, and video.

Using 360-degree photos or video, a technology that can create an immersive experience for the viewer, has been touted as a new way of storytelling that may help produce more empathy among viewers (Shin & Biocca, 2018). But more than 90% of both the journalist and communications respondents had never shot or edited such content. More than 70% of both groups had likewise never created animated graphics.

Skills falling under the umbrella of data



Figure 6



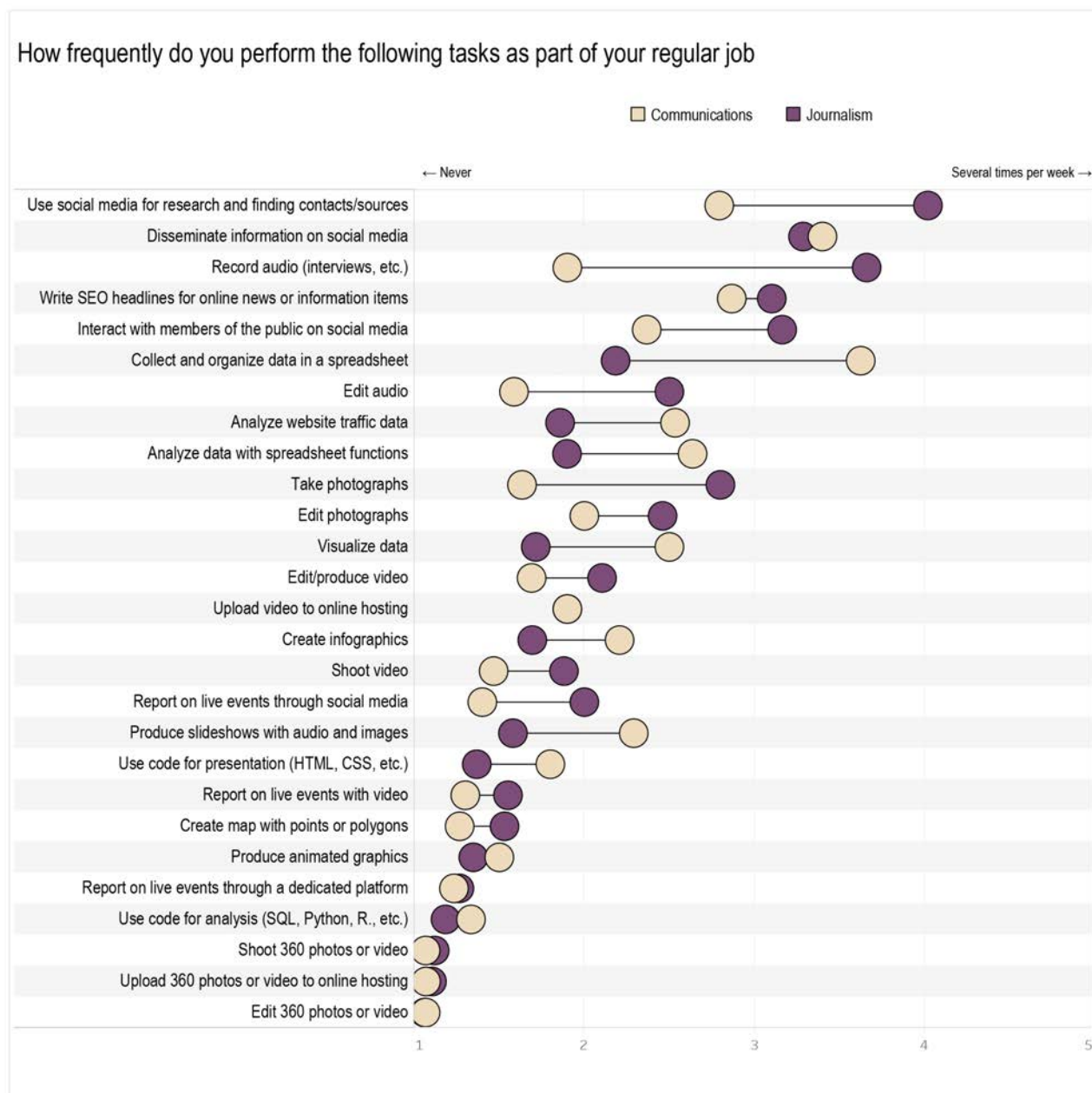
journalism were actually more likely to be used by the graduates working in communications fields than by the journalists. For example, 34% of those not working in journalistic jobs said they collected and organized data in spreadsheets several times a week, compared to only 8% of those in journalistic fields. While just over 6% of communications respondents reported that they never did spreadsheet work, nearly 37% of journalism respondents indicated this. Non-journalists were also more likely to visualize data, though only 30% did this either frequently or very frequently. By comparison, just over 10% of journalism respondents said the same.

Most graduates from both groups never used coding, either to analyze data or for web presentation. In both cases, the journalism group was more likely to report that they never perform these functions.

## POSSIBLE BARRIERS

As noted in the earlier analysis, there are many technology areas that appear to be under-utilized, defined as areas that recent journalism graduates see as being useful and indicate that they would use more in their work in an ideal world. The survey data provides some indicators of why this gap exists.

Figure 7



Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of statements that explain the perceived gap. Responses were provided on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As illustrated in Fig. 8, the strongest agreement was found in the claim that the technologies are not provided in the workplace. Other factors included respondents being too busy doing other things and some indication of a lack of confidence.

Respondents were also able to offer alternative explanations in an open-ended field. While most did not offer additional reasons, one journalism respondent said: “Primarily my work in editorial does not cross over with the photography team,

or digital team. Very segmented and I think that’s stopping us from advancing our publication.” Another offered this reason: “I live in quite a small community and our strongest medium is still print. Many of these technologies would require spending a lot of time to learn/keep up with technologies that only a few people actually click on. (Which is a chicken/egg thing.)”

Another respondent cited a culture that preferred the status quo and yet another indicated that many technology areas were too expensive. Many of the perceived barriers appear to be common to both journalism and communications workplaces as illustrated in Fig. 9.

The two reported reasons where there was

Figure 8

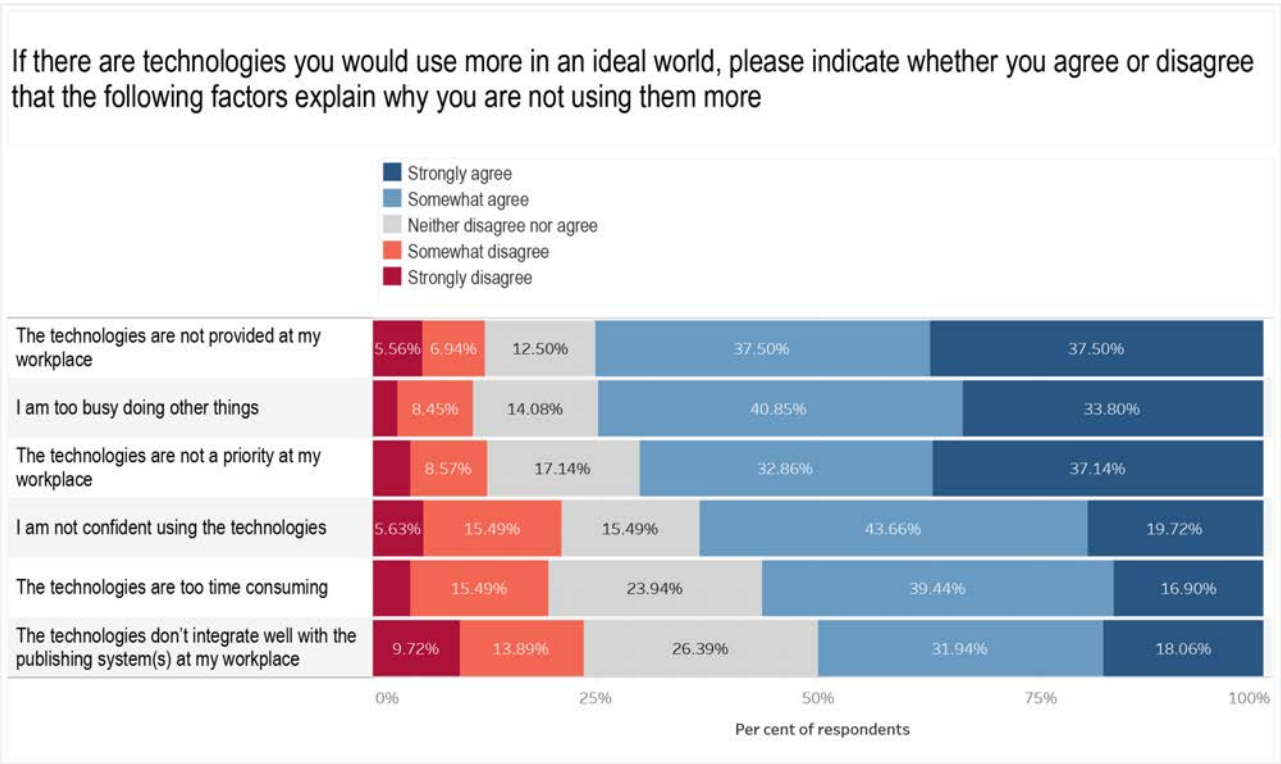
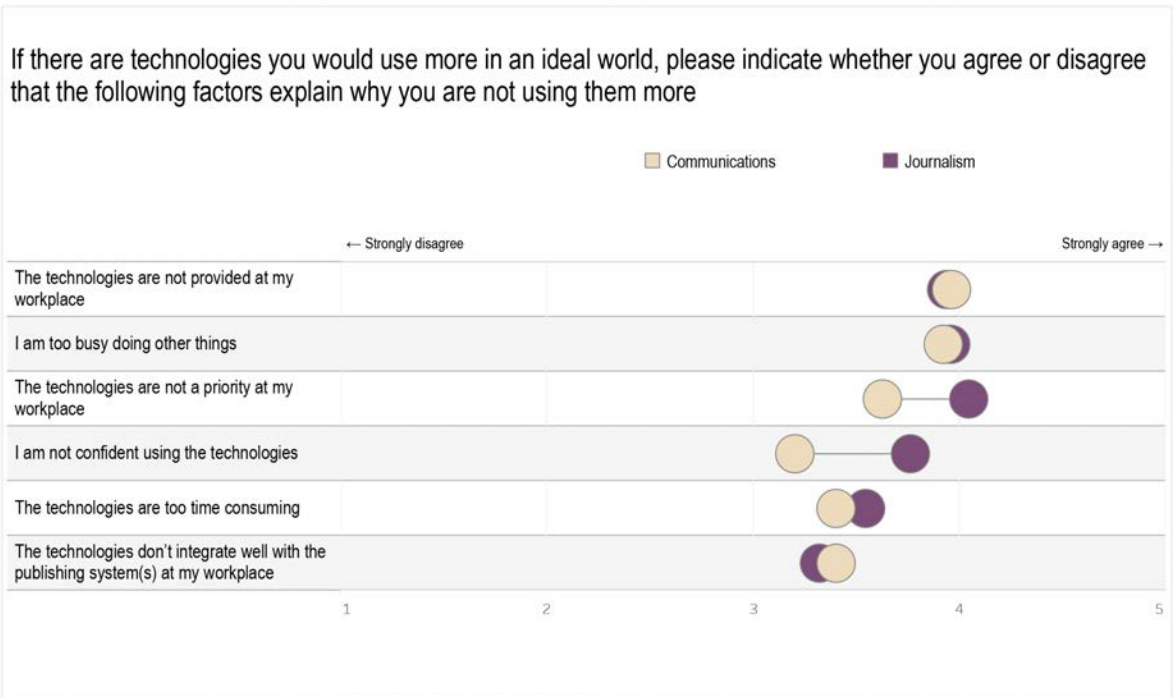


Figure 9



least agreement were the workplace priority, where journalism respondents were somewhat more likely to agree, and the perceived confidence, where journalism respondents were also more likely to agree.

## RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to provide some empirical measure of the extent to which recent journalism program graduates are engaged in ‘innovative’ practice, defined as using technologies deemed ‘useful’ for journalistic purposes as part of their work. Based on the survey results, we offer the following answers to the research questions.

**RQ1:** Recent journalism graduates deemed a broad variety of different technology-oriented areas and tasks as being useful. The areas most commonly rated as “very useful” were photography, videography, data visualization, podcasting, and databases. Interactive maps, online audience engagement, text on video, graphic animation, and mobile apps were also deemed very useful by at least a majority of respondents. Recent graduates were somewhat more tentative about some of the more advanced areas, including drones, 360-degree photography/video, virtual/augmented reality, or voice-activated computing.

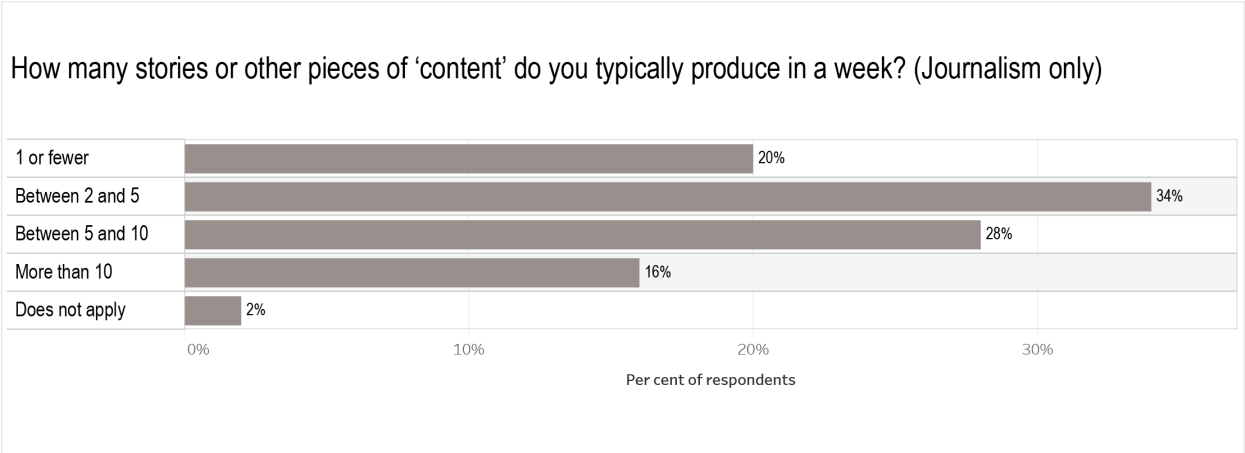
**RQ2:** Technology areas around social media, notably using social media for research and

finding sources, were most commonly used. More than half of respondents also reported recording audio, writing SEO headlines, and collecting and organizing data in a spreadsheet at least a few times per month. A slight majority of respondents indicated they never perform some other tasks, including analyzing data with spreadsheet functions, creating infographics, and visualizing data. In more leading edge areas, including coding, map creation, and 360-degree video and photo, large majorities reported never performing related tasks.

**RQ3:** Respondents indicated multiple technology areas they say they would use more frequently for their work in an ideal world, including photography, videography, podcasting, data visualization, databases, and interactive maps. Even a majority of respondents indicated that they would use coding more. As with attitudes towards whether technology areas are useful, respondents were less likely to indicate they would use more leading edge areas more, such as virtual/augmented reality, or voice-activated computing.

**RQ4:** Recent graduates indicated a number of different factors that help explain why they are not using different technology areas more than they say they would in an ideal world. Those working in journalism most commonly agreed with the statement that the technology areas were not a priority in their workplaces, and that they were too busy doing other things. As illustrated in Fig. 10, of those doing journalism work, nearly a

Figure 10





third reported that they produce between five and 10 stories (or pieces of content) each week, and another 16% indicated that they produce more than 10, so the pace of journalism production may be a contributing factor.

Those doing journalism work expressed stronger agreement with the statement that they lacked confidence than those working in communications fields.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

**T**his study provides some insight into what this group of journalism graduates considered “useful” in their nascent practice. It suggests a notable difference between the kind of innovative practice that journalism school graduates might engage in as compared with what they are actually doing. Aspects of the survey data echo earlier research (Larsson & Ihlebæk, 2017; Powers et al., 2018), which found that reporters used social media and other new technologies to perform traditional or routine journalistic tasks, or that the technologies displaced earlier technologies that had been used for the same tasks (Reich, 2013). But the results also show this is not necessarily what the graduates would ideally want to do, and indeed, a minority were using technology in ways that go beyond traditional journalistic approaches.

Respondents to this survey appear to have embraced social media to perform traditional journalistic tasks such as finding human sources and story ideas. While social media platforms were cited by many of the graduates as important for both researching and promoting the news, other practices that require greater technical proficiency and allowed work that was not as immediately recognizable as in the traditional model, were not being widely used by these graduates. It appears the work the recent graduates were doing, in their early career employment, was quite similar, aside from the online technologies they had adopted, to work of previous generations of journalists. This may reinforce Ryfe’s conclusion about the inherent conservatism of traditional news organizations (Ryfe, 2012). In 2008, after his analysis of a U.S. metropolitan newspaper, Ryfe wrote that, in the face of changes related to the Internet, the journalists “remained convinced that

the way forward was to preserve the newspaper and to protect their investments in traditional practices and values.” Ryfe concluded that “[t]hey simply made the wrong calculation” (p. 227). In the current study, in the cases where recent graduates provided additional detail in the open-ended comments, they referenced workflows that prioritize traditional, print-based news production.

Nevertheless, the graduates recognized a wide range of innovative technologies as useful or potentially useful in journalism, and the survey data shows a gulf between innovative methods the graduates see as valuable for the practice of journalism and the actual opportunities to use these methods in the journalistic workplaces where they have found early employment. These included tools that are well established in the practice of some journalists and organizations, such as analyzing and visualizing data (which can be done with Excel or Google Sheets), and others that might be viewed as more leading-edge or esoteric, such as 360 images and video, writing code, or using drones. Indeed, some respondents appear to be using some of these tools already, suggesting that even at this early stage in their careers, opportunities exist to move beyond methods that are analogs of journalism past.

This also suggests some notable limits to what Steensen (2009) refers to as “the power of individual action.” Recent journalism graduates will, by definition, be located at a relatively low position in any workplace hierarchy. Nevertheless, they will also bring technological skills learned in their degree programs and elsewhere and possibly new ways of doing things. But as noted above, respondents identified a number of possible ‘barriers’ to innovative practice, some related to perceived support and/or management limitations in their workplaces and some related to their perceived abilities.

While these findings are not generalizable to all recent journalism graduates, they run counter to the more optimistic narratives found in some of the innovation literature. For example there is no evident demand for a young journalist who can “[m]ake a basic website from scratch using HTML/CSS” (Royal, 2014). While recent graduates in this study see these coding skills as useful and indicate they would use them more in an ideal world, these

skills are rarely, if ever, put to use, at least in the Canadian context represented by these survey respondents.

These results may give some comfort to the traditionalists among journalism educators, who emphasize the importance of traditional news skills in identifying newsworthy topics, gathering information, synthesizing and assembling that information into news stories, and disseminating those stories. It is possible that these tasks will remain central to journalism for the foreseeable future, which would suggest that no matter what technologies may come along, important parts of what it means to report the news will remain essential parts of journalism program curricula. At the same time, those curricula will need to adapt to the newer technologies that can be usefully applied to journalism work in an increasingly networked world and that means constant vigilance in identifying those tools that can best facilitate that work. As Pavlik wrote (2013), “[a] media curriculum that emphasizes innovation and digital media entrepreneurship is one of the keys to a robust professional future for the field and students seeking a media career” (p. 213).

On that score, we acknowledge that our own programs could embrace technological innovation in a more robust way. Journalism educators face a host of challenges on this front, notably, how much of the curriculum in an undergraduate journalism program should be occupied teaching innovative or ‘out there’ tools that may only be used minimally once graduates actually begin their careers, which may never become more than niche tools or which may be replaced by new proposed technologies in a few years? Given the volume of material a typical journalism program must cover, this is a question that needs to be considered carefully.

At the same time, some journalists *are* employing non-traditional tools such as writing code, analyzing data, and creating immersive web experiences, possibly including at least some of those surveyed here. Some respondents said they would have been better prepared had they had training – or more training – in areas such as coding, data analysis, and web design. Both of the journalism schools from which students graduated have courses in their curricula that at least touch on areas such as data journalism, though whether the amount of emphasis in these programs is

optimal is an open question. Journalism educators would seem to have an important, continuing role in identifying these ‘up and coming’ approaches, and exposing their students to them.

So should journalism schools focus on the “basics” or prepare their students to use technologies not currently seeing widespread adoption? We would argue it is a bit of both. But while the authors are both enthusiastic about many different new and emerging innovation practices, it is tempting to get carried away by some of the literature and commentary about journalism innovation. To some extent, journalism education should be based on empirical realities.

For example, educators need to ensure that they are teaching skills such as social media use in the context of all aspects of news production. This means that the teaching of social media skills needs to go beyond how to distribute content on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, but must address how these kinds of tools can be mined to find and develop sources, identify possible story ideas and perform other basic journalistic functions, all within the context of critical and ethical practice.

That said, journalism schools should not simply serve the “industry.” They are often the first place new practitioners are exposed to the norms and practices of journalistic practice and therefore have an important role in defining what is efficient and useful. In our view, journalism curricula need to incorporate innovative skills into the core of journalism curricula rather than treat them as optional extras for an interested few. Important areas of innovation such as data journalism ought not to be explored only in electives or graduate programs; they need to be made part of core undergraduate journalism curricula, ideally in such a way that they are integrated into the courses that are considered foundational. Teaching the basics of interviewing, writing, and packaging text, audio, and video stories is still critically important, and is likely to remain so, but so is learning how to use a spreadsheet to better understand a City Hall budget, and creating visualizations to tell number-heavy stories in ways that will appeal to an audience; otherwise schools of journalism will simply reinforce the idea that the “basics” of journalism are somehow unchanging, and that new tools should mainly be employed to perform

traditional tasks.

Indeed, it can be argued that schools need to play a role in ‘seeding’ the news industry with graduates who are able to do innovative work, even if they are not immediately able to use the skills in their first reporting jobs. The results of this survey suggest that while this group of young journalists is not always engaging in ‘innovative’ practice, they see the value or potential value of them and would use them more if they could. The comparison between those in journalism and those in communications work provides some evidence that young journalists appear eager and capable of more innovative technological practice than they now appear to be engaged in. At the very least, there appears to be a strong consensus among the recent graduates that data-oriented skills are highly useful and would be used more. More emphasis in this area would likely be of benefit to program graduates and newsrooms.

This analysis is not intended to be overly critical of current priorities in Canadian newsrooms. As noted, many are struggling to stay afloat as revenue sources dry up. At the same time, these young journalists appear to be busy producing a fairly large number of stories each week, which evidently leaves little time to adopt other practices typically associated with innovation in journalism. (And this isn’t to say that there aren’t experienced journalists and others doing this kind of work, likely in the very newsrooms represented in this study.) Digital startups elsewhere have helped popularize different forms of journalism, from data-oriented analysis ([fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com)) to explainer-style work ([vox.com](http://vox.com)). But many areas of digital innovation have seemingly made limited inroads into the working lives of the recent graduates surveyed.

## CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

**T**his study paints at least a partial picture of the state of technological innovation among recent journalism graduates who have found employment in their fields. According to this picture, young journalists and communications workers are mostly not writing code or developing applications or generally harnessing more

‘leading-edge’ technology in innovative ways. However, their assessment of what is useful for journalism work and what they would do more of may provide important guidance for enhancing journalism curricula while at the same time being realistic about contemporary journalism work.

This study has limitations. First, it represents only 99 respondents. A larger study that could claim to be representative would allow us to draw more definite conclusions. Adding interviews would also allow researchers to explore the state of innovation more deeply. This study also offers just a snapshot in time. A recurring study might be useful for establishing which practices are gaining more traction and which fall out of favour. If journalism workers can expect anything from the future, ‘change’ would surely be at the top of the list.



## Appendix A - Survey Questions

Please indicate the frequency with which you perform the following tasks as part of your regular job:

	Never	Rarely (i.e. once or twice a month)	Occasionally (a few times a month)	Frequently (at least once per week)	Very Frequently (several times a week)
Take photographs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Edit photographs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Record audio (interviews, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Edit audio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Produce slideshows with audio and images	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shoot video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Edit/produce video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upload video to online hosting (YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shoot 360 photos or video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Edit 360 photos or video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upload 360 photos or video to online hosting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create map with points or polygons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create infographics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collect and organize data in a spreadsheet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyze data with spreadsheet functions (sum, average, standard deviation, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visualize data (Excel, Google Charts, Tableau, datawrapper, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Produce animated graphics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



	Never	Rarely (i.e. once or twice a month)	Occasionally (a few times a month)	Frequently (at least once per week)	Very Frequently (several times a week)
Write search engine optimized headlines for online news or information items (news stories, press releases, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disseminate information on social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use social media for research and finding contacts/sources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interact with members of the public on social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use code for analysis (SQL, Python, R., etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use code for presentation (HTML, CSS, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyze website traffic data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Report on live events with video (through YouTube, Facebook live, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Report on live events through social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Report on live events through a dedicated platform (Slack, for example)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How many stories or other pieces of 'content' do you typically produce in a week?

1 or fewer	Between 2 and 5	Between 5 and 10	More than 10	Does not apply
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate the extent to which you feel the following technologies or technology-related tasks are useful, or potentially useful, for the practice of journalism:

	Not sure	Not at all useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
360 photos and/or video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Data visualization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal assistant systems (Amazon Echo, Google Home, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drones	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Databases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual or augmented reality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interactive maps	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Graphic animation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voice-activated computing (Siri, Cortana, Alexa, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mobile apps	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videography	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Podcasting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coding (HTML, SQL, Java, Python, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Photography	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online audience engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interface design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text on video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Of those same technologies, please indicate whether, in an ideal world, you would use them more, less or about the same as you do now.

	Not sure	Would use less	Would use about the same	Would use more
360 photos and/or video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Data visualization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal assistant systems (Amazon Echo, Google Home, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drones	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Databases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual or augmented reality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interactive maps	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Graphic animation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voice-activated computing (Siri, Cortana, Alexa, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mobile apps	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videography	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Podcasting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coding (HTML, SQL, Java, Python, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Photography	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online audience engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interface design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text on video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there a technology or technology-related task you feel is important but is missing from this list? (Leave blank if not)

If there are technologies you would use more in an ideal world, please indicate whether you agree or disagree that the following factors explain why you are not using them more.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The technologies are not provided at my workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not confident using the technologies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The technologies are not a priority at my workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am too busy doing other things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The technologies are too time consuming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The technologies don't integrate well with the publishing system(s) at my workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If there are other reasons, please describe them. (Leave blank if not)



Please indicate how important you think it is for journalists to do the following:

	Unimportant	Of Little Importance	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Be a detached observer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promote social change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Remain strictly impartial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Influence public opinion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Be a neutral disseminator of information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Set the socio-political agenda	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mirror reality as it is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Report about positive developments in society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not let personal beliefs and convictions influence reporting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Be transparent about the working process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Let facts speak for themselves	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Monitor and scrutinize the reporting of other news media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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# At the Gate of Disaster: A Case Study on the Promotion of Climate Science Rejectionism by Mainstream News Outlets and E-Commerce Companies

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## Abstract

Climate science rejectionist Patrick Moore's new book, *Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom*, has been promoted by a constellation of media and special interest groups around the world that share his views. However, its success as an "environmental science" bestseller on Amazon, has also been the result of support it received from mainstream news media outlets and ecommerce companies. Using a narrative reconstructed with investigative reporting techniques, this case study will apply gatekeeping theory to explore how those who platformed or publicized Moore's fake invisible catastrophes argument failed to make its accuracy a determinant in doing so, instead prioritizing other concerns, such as freedom of expression and promoting a diversity of viewpoints.

**Keywords:** climate change; climate change skepticism; climate science denial; disinformation; gatekeeping theory; mass media; misinformation

## Résumé

***À la porte du désastre : Une étude de cas sur la promotion du rejet de la science du climat par les médias grand public et les sociétés de commerce électronique***

Le nouveau livre de Patrick Moore rejetant la science du climat, intitulé *Fake invisible catastrophes and threats of doom* (Fausse catastrophes invisibles et menaces d'un destin tragique), a été promu par une constellation de médias et de groupes d'intérêts spéciaux du monde entier qui partagent son point de vue. Cependant, son succès en tant que best-seller des « sciences de l'environnement » sur Amazon, a également été le résultat du soutien qu'il a reçu des médias grand public et des sociétés de commerce électronique. À l'aide d'un récit reconstruit avec des techniques de reportage d'investigation, cette étude de cas appliquera la théorie du gatekeeping (contrôle d'accès à l'information) pour explorer comment ceux qui ont mis en ligne ou rendu public l'argument des fausses catastrophes invisibles de Moore ont omis d'utiliser l'exactitude comme un facteur déterminant pour le faire, mais ont plutôt donné la priorité à d'autres préoccupations, telles que la liberté d'expression et la promotion d'une diversité de points de vue.

**Mots clés :** changement climatique ; scepticisme à l'égard du changement climatique ; déni de la science du climat ; désinformation ; théorie du gatekeeping ; médias de masse ; désinformation.



# INTRODUCTION

In 2021, a self-published book became an unlikely bestseller in Amazon's environmental science category, accompanied by hundreds of five-star reviews praising its "non-sensational reasoning," "reliable and truthful analysis," and use of "factual evidence" (Beaton, 2021; Herman, 2021; Montgomery, 2021). In just 237 pages, it discussed a cornucopia of headlining issues: from climate change and species extinction to ocean acidification and wildfires. However, unlike many other environmental science books on similar topics, the book did not discuss how those forces could threaten our own species and the sundry species with which we share this planet. Instead, its author, former Greenpeace leader and prominent climate science rejectionist Patrick Moore, described them as *Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom*, the title of his book.

Its success has been the result of the support it received from of a constellation of conservative and climate science rejecting groups, major ecommerce companies, and members of the mainstream news media, including Canada's largest newspaper chain, as well as two televised talk shows: one, which was backed by a leading West Coast university; and the other, which is rebroadcast on PBS stations across the United States. This case study will demonstrate how the diverse gatekeepers of our modern information ecosystem, which stretches beyond newsrooms to include civil society groups, private businesses, and public institutions, too often failed to make accuracy a determinant in their decisions to broadcast, publish, platform, or otherwise publicize Moore's fake invisible catastrophes argument. That failure means Moore was able to use these platforms to build a ladder of legitimacy that took this argument from the fringes of the Internet to a wider and more mainstream audience.

The end result is the contamination of that ecosystem, jeopardizing the informed decision-making that is a notionally part of our democratic political system. When that decision-making is cast into the hazard, decisiveness in the public and private spheres can be forestalled in favour of delay, and, most dangerously, disregard. We have seen that in our response to the

pandemic, as misinformation and disinformation has compromised health measures in many jurisdictions around the world (Butcher, 2021). And we have seen that in our response to climate change, which is still not being treated with the urgency it demands (McKie, 2021). However, as this case study will also demonstrate, what is less visible is how that contamination can be stopped.

## METHODOLOGY

Gatekeeping theory, as first articulated by Lewin (1947), postulates the behaviour of individuals and organizations can be understood as the outcome of a series of "in" or "out" decisions or impartial rules. That happens at gates along social channels leading to that behaviour. Hence, those responsible for such decisions, which are influenced by forces within those channels, are gatekeepers. Lewin suggested this model could be applied to "the travelling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group" (1947, p. 145). This suggestion was then actualized by White (1950) in his seminal paper "The 'Gate Keeper': A Case Study in the Selection of News," which examined the reasons a wire editor of a morning newspaper, in an industrialized mid-West city, used and rejected stories that crossed his desk over a seven-day period.

Since then, gatekeeping theory has been an important lens by which mass communication scholars view the news media and, more broadly, how news messages are selected and disseminated (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). That theory has also been used to understand gatekeepers outside of newsrooms, which has been particularly important as a result of the proliferation of Internet-based self-publishing and self-broadcasting tools, including blogging and social media platforms (DeJuliis, 2015).

In recent years, there has been criticisms of gatekeeping theory in communications scholarship, with O'Sullivan et al. (1994, p. 127) dismissing it as "oversimplified and of little utility." However, the application of gatekeeping theory persists and is appropriate in this case study for two reasons (DeJuliis, 2015). First, the study examines the choices gatekeepers made or did not make in platforming Moore's fake invisible catastrophes

argument, consistent with the theory's focus on understanding "under what conditions these personnel make their decisions" (Hartley, 2019, pp. 144-5). As a result, it facilitates individual and organizational accountability, whether political or journalistic. Secondly, gatekeeping theory recognizes "people want information checked, evaluated, and edited for them by professionals" (Hartley, 2019, p. 145). Therefore, by acknowledging the value of that process and the fact gatekeepers "primary professional function is to make objective, impartial decisions," this theory is best positioned to analyze when there are failures to do so (O'Sullivan et al., 1994, p. 126).

Such failures matter because classical democratic theory assumes citizens will use information to make "wiser decisions" about government (Berelson, 1952, p. 317-8, see also Davis, 1964, pp. 37-9; Dahl, 1989, pp. 99-100). By extension, misinformation can jeopardize that process, since it is impossible to make wiser decisions with inaccurate material. Yet how often do gatekeepers guard against the spread of misinformation within the context of the fraught debate about climate change?

This study explores that question by examining the dissemination of Moore's argument about fake invisible catastrophes. To do so, investigative reporting techniques were used to assemble a narrative of that dissemination, drawing on archival and contemporaneous news media coverage of Moore and records related to speeches he has given about that argument, as well as interviews with participants in its dissemination, including Moore himself.

The material for this case study was collected for a journalistic project undertaken for the award-winning, British Columbia-based online magazine *The Tyee*, which found Moore misinterpreted the findings of scientists he cited to support his fake invisible catastrophes argument (Holman, 2021a, 2021c).

## ACTIVISM TO INACTIVISM

**T**he story of the dissemination of that argument begins in the early Seventies. Back then, Moore had earned a doctoral degree from the University of British Columbia's

faculty of forests after writing a thesis on how mining pollution was being administered in the province (Moore, 1974). He now refers to that degree as a doctorate in ecology (Moore, n.d.). Around the same time, Moore became an environmental activist. He describes himself as one of Greenpeace's co-founders, a title the group contests (Greenpeace, 2010; Moore, n.d.). What is uncontested is he was the president of Greenpeace Canada, as well as a director with Greenpeace International (Moore, n.d.).

Since leaving Greenpeace in 1986, Moore has, in his own words, helped "guide governments and industries into sensible policies that would improve their environmental performance without driving them into bankruptcy" (Moore, 2021a, p. 6). He has also gained significant publicity for contesting the fact that human activity and carbon dioxide emissions are the main causes of the climate change we are now experiencing, which is how this case study will use the term climate science rejectionist when describing Moore in this study (Moore, 2021a, pp. 27-84). This definition is important since Moore has complained when the news media has referred to him as climate denier, even as he has admitted to be a "partial denier" (Moore, 2018b). The core of these complaints is his belief that the term is "culturally associated with the Holocaust...That is why this slur is used to discredit those of us who know the long history of [the] climate" (Moore, 2019b).

Regardless, his views would have found an easy home at Canada's climate science rejecting Frontier Centre for Public Policy and the similarly-minded Heartland Institute in the United States, where Moore is listed as senior fellow and policy advisor, respectively (Frontier Centre for Public Policy, n.d.; Heartland Institute, n.d.). However, he is most active as the director and past chair of the Arlington, Va.-based CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition, which aims to educate the "thought leaders, policy makers and the public about the important contribution made by carbon dioxide to our lives and the economy" (CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition, n.d.). Moore's own educational work included making headlines two years ago with a viral tweet calling Democratic House Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez a "pompous twit" for supporting the Green New Deal, which he alleged would lead to "mass death" (as cited in Niemietz, 2019).

That position is consistent with the belief he outlines in his book that humans have “not actually altered the climate in any way out of the ordinary and there is no hard evidence that we will. The climate of Earth today is not at all unusual for an interglacial period” (Moore, 2021a, p. 77). In fact, in 2019, scientists concluded there is a 99.9971 per cent chance the hard evidence that human activities are responsible for global warming at the Earth’s surface is correct, a finding published in one of the world’s most prestigious peer-reviewed scientific journals, *Nature* (Santer et al., 2019).

Outside climate circles, Moore has defended a range of products and industries around the world, including genetically engineered foods, nuclear power and polyvinyl chloride (Moore, n.d.). However, he is perhaps best known for telling a French documentary filmmaker “you can drink a whole quart of [the herbicide glyphosate] and it won’t hurt you” (Moreira, 2014). He then refused to do that when the filmmaker offered him a glass of the chemical, which has been classified as probably carcinogenic to humans (International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2015). The video of that exchange went viral and was widely reported around the world (Matthews, 2015).

## INVISIBLE AND REMOTE THREATS

Moore’s more recent contribution to science rejectionism is *Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom* (2021). The book was released on Amazon’s American and Canadian stores in January, 2021. However, the book’s story actually begins with an essay of the same title that was written in August 2018 and revised in June 2019. In that essay, Moore argues, “The majority of alleged environmental threats and catastrophes are invisible or very remote, thus making it virtually impossible for the average person to validate them through observation” (Moore, 2018a).

Among the sixteen invisible threats he dismisses or diminishes in his book or essay are farmed salmon, genetically modified foods, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, nuclear radiation,

pesticide residue, and undersea volcanoes (Moore, 2018a, 2019b, 2021a). But the other ten threats are all climate change-related, including coral reef deaths, species extinction, species endangerment, and ocean acidification. Indeed, climate change as a whole is the most prominent of the eleven fake invisible catastrophes catalogued in his book, which describes carbon dioxide as “the scapegoat of blame for an entire laundry list of negative effects” (Moore, 2021a, p. 6).

Before that book was published, Moore took his message on the road. The first speech he gave about fake invisible threats was in November 2018 to OKC Town Hall, an Oklahoma City forum for “nationally recognized speakers” (Oklahoma City Town Hall, n.d.). Other forums for that presentation included the July 2019 annual meeting of Doctors for Disaster Preparedness, a Tucson, Ariz.-based group that promotes climate skepticism (Hickman, 2010). His speech was recorded and has been viewed more than 43,000 times on YouTube, as of July 1, 2021 (Friends of Science, 2020). At that meeting, other presenters spoke on topics such as “Technocracy: the road to a ‘scientific’ dictatorship,” “Induced abortion: The modern anthropogenic plague,” and “If not Oswald, who killed President Kennedy and why?” (Doctors for Disaster Preparedness, 2019).

But that association with conspiracy theories did not stop Moore from almost getting his message out to a more mainstream audience soon after. He was booked through the National Speakers Bureau to deliver a keynote address at a conference organized by the local government of Regina, the capital city of the Canadian prairie province of Saskatchewan (Ackerman, 2020). That conference was intended to help the city achieve its goal of having “operations, facilities, and [a vehicle] fleet that are 100 per cent renewable by 2050” (City of Regina, n.d.).

At the time, Regina city councillor Mike O’Donnell told reporters the topic of Moore’s speech was to have been “A Sustainable Energy Future” (as cited in Ackerman, 2020a). Soon, concerns were raised about the appropriateness of Moore speaking at the event (Melnychuk, 2020). Then he was interviewed on popular talk radio station 650 CKOM, where he told right-wing host John Gormley he would actually be discussing “Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of



Doom” (John Gormley Show, 2020).

Two days after being interviewed by Gormley, Moore’s keynote was cancelled, although the City said he still pocketed the \$5,700 deposit on his \$10,000 speaking fee (Ackerman, 2020b). “Actually, I don’t want to be part of such a stupid exercise,” Moore tweeted when that news broke. “It’s impossible to make a city 100% renewable” (Moore, 2020a).

He was not de-platformed for long. Moore announced he had been “RE-platformed in REgina” by Ezra Levant, the “rebel commander” of the far-right Canadian media outlet Rebel News (Moore, 2020b). In promoting that speech, Levant told his viewers it would take place the night before the Reimagine Conference at the Conexus Arts Centre, which had hosted controversial psychologist Jordan Peterson two years prior. “I knew we’d be a good fit if they were cool with Dr. Peterson,” Levant said. “They just wanted us to hire some extra security that night” (Rebel News, 2020).

That event was rescheduled for March 30, 2021. It was ultimately cancelled as a result of Saskatchewan’s pandemic restrictions (Gunn Reid, 2021). However, Moore also found a similarly receptive audience for his message at the Oregon Logging Conference, where he spoke to “500 loggers and foresters” after the cancellation of his speech in Regina (Moore, 2020c). The conference’s president lauded him as “knowledgeable in the facts and real science of our environment unlike much of the current ‘best available’ information which is more often than not, politically or agenda driven” (Oregon Logging Conference, n.d.).

Nevertheless, in a letter to the editor of the *Eugene Weekly*, one activist who protested Moore’s appearance wrote the “entire event bore little resemblance to a professional convention,” with speakers who “warned that cap and trade and endangered species protection threatened rural families’ way of life” and “demonized effete urban democrats and unpatriotic, lazy activists” (Watson, 2020). Moore contributed to that demonizing.

According to his own account of that protest, when eight to ten demonstrators “stood up screaming, ‘FALSE,’” he asked the audience to “forcibly remove them...I went short of asking the audience to injure them badly...The retards do not have a right to interfere with my right to free

speech, as long as it is not defamatory or hateful” (Moore 2020c; Moore 2020d).

## CLIMATE SKEPTICISM AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE BESTSELLER

Moore also exercised that right by turning his fake invisible catastrophes essay into a book project thanks to the time provided by the COVID-19 lockdown. He launched a crowdfunding campaign for it in September 2020, promising funders he would deliver a “hard-hitting, fact-based debunking of [the] most outrageous claims about climate, polar bears, coral reefs, GMOs, forests, etc.” (Moore, 2020e).

As examples of his work, he touted his previous book, *Confessions of a Greenpeace Dropout: The Making of a Sensible Environmentalist*, and videos featuring him that were produced for Prager University, an American non-profit that is not actually an accredited academic institution but instead promotes conservative ideas to teenagers and post-secondary students (Bowles, 2020; Moore, 2020e). That sales pitch raised more than \$26,000 of its \$30,000 goal to pay for a publicist and book designer (Moore, 2020e). The top contribution was from a \$8,787 anonymous donor (Moore, 2020e). Other top contributors included Robert Bebb [\$2,000], who ran as a candidate for the far-right People’s Party of Canada in the 2019 federal election (Bebb, 2021; Moore, 2020e).

However, two weeks after a media request was placed with GoFundMe about Moore’s campaign and whether the platform had any policies prohibiting fundraising for projects such as this, the company removed it. “Cancel-culture at work,” Moore tweeted (Moore, 2021e). For its part, a GoFundMe spokesperson stated Moore’s campaign was removed because it promoted misinformation, violating their terms of service (as cited in Holman, 2021a). Amazon has taken a different approach.

In mid-February 2021, *Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom*, charted as the fifteenth most sold and read book on Amazon.ca (Amazon, n.d.). It has also been listed in both Amazon’s Canadian and American shops as a



Number 1 best-seller in the environmental science category. Asked about those sales and the book's categorization, a company spokesperson wrote, "As a bookseller, we believe that providing access to the written word is important and have policies that outline what products may be sold in our stores" (as cited in Holman, 2021d).

Those policies do not include any restrictions on the sale or promotion of climate science rejectionism, misinformation, or disinformation. Instead, censorship seems to be the foremost concern for Amazon, with its spokesperson saying the company is "mindful of a global history fraught with book censorship, and we do not take this lightly" (as cited in Holman, 2021d). The spokesperson did not respond to a question about how selling climate skepticism is consistent with founder Jeff Bezos's climate change commitments (Gamboa, 2021; as cited in Holman, 2021d; Siegel & Greene, 2019).

At first, Moore's book was promoted by conservative media outlets and climate skeptic groups such as Real Clear Markets, Rebel News, and Watts Up With That? (Moore, 2021b; Rebel News, 2021; Rotter, 2021) But then, Canada's national newspaper chain, Postmedia, mainstreamed it.

## NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PROMOTES BOOK WITH TAXPAYER HELP

Postmedia has a record of publishing climate science rejectionists and pumping up the oil and gas industry on its comment pages. In fact, a conspiratorial report commissioned for the Canadian province of Alberta's controversial public inquiry into "anti-Alberta energy campaigns" singled out Postmedia's flagship publication, the *National Post*, for featuring "editorial and commentator content that is generally critical of the energy transition" away from fossil fuels (Nemeth, 2020). That report also included multiple references to articles written by *National Post* columnists Terrance Corcoran and Rex Murphy, the latter of whom told attendees on a webinar, "You have to defy the conventional idea that if you deny global warming you are some sort of benighted Neanderthal" (Canada Strong and Free Network, 2021; Nemeth, 2020)

Nevertheless, Postmedia's publications are still nominally considered mainstream news outlets in

Canada. The company stated mission is to keep Canadians "in the know with ambitious, trusted and high-quality journalism" (Postmedia Network Canada, n.d.) Its publications also belong to the National NewsMedia Council, a voluntary, self-regulatory body that polices news industry ethics in Canada (National NewsMedia Council, n.d.). So, against that backdrop, it was surprising when the *National Post's* business section, the *Financial Post*, ran an op-ed from Moore promoting his book on February 10 (Moore, 2021c).

In it, the former Greenpeace leader expounded on his argument that the environmental catastrophes we face today are "fake news and fake science" (Moore, 2021c). As an example, Moore claimed "the Great Barrier Reef is alive and well," despite a recent study by James Cook University's ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies (2020) that found it has "lost half its corals in the past three decades" (Australia Research Council, 2020; Moore, 2021c). The *National Post* had actually published news of that study, along with a story about the International Union for Conservation of Nature raising the World Heritage-listed site's status to "critical" from "significant concern" (Reuters, 2020a, 2020b).

Moore then ended his op-ed, which prominently featured his book's cover art, by promising the "main attraction" of *Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom* would be his belief CO<sub>2</sub> will not wreak "havoc on an unsuspecting planet and all species of life thereon" (Moore, 2021c). Asked about Postmedia's decision to publish that op-ed, the company's communication vice-president Phyllise Gelfand wrote, "It was a commentary and no one paid Postmedia to publish it. We publish a variety of opinions" (as cited in Holman, 2021c). She did not respond to a question about the process the *Financial Post* took to verify the op-ed's claims prior to publication, although Moore said he got a "good edit" (as cited in Holman, 2021c).

That edit was partially bankrolled by Canadian taxpayers. In the year ended August 31, 2020, Postmedia received \$10.8 million in journalism tax credits from Canada's federal and Quebec governments under a scheme to bailout the country's floundering news industry (Postmedia Network Canada, 2020). However, to qualify for those tax credits, Postmedia must produce "original news content," which includes commentaries, "based

on journalistic processes and principles,” with one of them being a “commitment to researching and verifying information before publication” (Canada Revenue Agency, n.d.)

## MOORE APPEARS ON A UNIVERSITY-SUPPORTED TALK SHOW

Nor was this the only support Moore’s argument received from the public sector. In February, the televised talk show *Conversations That Matter* featured him as a guest (Conversations That Matter, 2021a). At the time, that show was a partner program of the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, a conference facility at Vancouver, Canada’s Simon Fraser University that promotes “dialogue and engagement” to “increase mutual understanding and identify shared solutions” (Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, n.d.-b). The show’s subject: “Do catastrophic predictions come true?”

Stuart McNish, a veteran Vancouver broadcast reporter who formerly worked for one of Canada’s highest-rated television newscasts, started *Conversations That Matter* in 2014 (The Vancouver Sun, 2014). In October of that year, the Postmedia-owned *Vancouver Sun*, which is the largest broadsheet in British Columbia, announced the show would be available each week on its website (The Vancouver Sun, 2014). The newspaper wrote “initial funding for the program has come from a group of supporters who believe the show fills a need, and by contributions from viewers who wish to join in” (The Vancouver Sun, 2014). The *Sun* did not disclose who those supporters were. However, it did say the show would allow “leaders in their professions to take us inside their worlds on a wide range of topics” (*Vancouver Sun*, 2014).

According to his LinkedIn profile, McNish became an associate with the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue in November 2014 (McNish, n.d.). By 2015, *Conversations That Matter*’s opening was branding it as one the centre’s partner programs (Conversations That Matter, 2015d). In an email, the centre’s executive director Shauna Sylvester wrote McNish raises the funding for the show himself, although those monies “do come through Simon Fraser University” (as cited in Holman, 2021c).

As of July 1, 2021, the show had more than

600 videos and 22,000 subscribers on YouTube (Conversations That Matter, n.d.). A search of that channel, as well as *Vancouver Sun* archives, indicates McNish has had climate activists and scientists and on his show, with the later including University of British Columbia’s Simon Donner and Sara Harris, as well as Greg Flato, who was the lead author for chapters in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s fourth and fifth assessment reports (Conversations That Matter, 2015a, 2019a, 2019b).

However, his show has also featured guests who have discussed their climate science rejectionism, including Friends of Science communications manager Michelle Stirling, Princeton University physicist Freeman Dyson, and Trump administration National Security Council appointee William Happer, who co-founded the CO<sub>2</sub> Coalition that Moore helps (Conversations That Matter, 2015b, 2015c, 2020b). Prior to his most recent appearance, Moore had twice been a guest on *Conversations That Matter* (Conversations That Matter, 2016, 2017). “I think he thinks I’m a conversation that matters,” Moore said. “He gets a lot of heat for interviewing me” (as cited in Holman, 2021c).

During his 2021 appearance, Moore accused journalists and scientists of “making up so-called narratives that are fake” (Conversations That Matter, 2021a). Moore also claimed it was “extremist to say that humans are the main factor in the changing climate of Earth because it has changed a lot more before humans were even here” (Conversations That Matter, 2021a). Instead, he attributed recent changes to a “gentle warming period” that has occurred since the Little Ice Age (Conversations That Matter, 2021a). “We are [a] tropical species. So warming of the Earth will not really be that big of a problem for human beings” (Conversations That Matter, 2021a).

McNish did not respond to a question about why he did not challenge Moore’s positions (Holman, 2021a). In the past, he has said “being tough on my guests is not what *Conversations* is all about” (Conversations That Matter, 2020a). Nor would he consent to an interview unless it was on his show (as cited in Holman, 2021a). The Wosk Centre’s executive director, Shauna Sylvester, was more communicative. In an email, she wrote, “I’d hope we were beyond climate denial” (Holman,

2021a). That said, Sylvester added her centre does not practice “editorial control” over *Conversations That Matter* (as cited in Holman, 2021a).

For its part, the *Vancouver Sun* does practice editorial control over what it promotes and publishes on its website, which included the episode *Conversations That Matter* featuring Moore (McNish, 2021). Yet, when Simon Fraser University communications professor Robert Hackett expressed concern about that decision, the newspaper’s editor-in-chief Harold Munro told him, that while there is “no dispute” that climate change is real, “there is room for legitimate debate on our editorial pages about the best solutions, pace of change and fairness in sharing the financial and social burden” (as cited in Holman, 2021c).

Since the *Conversations That Matter* episode featuring Moore was aired, the show has posted a “revised” version of it that no longer includes the Wosk Centre’s logo (*Conversations That Matter*, 2021b). Subsequent episodes do not have that logo either. As of July 1, 2021, *Conversations That Matter* remained listed as one of the centre’s partner programs on its website (Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, n.d.-a). At the time of publishing this article, it is now listed as a “past program.” Neither McNish, who no longer lists himself as a Wosk Centre associate, nor Sylvester responded to a request for comment about those changes (as cited in Holman, 2021a). However, this was not the last time Moore’s fake invisible catastrophes argument would be given a mainstream audience.

## PBS PLATFORMS “FAKE INVISIBLE CATASTROPHES”

Two months after his *Conversations That Matter* appearance, the former Greenpeace leader was featured on *Canada Files*, a television program presented by WNED, the public broadcaster that serves Buffalo, NY and Toronto, Ont. (Deeks, 2021). The half-hour program, which is rebroadcast on other PBS stations across the United States, premiered in 2020 to “give American audiences an opportunity to become aware of and appreciate Canadian heritage through the many guests they already know” (Schneekloth, 2020). Jim Deeks, a former news anchor at Canadian national broadcaster CTV’s Toronto affiliate, interviews those guests as the show’s host and executive

producer. Prior to Moore’s appearance, its roster included luminaries ranging from author Margaret Atwood and musician Robbie Robertson, to astronaut Chris Hadfield and former Chief Justice of Canada Beverley McLachlin (*Canada Files*, n.d.-a).

Deeks, who served as executive director of the Canadian Open Golf Championship after he left CTV and was a former advertising agency copywriter, said he interviewed Moore after he was “identified to me as a person with a different perspective on climate change” (*Canada Files*, n.d.-b, Holman, 2021b). Prior to that interview, Deeks said he did “fairly extensive research into [Moore’s] background and credentials, read some of his previous articles, and watched an interview that he did about two years ago with [fellow climate science rejectionist] Rex Murphy” (as cited in Holman, 2021b). From that research, Deeks “found his views compelling, even if I didn’t agree with them, and in view of his educational and Greenpeace credentials, I felt that he was a valid candidate for our show” (as cited in Holman, 2021b).

During that show, Moore claimed the climate was changing “very slowly” compared to the “way climate has changed in the past,” despite the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluding the rate of warming is “much more rapid and very unusual in the context” of the temperature changes over the past million years (Deeks, 2021). Moore also incorrectly claimed there is “no actual proof” carbon dioxide emissions and fossil fuel use has anything to do with that warming (Deeks, 2021). He further claimed “climate change has sort of become what I would describe [as] a rather toxic combination of extreme left ideology and warped science” and that there was not a consensus among scientists that human activity is the main cause of global warming when, in fact, there is (Deeks, 2021).

Occasionally, Deeks gently questioned Moore’s claims. However, Deeks stated, “I also respect our viewers, and believe that they are intelligent and mature enough to make up their own minds about an alternative view. And, for that matter, who’s to say with absolute certainty that Patrick’s views are all wrong?” (as cited in Holman, 2021a, 2021b). Deeks also added that, since environmentalist David Suzuki had appeared on *Canada Files* the



previous year, he had “already presented the views of mainstream science on the issue of climate change” (as cited in Holman, 2021a).

Nor did WNED seem particularly concerned with its platforming and publicity of Moore’s fake invisible catastrophes argument. In an email, the station’s senior director of corporate communications, Heather Hare, said those views, and others expressed on the show, do “not necessarily represent those of WNED” and that the station believes “strongly in the free expression of ideas” and their debate, with Moore’s episode representing “less than 30 minutes of hundreds of hours of programming” (as cited in Holman, 2021a).

## ANALYSIS

Cumulatively, such responses demonstrate the information ecosystem gatekeepers responsible for broadcasting, publishing, platforming, or publicizing Moore’s fake invisible catastrophes argument often failed to make its accuracy a determining factor in whether to do so. What is striking, is that these failures took place in an environment of heightened concern about climate change and the effect of misinformation and disinformation on democratic discourse, as demonstrated by social media crackdowns on those who have alleged voter fraud during the 2019 American presidential election or denied expert guidance about COVID-19. They also took place in an environment where those gatekeepers knew or should have known about Moore’s lengthy history as a climate science rejectionist, quite apart from the scientific invalidity of many statements made in the book. Indeed, when the lead authors of the mainstream scientific studies Moore referenced to support his arguments were contacted, each of those who responded provided detailed explanations of how the former Greenpeace leader had misinterpreted their findings or conclusions (as cited in Holman, 2021a).

The only decision-makers who appear to have been concerned about the inaccurate nature of Moore’s arguments were GoFundMe and the City of Regina. However, GoFundMe’s termination of his crowdsource funding campaign only happened after it had been platformed for five months and

was brought to their attention (Holman, 2021a). Similarly, Regina’s cancellation of Moore’s appearance at its sustainability conference only happened after the public criticized the city for platforming him (Ackerman, 2020a). In other words, GoFundMe and the City of Regina closed the gate on the former Greenpeace only after they had let him through.

In some cases, these decisions were not surprising. We would not expect decision-makers associated with climate science rejecting groups to close the gate on material supporting their beliefs. Nor would we expect that from those associated with conservative groups, given how evidence denialism has increasingly become one of the modern right’s defining features. However, we should expect better from the world’s biggest bookseller and e-book self-publisher [Amazon], a leading post-secondary institution [Simon Fraser University], the Government of Canada, and members of the mainstream new media [Conversations That Matter, the *Financial Post*, the *Vancouver Sun*, Canada Files, and WNED]. In accounting for their decisions to broadcast, publish, platform, or publicize Moore’s argument about fake invisible catastrophes, other forces appear to have taken precedence over the accuracy of that information. In public statements, his facilitators cited opposition to censorship and promoting a diversity of perspectives as their reasons for doing so.

Since that dissemination occurred, Moore’s fake invisible catastrophes argument has been spread even further by conservative media groups. For example, in April, he promoted his book on a talk show hosted by Denis Prager, the founder of an influential American online “university” that promotes conservative ideas to teenagers (The Dennis Prager Show, 2021). A month later, he appeared on Sky News to drum up readers in Australia, telling its audience, “The climate in this interglacial period, the last 10,000 years during which civilization occurred, is no different today than it has been throughout that whole period” (Smith, 2021). Soon after, the Washington Times featured *Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom* in its Inside the Beltway column (Harper, 2021). Two days later, the *Epoch Times* published a news story about the book (Teo, 2021). And, more recently, the *American Spectator* reviewed



*Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom*, describing it as the book to give “intelligent young people in your family who parrot the received wisdom about climate change but whose minds are not yet set in progressive stone” (Isaac, 2021).

Moore is aware that decisions to broadcast, publish, platform, or publicize his argument could encourage other gatekeepers to do the same thing, helping him build a ladder of legitimacy to reach ever larger audiences. When the *National Post* published his op-ed promoting fake invisible catastrophes, he sent a tweet to Miranda Devine, a Fox News contributor with bylines in the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Daily Telegraph* and *New York Post*, that read, “NatPost in Canada ran my op-ed today. Would love to write one for NY Post or do an interview. Timely. 21 Five-star reviews” (2021d). That has not happened so far. However, when the *Epoch Times* covered *Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom*, Moore wrote, “This is a breakthrough for the book and will hopefully see it in much wider distribution” (2021f). And he knows each positive review of his book does the same thing, writing, declaring, “93% of more than 1,000 reviews on Amazon are 4- 5-Star” (2021g).

That wider distribution matters because, according to a recent poll conducted by Vancouver, BC-based Research Co., 30% of Canadians and 39% of Americans think global warming is mostly caused by natural changes or is a theory that has not yet been proven (Canesco, 2020). That number is even higher among the residents of Alberta [38%], as well as among those who voted Conservative in Canada’s last federal election [52%] or are registered Republicans [62%] (Canesco, 2020). Moore’s argument and those like it only serve to fortify these beliefs. In doing so, these works can delay climate action in the face of mounting evidence of disaster.

Yet, that is not how Moore would likely perceive himself or what he is doing. In his autobiography *Confessions of a Greenpeace Dropout: The Making of a Sensible Environmentalist*, he wrote, “The greatest flaw in the more extreme environmental rhetoric is the tendency to characterize humans as a disease on the earth. This, in combination with doomsday predictions, causes people, especially young people, to give up hope for the future. Nothing could undermine more our prospects for finding solutions to environmental problems”

(2013, p. 494). The provision of such hope is surely what Moore believes he is doing with his fake invisible catastrophes argument, even as he denigrates those he disagrees with, while sometimes ascribing unsavory motivations to them. We are all heroes in our own stories, with anyone but ourselves playing the villain. And, in Moore’s words, you can hear the echoes of the Greenpeace leader he once was.

After all, this is the same person who wrote a rebuttal in 1971 to a *Vancouver Sun* op-ed by a University of British Columbia faculty member who complained how it had become “politically fashionable to warn people about some ecological disaster” and obtain lots of publicity, “only to find out that there wasn’t any ecological disaster as first imagined” (Parsons, 1971). The faculty member referenced reports about the dangers of DDT, mercury contamination, dam construction and nuclear weapons testing as examples of “alarmist articles and pronouncements” (Parsons, 1971). In response, Moore, then a graduate student at that same university, wrote that the op-ed required “considerable comment as it is loaded throughout with misinformation and distortion, just what he is accusing the ‘environmentologists’ (*sic*) and journalists of doing in their reporting of ecological problems” (Moore, 1971).

Yet, exactly 50 years later, Moore has switched roles. He has gone from telling *Washington Post* readers just a few years ago that carbon dioxide is the “primary greenhouse gas responsible” for “catastrophic climate change,” to rejecting that fact, as well as the scientific consensus surrounding it (2006). Those who decided to broadcast, publish, platform, or publicize Moore’s fake invisible catastrophes argument have functionally done the same thing. In doing so, they seem oblivious to the risk that if citizens and our representatives replace facts with alternative facts, we will end up governing an alternate reality that bears little resemblance to the one under threat by so many ails.

There are no easy or quick answers here. We are all out of those. However, the pressing problems of today cannot be solved by a strict and reactionary adherence to the principles and practices of yesterday, such as promoting freedom of expression and so-called balanced coverage at the cost of platforming misinformation and

disinformation. Such an approach can only lead to a darker tomorrow that will dramatically disprove Moore's thesis that we have nothing to fear from all the too visible catastrophes that are even now afflicting us. The only way of keeping that darkness from overwhelming us is if the gatekeepers of our modern information

ecosystem use accuracy as a determinant in their platforming decisions, helping buttress support for the evidence-based policies could help preserve our history and protect our future.



*Note: Sean Holman published a research report on journalism and climate change in 2021 that included Facts & Frictions editor Patricia Elliott as a co-author. Dr. Elliott did not participate in the review of this article.*

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# Addressing Deficits with Crowdfunded Journalism

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## Abstract

Crowdfunding has emerged as an alternative revenue model in response to the diminishing of journalism's 150-year-old advertising-based model (Gasher et al., 2016; McChesney & Pickard, 2011; Public Policy Forum, 2017). Crowdfunding's ability to help replace the previous financial paradigm depends on understanding how best to make direct financial solicitations to news audiences. This study conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 Canadian journalists to understand how practitioners are crafting value propositions to optimize the success of the crowdfunding revenue model. Results indicate that respondents' value propositions are based primarily on the democratic value of news and the negative impact the financial decline of journalism has on democratic society.

**Keywords:** crowdfunding, media business, alternative media, journalism enterprises

## Résumé

*Remédier aux déficits grâce au journalisme à financement participatif*

Le financement participatif (crowdfunding) est apparu comme un modèle de revenus alternatif face à la diminution du modèle du journalisme basé sur la publicité, vieux de 150 ans (Gasher et al., 2016 ; McChesney & Pickard, 2011 ; Public Policy Forum, 2017). La capacité du crowdfunding à permettre le remplacement du paradigme financier précédent dépend de la compréhension de la meilleure façon de faire des sollicitations financières directes aux audiences des nouvelles. Cette étude a mené des entretiens approfondis semi-structurés auprès de 10 journalistes canadiens afin de comprendre comment les praticiens élaborent des propositions de valeur pour optimiser le succès du modèle de revenu du crowdfunding. Les résultats indiquent que les propositions de valeur des répondants sont basées principalement sur la valeur démocratique des nouvelles et sur l'impact négatif du déclin financier du journalisme sur la société démocratique.

**Mots clés :** financement participatif, entreprise en médias, médias alternatifs, entreprises de journalisme

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he introduction of the World Wide Web and digital transformation of publishing from the 1990s onward undermined the technical and economic relationships supporting print journalism's 150-year-old advertising-based business model (i.e. Downie & Schudson, 2009; Public Policy Forum, 2017; McChesney & Pickard, 2011). As the public migrated to consuming news through digital media on the internet, news companies saw a precipitous erosion of their

print advertising income at the same time as they were struggling to monetize their online content (Kammer *et al.*, 2015). This financial decline in legacy news media has led to numerous rounds of layoffs and cutbacks in the industry worldwide (Usher, 2010).

This "systemic market failure" (Pickard, 2020, p. 58) has widely been described as a crisis (Aamidor, et al., 2013; Chyi et al., 2012; Kaye & Quinn, 2010; Picard, 2014; Pickard, 2011; Public Policy Forum, 2017; Siles & Boczkowski, 2012), although others dispute the use of this term as it

obscures the role of poor corporate management (Gasher *et al.*, 2016). Nonetheless, what seems certain is that the long-term survival of the journalism industry requires devising new non-advertising-based revenue models and replacing lost advertising revenue through other means. Indeed, the failure of the advertising model has prompted a search within journalism for alternative business models (Chyi, 2005, 2012; Graybeal & Hayes, 2011; Jian & Usher, 2014; Ladson & Lee, 2017; Siles & Boczkowski, 2012; Zaripova, 2017).

One recent consequence of this is a renewed interest in direct audience revenue models, such as subscriptions, as opposed to models that produce revenue by “selling” audiences to advertisers (Chyi & Ng, 2020; Graybeal & Hayes, 2011). A subset of journalists is experimenting with crowdfunding, which can be described as “an open call to provide financial resources” (Belleflamme *et al.*, 2015, p. 1) via the internet and, in the context of journalism, a “distributed funding model in which stories are funded by small donations or payments from a large crowd of people” (Aitamurto, 2015, p. 189). Crowdfunding requires practitioners to craft value propositions to appeal to their audiences. Following Payne *et al.*, this paper defines value proposition as a “strategic tool facilitating communication of an organization’s ability to share resources and offer a superior value package to targeted customers” (2017, p. 6). Thus, when crowdfunded journalists craft value propositions, they are intended to strategically communicate the superior value of the news those journalists produce.

If any alternative revenue model hopes to replace lost advertising revenue in the journalism industry and reverse the large scale cuts to staff and news coverage that came as a result, it is imperative that practitioners have a thorough understanding of how to optimize success and maximize revenue for any given model. Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand how current practitioners of crowdfunding in journalism are optimizing this strategy through crafting and testing value propositions. A further motivation for this study was the lack of existing literature specifically asking what crowdfunded journalists themselves think is the best way to appeal to potential financial supporters.

While fundraising directly from the audience is not a novel idea in news media (Aitamurto, 2011; Hunter, 2015), it has largely been unsuccessful in online news publishing. Only the largest and most well-known news brands such as *the New York Times* have recently succeeded in achieving financial sustainability through reader subscriptions (Scire, 2020a). Crowdfunding is a new permutation of the audience-revenue business model, facilitated by the transformation in digital communication technology (Achtenhagen, 2017). News publishers showed renewed interest in charging for access to their content during the financial crisis of 2008. These “paywall” restrictions frequently resulted in significant decline in overall traffic to news websites (Chyi, 2012). It remains true that “direct audience support for journalism has rarely proven viable by itself” (Olsen, Pickard, & Westlund, 2020, p. 3).

Crowdfunding business models appeal to contemporary journalism workers for reasons such as having agency in a labour market that is becoming more informalized and freelance-based or having a degree of autonomy that is not typical in larger newsrooms (Hunter, 2015; Achtenhagen, 2017). In the last decade, crowdfunding became increasingly popular as a way of funding projects in the cultural and creative industries, such as movie and music production (Bennett *et al.*, 2015; Shneor & Munim, 2019). A recent survey of cultural crowdfunding identified journalism as a theme unto itself, alongside four other thematic clusters, demonstrating the growing prevalence of journalism within the cultural crowdfunding sector (Rykkja *et al.*, 2020). The agency, autonomy, and direct access to audiences provided by the crowdfunding revenue model, and the growing size of cultural sector crowdfunding generally, indicates it will likely remain a recurring strategy for independent journalism for the foreseeable future, thus warranting the subject as a line of academic inquiry.

Based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 Canadian journalists, this study asks how participants craft their crowdfunding appeals, and how they feel this has impacted their success or failure. This article argues that respondents are conscious of their positions within a restructuring news media industry. The value propositions participants make to potential financial supporters



during their crowdfunding campaigns address how the public has been negatively affected by the economic decline of the news media industry. They appeal to their audience by saying they will replace the deficits created by a lack of quality journalism and thereby rejuvenate journalism's role in civic affairs and public accountability.

## WILLINGNESS TO PAY

News media initially responded to the arrival of the commercial World Wide Web in a "haphazard" way (Graybeal & Hayes, 2011, p. 130), and in the end the industry largely replicated its print advertising business model online and offered content for free to maximize audience size (Chyi, 2012; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2012). A 1999 survey of 64 online newspaper publishers in the United States found that around 80% generated revenue from online advertising, and only 3% were subscription-based (Chyi, 2012). Until 2011, the vast majority of newspapers gave their online content away for free (Chyi & Ng, 2020). In the past decade, there has been renewed interest in charging for online content, rather than generating revenue indirectly through advertising (Chyi & Ng, 2020; Graybeal & Hayes, 2011;). Without advertising revenue subsidizing the cost of producing and distributing the news, these costs "must be imposed onto consumers unless alternative revenues or subsidy sources are developed" (Olsen, Pickard, & Westlund, 2020, p. 3).

Newspaper audiences have never been expected to bear a significant portion of production costs (Kaye & Quinn, 2010), and "in many ways, advertising previously served as a subsidy for media organizations, with news and information a kind of by-product or positive externality resulting from the primary exchange between advertisers and newspapers" (Pickard, 2020, p. 6). Moreover, the public have come to expect online content to be free and changing that mindset has proven difficult (Carvajal et al., 2012; Chyi, 2005, 2012; Graybeal & Hayes, 2011; Halpape, 2011; Hunter, 2015; Kaye & Quinn, 2010; Ladson & Lee, 2017; Picard, 2000). A significant barrier to charging for general online news is that this type of news is widely available for free, so consumers will generally go elsewhere whenever there is an attempt to impose a fee (Chyi,

2005; 2012; Herbert & Thurman, 2007; Kammer *et al.*, 2015).

For those that are willing to pay, Price (2017) found that the cost did not impact willingness to pay, and "people who have positive attitudes about the media, and its potential role in society, tend to be more open to the idea of paying for online news" (p. 4). Relatedly, Chyi (2012) found that payment method and cost did not affect willingness to pay for online news and those who aren't willing to pay for news to begin with cannot be compelled by different prices, the only price they will accept is zero.

## CROWDFUNDING AS A REVENUE SOURCE FOR NEWS

The increasing prevalence of paywalls and digital subscriptions over the past decade indicates "a shift from the advertising model to 'reader revenue'" (Chyi & Ng, 2020, p. 3), of which crowdfunding is a subset. Crowdfunding is variously described as "an open call to provide financial resources" (Belleflamme et al., 2015, p. 1), or "the online request for resources from a distributed audience often in exchange for a reward" (Gerber & Hui, 2013, p. 1). The connectivity provided by the internet and social media, or internet publishing, is seen as the "main enabling factor" for crowdsourcing (Ghezzi, et al., 2018, p. 344). While the harnessing of "collective intelligence" in news media has long existed in the form of letters to the editor, for example, the rise of the internet has "added a whole new dimension to such citizen-media interactions" (Muthukumaraswamy, 2010, p. 48).

The crowdfunding business model originated primarily as a way of funding the research, development, and production of new technology and then became popular as a way of funding media projects such as movie productions and board games (Bennett et al., 2015; Shneor & Munim, 2019). Between 2009 and 2015, 658 journalism-related projects were posted on Kickstarter, a crowd-funding platform, raising around \$6.3 million, which is much less than other creative categories such as music or technology. Seventy-one percent of those 658 projects were produced by individuals not tied to any journalistic organization (Vogt & Mitchell, 2016).

There are four general types of crowdfunding:

reward, donation, equity, and lending (Aitamurto, 2015; Belleflamme et al., 2015; Shneor & Munim, 2019). These can be grouped into two classes which are quite different from each other: reward and donation, in which donors do not expect anything substantial in return; and equity and lending, wherein donors do expect significant returns (Belleflamme et al., 2015).

In reward-based crowdfunding, donors contribute in return for desirable perks, such as a meeting with the creator, or products and merchandise, often taking the form of pre-sales of the item being developed (Shneor & Munim, 2019). Reward and donation-based are the most common types of crowdfunding broadly, and this holds true for journalism specifically, although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between rewards-based and donation-based crowdfunding, as rewards are often trivial and symbolic (Belleflamme et al., 2015).

Additionally, there are four types of crowdfunding that take place within the journalism field: funding for a single story; for a continuous coverage/beat; for a new platform/publication; and for a service that supports journalism, such as travel expenses (Aitamurto, 2015). The earliest crowdfunding platform specifically for journalism was Spot.Us, launched in late 2008 (Aitamurto, 2011; Jian & Usher, 2014; Kaye & Quinn, 2010). Spot.Us was intended to determine “how reporting can thrive as we witness the death of the institutional model that traditionally supported it” (Kaye & Quinn, 2010, p. 66). Journalists posted story ideas and visitors funded the ones they wanted to see reported. Spot.Us limited the percentage of donations from any one individual to stop advocates and lobbyists, and published material under a creative commons license (Kaye & Quinn, 2010; Kershaw, 2008). Single stories could be bought by established news publications (Aitamurto, 2011). However, the project was bought by American Public Media in 2011 and closed in 2014 (Easton, 2015). Journalists have also used general crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo, not specifically designed for journalism, to raise funds for their work (Hunter, 2015; Carvajal et al., 2012; Liu, 2016; Aitamurto, 2011).

## MOTIVATIONS, SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Within crowdfunding research, questions about motivation are divided between those of the fundraisers or crowdfunders, and those of the donors. Gerber and Hui (2013) found crowdfunders in creative industries are motivated by an interest in raising funds through unconventional channels or gaining approval and a desire to expand awareness of their work and form connections with an audience or others engaged in similar work. Looking more specifically at journalism, Gerber and Hui (2013) and Hunter (2015) found that journalism crowdfunders are frequently motivated by a desire for autonomy (Gerber & Hui, 2013; Hunter, 2015). Hunter (2015) further found that journalism crowdfunders may be motivated by challenging the journalistic norm of objectivity and using crowdfunding to pursue advocacy journalism. Previous research on donor motivation in crowdfunded journalism found the reasons for contributing include: belief in an independent press or the civic role of investigative journalism and concern over declining rates of this kind of journalism (Harlow, 2020; Price 2017; Träsel & Fontoura, 2015); altruism or supporting a social cause (Aitamurto, 2015; 2011; Gerber & Hui, 2013; Jian & Shin, 2015); social influence or reciprocity [motivated to contribute if others have already contributed] (Agrawal et al., 2011; Borck et al., 2006; Burtch et al., 2013); a desire to be part of a community (Belleflamme et al., 2013a; Gehring & Wittkower, 2015; Gerber and Hui, 2013); and unique, specific content, as compared to general news coverage (Price, 2017).

Content category plays a role in crowdfunding campaign outcomes. Generally, news audiences are more likely to pay for, and news companies are more likely to charge for, content that is highly unique, and not available elsewhere (Herbert & Thurman, 2007; Price, 2017). Non-public affairs news such as arts & culture, lifestyle, technology and crime stories were more likely to be successfully crowdfunded than stories on politics, economics, or international affairs (Ladson & Lee, 2017). Goyanes found that for online news generally, people were more willing to pay for “entertainment and solutions” (2014, p. 753). Jian and Usher (2014) conclude that donors to crowdfunded journalism



prefer stories that supply practical guidance for everyday life, regarding public health or local city infrastructure for example, while reporters focused on general awareness with stories about government and politics. There is some indication of divergence in news consumption broadly, between what journalists consider newsworthy and what news audiences are willing to pay for or consider noteworthy (Boczkowski et al., 2011; Boczkowski & Peer, 2011; Ladson & Lee, 2017; Lee & Chyi, 2014). Lee (2013) found four categories of motivating choices for general news consumption: information, entertainment, opinion, and social.

Appeals to potential funders of cultural productions often exhibit more success when they are based on emotion rather than “rational considerations” (Rykkja et al., 2020, p. 425). Belleflamme et al. (2013b) found that non-profit organizations were more successful at crowdfunding than for-profit.

Jian and Shin (2015) found the only motivators associated with long-term, sustainable funding were fun or enjoyment, or donors wanting to support friends and family. Other research indicates early support from a crowdfunder’s immediate friends and family, or extended social network, and the crowdfunder’s “social capital” is important to success (Agrawal et al., 2011; Belleflamme et al., 2013a; Colombo et al., 2014; Davidson & Poor, 2016; Horvát et al., 2015; Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2018; Mollick, 2014; Zheng et al., 2014).

There are predictable patterns in the life cycle of a crowdfunding campaign which influence its success or failure. There is a persistent U-shaped pattern in donor support, with most contributions coming in the first and last weeks, and a strong deadline effect which drives contribution increase at the end (Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2018). Donor propensity increases as the campaign accumulates contributions (Agrawal et al., 2011), and potential donors may quickly lose interest if the campaign gets off to a “cold start” (Ward & Ramachandran, 2010). This is likely because “the number of prior contributors signals that a project is of high quality” (Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2018, p. 171). Donor perception of how impactful their contribution could be to meeting a goal also creates a deadline effect as a campaign approaches its goal but, once that goal is reached, contributions drop

off (Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2017). Other quality signals for crowdfunding include producing a promotional video, sending frequent updates to supporters, and a lack of typos or other indicators of unpreparedness or lack of care (Mollick, 2014; Shneor & Munim, 2019).

The motivation for this study was the lack of existing literature specifically asking what crowdfunded journalists think is the best way to appeal to potential financial supporters. The available literature had looked at the motivations of journalists who engage in crowdfunding, some works examined the motivations of donors, and some had looked at ways in which journalists compel their audience to become financial supporters, such as by offering rewards (Gerber & Hui, 2013; Hunter, 2016; Ladson & Lee). However, none have looked in depth at what crowdfunded journalists think are the best value propositions.

## METHODOLOGY

The data collection protocol went through an iterative process wherein the “interview guides [are] semi-structured during each phase but the content of the guides [is] driven by what is learned from each successive phase” (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012, p. 22). Data collection took place between May and September 2019. All interviews were conducted remotely, either by telephone or video chat, as the respondents were in cities across Canada.

The recruitment phase used theoretical sampling; subjects were chosen from a specific subset of journalists: those associated with crowdfunding campaigns. Theoretical sampling selects subjects “in order to explore concepts or categories” (Jensen, 2013, p. 269). In quantitative research, samples are typically gathered through probability sampling and random selection. In contrast, samples in qualitative research are “driven by a purpose, not by a principle of probability” (Jensen, 2013, p. 268). The final interview questions were optimized using the Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) framework developed by Castillo-Montoya (2016). An element of convenience sampling was warranted given the relatively recent and incipient nature of the phenomenon under study.

## RESPONDENTS

Below is a table with the names and media outlets of the 10 respondents. The table indicates whether the respondent's crowdfunding activities were successful or not. The definition of success used here is that the respondent was able to sustainably fund the ongoing operation budget for a news outlet from crowdfunded revenue, or if they met the target of a crowdfunding campaign that provided initial seed money for a duration they had previously decided on. Nine out of 10 respondents did not use paywalls on their websites. The lone exception did not use a paywall when they launched but had implemented one just prior to when the research was conducted.

Name	Code	Media Outlet	Result of crowdfunding
Chelsea Murray	R1	The Deep	Partially Successful
Ethan Cox	R2	Ricochet Media	Successful
Confidential Respondent	CR1	confidential	Successful
Joey Coleman	R3	The Public Record	Successful
Mack Male	R4	Taproot Edmonton	Successful
Taylor Lambert	R5	The Calgarian	Not Successful
Jeremy Klaszus	R6	The Sprawl	Successful
Emma Gilchrist	R7	The Narwhal	Successful
Lindsay Sample	R8	The Discourse	Successful
Darren Krause	R9	LiveWire Calgary	Not Successful

Below are timelines providing funding totals and funding growth over time for respondents, where available. Each respondent revealed precise financial information to varying degrees; all respondents wished to maintain some level of confidentiality. Thus, the information below is principally based on what is publicly available. All figures are in CAD dollars.

Respondent	Financial History
Chelsea Murray (R1)	Sixty-day Kickstarter campaign between October and December 2016 successfully raised seed-money goal of \$19,000. The Deep launched in August 2017. Efforts to grow monthly contributor base were unsuccessful; outlet went into hiatus in December 2018.

Ethan Cox (R2)	Thirty-day Indiegogo campaign in June 2014 successfully raised seed-money of \$83,000, exceeding goal by \$8,000. Ricochet media launched in October 2014. Now sustained through monthly member contributions.
Joey Coleman (R3)	Thirty-day Indiegogo campaign in Winter 2014 successfully raised seed-money of \$11,000, exceeding goal by \$200. The Public Record launched in 2014. Subsequent one-time Indiegogo campaigns in 2014 raised \$12000, in 2015 raised \$7,500, and in 2017 raised \$9,900. The Public Record is currently sustained through monthly contributors.
Taylor Lambert (R5)	Sixty-day Kickstarter campaign between April and June 2016 raised \$4,400, failing to meet the set goal of \$12,000. The crowdfunding campaign was an “all-or-nothing” style campaign, so none of the money raised was retained.
Jeremy Klaszus (R6)	The Sprawl launched in 2017 with a Patreon campaign, soliciting monthly contributions. In 2019, they launched a monthly contribution portal on their own website. As of September 2021, they had 2,100 monthly contributors. There were 235 contributors remaining on Patreon, raising \$1,925 per month. Total from all monthly contributors unknown.
Emma Gilchrist (R7)	The Narwhal launched in May 2018 with 100 monthly members contributing a combined total of ~\$16,000 yearly. By October 2019 there were 800 monthly members contributing \$132,000 yearly and by September 2020, 1,600 monthly members contributing \$260,000 yearly. As of September 2021 there were 3,400 members contributing an unknown amount; estimated ~\$500,000 yearly based on prior numbers.
Lindsay Sample (R8)	The Discourse launched in 2014. Until 2017, crowdfunded revenue comprised just 2% of their budget. In November 2017 a six-week equity crowdfunding campaign on FrontFundr raised \$325,000. In May 2019 launched a donation/reward type crowdfunding campaign for recurring monthly contributions of \$15/month. Acquired 500 contributors, short of goal of 1,000.

Analysis was performed using inductive thematic analysis (cf. Butler-Kisber, 2018; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Jensen, 2013), with open coding to find emergent codes from the textual data from the interview transcripts. The analysis of the data generated one major theme with five subthemes. The main theme is described as “value.” Below is a description of the major theme and the five sub-themes.

## DESCRIPTION OF THEMES

### I. Value:

Describes the many ways that respondents conceptualized the value of the journalism they were offering to potential financial supporters, and how they formed value propositions. It includes both assertions of the value of news in general, as well as what makes their own journalism of high quality and the desirability basis on which they appeal to potential financial contributors.

**a) Deficit in Media:** Respondents explain that they were responding to a deficiency or weakness in existing media and the degree to which they believed there was an audience looking for media that resolved this deficiency or weakness.

**b) The Public Good:** Respondents described their audience as seeing the value of news as a common good, or a public good, their audience motivated by a desire to contribute to the common good.

**c) Civic Engagement:** When respondents describe their audience being motivated by a desire to be informed or to know things about government or other important social institutions.

**d) Social Issues and Topics:** Respondents talk about their audience being interested in specific issues, typically social or political, or topics of interest. It doesn't necessarily have to be “an issue” as in a political issue like climate change, or corruption, but could be just a topic, such as arts and culture, or technology.

**e) Community:** When respondents talked about

the role that the concept of community plays in motivating their funders.

## RESULTS

The main theme coalesced around the term “Value.” Respondents said they made appeals to potential funders that emphasized a value or utility that could be derived from the journalism they produce. Often this took the form of being able to “show them [the audience] the value” (R2). Respondents believed in the need to work to demonstrate the value of their journalism before an audience would become funders. The sub-themes that emerged under the umbrella of Value include: deficit of existing news media, civic engagement, the public good, coverage of social issues and topics, and community.

### DEFICIT IN EXISTING NEWS MEDIA

All respondents appeal to potential funders by demonstrating that their journalism exhibits a value or quality that has declined within legacy news media; typically, this touched on themes such as the depth or breadth of coverage, the specific issues and topics addressed in the coverage, and the degree to which information provides the requisite knowledge about current affairs and government to be a more engaged citizen.

Nine out of 10 respondents said they believe audiences are dissatisfied with current news media offerings, particularly those produced by corporately owned media; they believe the public recognizes the declining quality of the journalism being offered as acutely as they do. Respondents said they were addressing real and significant deficits in Canadian news media caused by “round after round of cuts” (R2), and they were filling a “hole” (R1; R2; R5), “gap” (R4; R5; R6; R7; R8), “niche” (R1; R9) or “need or want” (R1) in the news media industry. Respondents felt that the public are “dissatisfied” (R5; R6) or “frustrated” (R2) with and have “distrust” (R3) in existing news media. Two respondents said the corporate media and legacy newspaper business models are “dying” (R1; R2).

Chelsea Murray targeted a gap they saw in



magazines for the Atlantic Canada region: “there aren’t any magazines doing the same thing that we’re doing here, so... because there’s a hole, people saw that and wanted it to be filled.” Ethan Cox launched their media outlet in response to coverage of the 2012 Quebec student strikes in English-language media. Their goal was to create non-corporate media and saw crowdfunding as the only viable way: “We wanted to build a non-profit outlet that would not be accountable to corporate owners and the only [way] to do that is to get an investment, a buy-in, from your readers.” Cox said people are increasingly interested in “alternatives” to increasingly lower quality from existing news media.

Taylor Lambert hoped to distinguish themselves in comparison to existing news media, and thought they could be successful by showing people the quality of their work:

Show people the work they are missing out on in the current local media landscape in Calgary, people will be willing to pay money to keep it going. That was my idea behind crowdfunding.

Joey Coleman said they choose news stories to cover “when something occurs where there is going to be no other coverage if I don’t cover it.” They recognized a gap in their local news based on their own interests, saying that prior to their first crowdfunding campaign they were “not able to keep up on [local] politics because there isn’t the coverage.” Coleman did not think they were filling a gap that was high in demand, but rather making news they themselves “wanted as a consumer of news,” saying municipal politics was a niche interest and a small percent of news audiences are interested. Lambert and CR1 also focused on stories unreported or underreported by existing media. Both Lambert and Jeremy Klaszus referenced the closure of the same Calgary, AB alt-weekly publication, named *FFWD*. Klaszus described how the closure of *FFWD* spurred them to try crowdfunding:

When that was gone there was a gap here, but I wasn’t sure what could fill that gap. So, I basically started exploring that with different people in town, other

journalists, community leaders, basically saying, what do we need in Calgary and how might it work?

Mack Male added an Arts & Culture newsletter to their offerings in response to a gap left behind by the closure of an Edmonton alt-weekly newspaper.

Emma Gilchrist said they consider their media outlet to be “like the environment section of the newspaper if there was such a thing, but there’s not such a thing,” adding that they see their journalism as “basically filling in the gaps that aren’t necessarily being covered by traditional news, but I really dislike when people refer to it as mainstream media and alternative media.”

All respondents focused on longform journalism, in-depth reporting, or investigative reporting, as opposed to daily news or *fait divers* type of news. Many of the journalists were trying to explicitly avoid competing with existing legacy media organizations or competing to cover daily news, thus were interested in taking a long-form, in-depth investigation approach to journalism. Male leans toward highly researched, in-depth investigative journalism, focusing on deeper reporting rather than daily news brief journalism because the daily news market is too competitive and crowded:

There are lots of places to find out what happened today, so if that’s the pitch, then, I think it puts your crowdfunding efforts in competition with everybody else who is doing local journalism coverage in your community. There are far fewer people doing that sort of thoughtful, investigative type of journalism, and I think that’s a clearer value proposition for members for sure.

Conversely, Darren Krause felt they were responding to a deficit in traditional, daily broadsheet type news. They had previously been the editor of a free daily commuter newspaper and said they achieved success there by “focusing on very community-focused, unique content.” After the paper was purchased by a larger news corporation, the editorial direction changed to what Krause described as “more social causes, a little bit more activist journalism.”

Unlike other respondents, who saw a deficit in the existing media landscape around lack of coverage of social issues, Krause thought that legacy media had gone too far in appealing to certain issues oriented toward political or social values on a political spectrum, as opposed to keeping with journalism's traditional detached and neutral tone. Krause said legacy news was "going after these market segments because they are the ones who will pay."

## THE PUBLIC GOOD

The concept of "service" was applied along a varying spectrum between the individual and collective conceptualizations of the public and citizenship, using terms such as "public interest," (R2), "community good" (R3), "public good" (R5), "public benefit" (R7) to describe how they communicate the value of their journalism.

Cox believed that taking a strong position on the side of public interest journalism aided their success in crowdfunding, because there is "a big population of people out there who are frustrated with the media, who want to see something different, something non-profit, public interest, journalist-run." Cox said they thought it "certainly helped with the appeal" when they were "talking about being on a side, representing a side, balancing out an imbalance in the public square."

Coleman said the concept of the public good, or community good, was especially important to how they communicate the value of their journalism and phrased it this way: "Why do people participate in community clean ups?... People do that all the time at the local level, they contribute to the civic commons, and it's a key part of the communications I make." In contrast to Cox, Coleman's concept of public service journalism adhered to the non-partisan ethos of traditional journalism ethics:

You don't see me refer to myself as a progressive news editor. You don't see me refer to myself as an urbanist news outlet. I refer to myself as a common good, and that enables me to get [financial contributions] - I know my funders and there is no particular political orientation that makes up the majority.

Male said they adopted the concept of service journalism early on to explain their value proposition to potential donors. Male thought providing a service to the public through journalism should be focused on providing information: "We wanted to come up with a model that would allow us to actually truly serve them, which means we need to find out what it is they want to know and what they need to know."

Many respondents linked the idea of altruism and journalism being a public or community good. Cox said that there was an element of altruism involved when their audience members contribute financially because there is no paywall being used—audience members don't get access to additional content as a perk or reward when they contribute financially. Murray also said they didn't think perks were a main driving factor motivating their financial supporters. Coleman said about half of their financial supporters are motivated by altruism:

They contribute because there is no paywall, because they're buying the news for other people. Whereas, if I had a paywall, I think I would only be able to get 10 dollars a month out of people. Whereas without the paywall, I'm averaging 18 dollars 11 cents.

Lambert also made appeals during their crowdfunding campaign centered around the idea of journalism being a public good, saying that "part of my pitch was this was a social good that we need to have, as is all journalism." However, Lambert also felt that a broad appeal based on the general idea of the public value of journalism had contributed to their lack of success:

I may have just assumed that this idea will sell itself, and if anyone cares at all about local journalism, or independent journalism, I'm the only guy doing it. Nobody else is stepping up to do it, so if you want to do this, here's your chance, I'm the guy.

Klaszus also expressed some skepticism of using the concept of the public good to make a financial appeal to their audience:

All that stuff is true, it resonates with a certain group of people but I think that group of people is quite small, is the reality, whereas if you are putting out content that people are sharing, then it's like, 'oh this is actually giving me something I'm not getting elsewhere,' it catches people's attention and then they're like, 'oh, yeah, sure, five bucks a month that seems reasonable.'

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Respondents thought that one of the main values that journalism provides is information useful for taking part in civic life or being politically informed. This contrasted with existing legacy news media, where they believed this type of information was declining.

Six out of 10 respondents (CR1, R2, R3, R4, R6, and R9) appealed to their audience around the idea of civic engagement. These respondents explicitly alluded to the value of their journalism work as related to the information it contained; the information would allow people to make more informed and educated decisions about engaging with civil society and institutions, whether that be government or private enterprise.

Journalists invited the audience to make use of the information they were being given for use in civic engagement, but they also proposed to fill that role for the audience themselves by reporting on important social and political institutions, thus assuming the importance of roles such as being a journalistic "watchdog" or practicing adversarial accountability journalism.

Male said their audience would be "people that are already very engaged in the community... similar to the way I was, so on boards, committees, things like that, or even just the folks that are active on social media discussing civic [issues]." Klaszus also described their audience as "civically engaged Calgarians, so they're people who are interested in what's going on in local politics."

Coleman thought their financial supporters were motivated by a desire for there to be a "watchdog" type of journalist focused on Hamilton City Hall. They also felt the role of their journalism was to help create an informed citizenry:

Ultimately, in my mission statement, it talks about providing the information for the citizenry to enact their responsibilities of engaged citizenship [...] going to these board hearings is trying to explain to people, here's how government actually works, and therefore you can start getting engaged in government effectively.

Krause approached their journalism in a comparable way, saying that their aim was to "give you the information, we'll try and paint the fuller picture for you, so you can actually make an educated decision on it."

CR1 said they thought audiences were looking to the news media for information on "politics and what decisions are being made around the government." As an example of valuable journalism work, CR1 said using freedom of information requests or research to show that a government communication is making untrue claims, or if the reporting work shows that a product being sold is dangerous. CR1 said that this kind of journalism work demonstrates value because "it shows the power of knowing," and that when crafting appeals to potential financial supporters they "try to impress upon people that by subscribing you're helping to fund investigations and news reporting and features that are going to be really important to understanding your world, so that we hope that they will subscribe." CR1 also extended this logic to the realm of private enterprise, providing the following example:

Corporate and consumer information... if a best-selling product is actually extremely harmful to, and hazardous to health, I think that is the kind of information people do rely on.

## SOCIAL ISSUES AND TOPICS

The idea of being able to support a cause that aligns with one's values was a common way that respondents appealed to potential financial supporters. CR1 conceptualized the value being offered by their outlet as related to the issues and stories they reported on that concern social inequality. Furthermore, CR1 said that for their financial supporters: "supporting a cause they



believe in is a huge motivating factor for not just [media outlet – redacted] but most publications.”

Klaszus began with journalism that was focused on a municipal election in Calgary. Typically interest in municipal politics is higher during an election, so this was an example of appealing to people with general interest in civic engagement. In later editions of their “pop-up” outlet, Klaszus has focused on social issues such as climate change, as the next logical place for their journalism to go after a focus on municipal politics.

Lindsay Sample’s media outlet began as a company focused on social issues – such as “gender, climate, sustainability, reconciliation, education” – and would partner with non-profit institutions interested in these issues. In the last two years they have shifted emphasis to local news, focusing on a specific geographic community, Cowichan Valley, on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, although they remain focused on important social issues within the context of local news.

CR1 and Gilchrist were both responding to a lack of coverage of certain important social issues, such as climate change and renewable energy. CR1’s media outlet launched with a crowdfunding campaign to fund an environmental news reporting beat because “climate change is becoming more mainstream, but at the time it really wasn’t getting that much coverage, considering the magnitude of the issue.” Gilchrist attributes their success to an unaddressed demand for this type of reporting, saying that they “got a lot of new members in that time just because people were so stoked to see there was this new media outlet covering the environment.” Gilchrist built their media outlet around the social issue of climate change and environmental issues. They expressed that people looked at journalism as a way that action can be taken regarding social and political issues:

I think people, they feel disenfranchised, and there aren’t a lot of ways for them to grapple with the very large issues that we’re facing and being able to donate to make a certain story possible, or to support independent journalism in general, helps them counter that. It gives them something that they can do, that is tangible, and I think that makes them feel good.

Conversely, as mentioned, Coleman strives to be politically non-partisan, rather than catering to audiences on the left and on the right. Coleman contrasted their work with *Rabble Media*, a politically left-leaning news organization, as an example of a politically partisan journalism outlet: “*Rabble*, they are funding a media outlet with a political viewpoint because they like those ideas, they believe in those ideas, they believe in the importance of that type of coverage.”

Krause also had consciously gone in the opposite direction of addressing social issues, and related this to the financial crisis in legacy journalism, which they thought caused the news industry to turn away from traditional “objective” journalism and be more politically partisan:

We haven’t found a way to do objective journalism and get paid for it. So, what do we have to do? We have to cater to the people who get all hyped up about these progressive or conservative issues and then we ask them for their money. And that’s what the media companies are doing now.

Social issues were also related to the idea of urgency in raising money through crowdfunding. Gilchrist explained that “another huge thing, when it comes to fundraising, it needs to provoke emotion, good fundraising is not cold, hard and rational, it’s emotional, and you need to make people feel things.”

Murray said it is important to create a sense of “urgency,” and that is why it is best to choose a shorter campaign length. Cox stated you must talk about something that “lights a fire in people.” Respondents also noted the importance of empowering the audience; Gilchrist said this involves “making them the hero,” in contrast to an “organization-centric” approach that highlights what the organization wants to do rather than what the audience can help achieve.

## COMMUNITY

Eight out of 10 respondents (CR1, R1, R2, R4, R6, R7, R8, R9) said the idea of community played a role in successful crowdfunding appeals. Murray used storytelling events to build community around their media outlet, comparing standard



## subscription models with crowdfunding:

If you're offering subscriptions, you're selling a product, but if you're offering membership, or you're doing a crowdfunding campaign, that's more of a community interaction, or building a feel like they're helping build something that's important.

Klaszus expressed similar sentiments about transactional subscription models of funding media:

I think people had, and still have, a sense of being part of something, so it's not just like *The Athletic*, for example, where [it is] 'here's my subscription and now I get this premium content,' this stuff is happening anyway, so it's not behind a paywall, but I want to be part of it.

Gilchrist also heavily emphasized the role of community in their crowdfunding success:

I think it's huge, and I think that is something that did really change when we launched *The Narwhal*. We created all the swag, and people loved that. Now we have a premium offer, people become a monthly member for \$20 a month, they get a t-shirt or a toque, and that has been really effective as well. People are searching for a sense of belonging and *The Narwhal* is something that many people want to belong to, and I think that sense of community is really important.

Cox also felt that the idea of community was "critical" to success in crowdfunding, describing crowdfunding as trying to build a community to collectively achieve a goal:

You're trying to build a community around a project. That's exactly what it is. You're saying, look, if you reach into your pocket, and you support this project, and you become part of this community, then we can do more together than we can individually.

Those who contributed financially to Male's media outlet became a member and obtained access to a website called the "Story Garden" where they could suggest ideas for stories to report on and other members could comment. While Male said community "is a word that gets used for a lot of different things," within their media organization it primarily refers to members who have access to the Story Garden platform, and "people that are engaged more actively in the work that we're doing."

## DISCUSSION

### COMPARISON WITH THE LITERATURE

The results showed that respondents were crowdfunding often to bring into existence a media outlet that would not be able to exist otherwise due to the prevailing economic and market conditions of the journalism industry. These results fit with previous findings that describe crowdfunding as often allowing funders to pool their resources for the realization of something the existing consumer markets cannot provide (Aitamurto, 2015). Respondents felt there were various elements of value that had declined in existing news media, which they asserted they would bring back or replace, described as filling a gap or a hole in the media ecosystem or landscape. This fits with Jian & Shin's (2015) conclusion that contributors to crowdfunded journalism are motivated by a desire to fill a gap in existing media. These findings agree with previous research indicating contributors to crowdfunded journalism are motivated by a concern with declining quality and volume of in-depth journalism (Harlow, 2020; Price 2017; Träsel & Fontoura, 2015).

The results also show that social issues, the public interest, and civic engagement were prominent value propositions for the respondents. This fits with previous research indicating that crowdfunded journalism contributors are motivated by altruism and supporting a good cause (Aitamurto, 2015; 2011; Gerber and Hui, 2013; Jian & Shin, 2015). These results are also in line with Aitamurto's (2011) hypothesis that "advocacy, cause-driven, or problem-solving journalism is more meaningful for the community than neutral, value-free journalism that provides

information but not the means to solve problems” (2011 p. 442). Aitamurto argues that crowdfunded journalists should engage in “cause marketing, the term applied to marketing efforts by non-profits working for social change” (2011, p. 442).

Results on the use of community fit with what Gehring & Wittkower (2015) have said about community as having a symbolic value used in crowdfunding; it can mean a range of things but indicates increased intimacy, inclusion, and may mean increased participation in the journalistic process. The journalists in this study were trying to connect with their audiences based on important issues and in-depth journalism, which contrasts with the literature showing an audience preference for lighter content such as arts & lifestyle, sports, technology, and crime stories (Boczkowski et al., 2011; Boczkowski & Peer, 2011; Ladson & Lee, 2017; Lee & Chyi, 2014).

## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The research for this paper was conducted in 2019, just prior to the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Thus, it is worth briefly detailing how this event may have changed how the respondents crafted their value propositions. Appeals for financial support continued to be anchored in the broad concept of the democratic and civic value of quality news and information. For example, Sample’s media outlet began fundraising in the summer of 2021 for a legal defence appealing a court injunction denying media access to protest sites in Pacheedaht and Ditidaht territories on Vancouver Island. Respondents largely continued to appeal around the themes identified above; an emphasis on in-depth reporting (the kind they say is lacking in legacy news media), community-focused stories, reporting on social issues, and providing the information to help facilitate readers’ civic engagement.

## CONCLUSION

**T**he following points can be concluded from the results:

1. *The journalists in this study all believed demand still existed for high-quality news products,*

*despite overall declining revenues in the news industry.* Moreover, they believed they were filling a gap or hole that existed in current Canadian media offerings, holes that have developed due to the contracting economic size of the news industry.

2. *Thus what respondents in this study thought were the best ways to appeal to potential financial supporters were:*

I. **Position your media outlet, the values of the outlet, and the goal of the journalism as antithetical to the current traditional structure of the news media industry, particularly corporately owned newspapers.** Respondents structured their value propositions around appealing to belief in an independent press or the civic role of investigative journalism, and concern over declining rates of this kind of journalism.

II. **Respondents thought appeals to emotional and altruism were more effective than purely rational and transactional appeals.** To convince people to become financial supporters, crowdfunded journalists must excite people by appealing to values and passions related to social issues. Their journalism should create information that is primarily *actionable*, and allows one to be a more informed citizen; to engage with civic and political institutions more effectively; or to simply be more knowledgeable about policy and other information regarding a specific industry or area one is interested in.

III. **Community plays a role in emotion and augmenting the journalist/audience relationship from a purely transactional one.** All respondents found that creating a sense of community was essential in distinguishing themselves from more transactional news purchases, such as sports or financial news.



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# Journalisme multiplateforme, journaliste fragmenté

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## Résumé

L'œuvre renouvelle les formats journalistiques audio et fournit plusieurs niveaux d'information dans un même reportage. Elle montre comment élargir le champ de ce qui peut être dit et dévoilé, comment briser le statu quo imposé par les formats convenus.

*Mots clé :* journalisme audio; formats journalistiques; conditions de production; nouvelle.

## Abstract

*Multiplatform Journalist, Fragmented Journalist*

The work renews journalistic audio formats and provides multiple levels of information in a single story. It shows how to widen the field of what can be said and revealed, and how to break the status quo imposed by conventional formats.

*Keywords:* audio journalism, journalistic formats, production conditions, news.



*Lien Soundcloud*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-630172892/journaliste-assujetti-journaliste-fragmente/s-vsxZI5BNmKW>

*Lien permanent*

<https://factsandfrictions.j-schoolscanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Journalisme-multiplateforme-journaliste-fragmente.mp3>

L'œuvre matérialise deux ambitions : 1) renouveler les formats journalistiques audio ; 2) fournir plusieurs niveaux d'information dans un même reportage. Pour y arriver, nous avons suivi un journaliste, documenté son quotidien, puis, créé cette œuvre sonore multipiste dévoilant à la fois une nouvelle et dans quelles conditions la nouvelle est fabriquée<sup>1</sup>.

Une des particularités de l'œuvre produite est que les conditions de production des journalistes sont révélées sans être décrites de façon formelle avec une voix narrative autoritaire : « The 'good radio voice' is not simply boring, it hides insipid power structures, it speaks with a questionable authority and false intimacy », dénonce Wennersten (2007, p. 88; voir aussi Augaitis et Lander, 1994). Les conditions de production sont imbriquées, tissées, *dans* la nouvelle.

Les journalistes puiseront dans l'œuvre des approches innovantes au niveau esthétique et méthodologique : une façon de couvrir les nouvelles axée autant sur l'information brute que sur les conditions de collecte de l'information ; des formats audio multipistes livrant plusieurs niveaux d'information.

Les journalistes en retireront aussi un questionnement épistémologique renouvelé sur le journalisme : À quoi sert-il ? Comment le pratiquer ? Que puis-je changer dans ma pratique ? Quelles réflexions et remises en cause émergent lorsque je dévoile mes conditions de production en même temps que je livre une nouvelle ? Ces interrogations pourraient gagner les auditeurs—les citoyens—confrontés à une nouvelle forme de présentation des nouvelles livrant plusieurs niveaux d'information.

Pourquoi chercher à : 1) renouveler les formats journalistiques audio et 2) fournir plusieurs niveaux d'information dans un même reportage ? Parce que les nouvelles audio—ou radio—ont presque toujours la même forme, le même ton, la même façon de décrire les acteurs sociaux, le même élan dans la présentation et dans la cristallisation d'opinions. En général, les nouvelles audio prennent la forme suivante : Narration du journaliste; citation; narration du journaliste; citation; conclusion du journaliste. Par exemple :

Le journaliste annonce une nouvelle mesure gouvernementale—*citation d'un ministre*—le journaliste résume les réactions suscitées par la nouvelle mesure—*citation d'un citoyen*—le journaliste précise quand la mesure entrera en vigueur.

Schudson appelle ces formats de présentation des « patterns of discourse » (1995, p. 14). Ces patrons ont leur raison d'être : le but d'un reportage est d'être entendu, compris et cru. L'ordre et la synchronisation des mots et des phrases, le ton et les sons sont cruciaux. Selon Manchon, un journaliste aura bien fait son travail si, par exemple, les auditeurs ont compris que le thème d'une nouvelle est l'économie, le sous-thème est le chômage et que la « nouvelle » dans la nouvelle est une bonne nouvelle (2012, p. 14). Autrement dit, faire comprendre aux auditeurs qu'il y a une bonne nouvelle dans le secteur du chômage est une performance honorable pour un journaliste audio. Voilà pourquoi les nouvelles audio doivent se conformer à des patrons ou à des formats précis. Ces patrons permettent aussi aux journalistes de travailler vite et de respecter l'heure de tombée, de montrer l'impartialité journalistique en utilisant ces « rituels stratégiques » (Tuchman, 1972) et d'être concis et d'entrer dans l'espace temporel disponible (Chalaby, 1996).

*Les patrons audio constituent toutefois une prison parce qu'ils limitent le champ de ce qui peut être dit et dévoilé.*

Les patrons audio constituent toutefois une prison parce qu'ils limitent le champ de ce qui peut être dit et dévoilé. Les informations n'entrant pas dans ces formats sont tuées, n'existent pas. Les patrons audios enferment ou contrôlent les journalistes et leur auditoire : « These forms – which they must control if they are to be respected professionals – have an extraordinary power to control the journalists themselves and, through them, their readers » (Schudson, 1995, p. 71). En respectant les formats journalistiques

1 Le projet a reçu le financement du Fonds de recherche québécois Science et Culture et l'approbation du comité d'éthique de la recherche de l'UQAM.



conventionnels, les journalistes renforcent les hiérarchies de la société, les valeurs dominantes, les rapports de force existants (Chalaby, 1996; Coman, 2003; Allan, 2004). Schlesinger parle de « specific framework of interpretation » (1987, p. 164) en dehors desquels la « réalité » n'existe pas (voir à ce sujet l'analyse de la couverture du « Printemps érable », décrivant comment les formats journalistiques ont « contenu » la révolte étudiante, dans Francoeur, 2012a). Allan (2004) résume bien le phénomène, en disant : « It is the codified definitions of reality which are regarded as the most 'natural', as the most representative of 'the world out there,' that are actually the most ideological » (p. 91).

Vues de cette façon, les nouvelles restent confinées à une fonction de reproduction et de fixation des relations sociales telles qu'elles sont. Plutôt que d'informer le citoyen, les nouvelles forment le citoyen à fonctionner dans la société. Les nouvelles semblent plutôt *l'in-former* (Francoeur, 2012a). La modification des formats journalistiques et la production de reportages fournissant plusieurs niveaux d'information apparaissent ainsi comme une action critique.

« Journalisme multiplateforme, journaliste fragmenté » s'attarde à un sujet précis pour mettre en œuvre cette action, soit les conditions de production des journalistes. Les formats journalistiques conventionnels masquent les conditions dans lesquelles les informations sont produites : pauvreté de moyens, difficultés d'accès à l'information, heures de tombée multiples, complexité de l'organisation du travail,

exigence de la démarche journalistique (Forum des Politiques Publiques, 2017). La livraison quotidienne des nouvelles passe sous silence ces réalités. En renouvelant les formats pour, à la fois, livrer une nouvelle et décrire les conditions dans lesquelles elle est produite, « Journalisme multiplateforme, journaliste fragmenté » montre comment élargir le champ de ce qui peut être dit et dévoilé, comment briser le *status quo* imposé par les patrons convenus.

L'œuvre est un exemple, un prototype, illustrant les conditions de production post-convergence (Francoeur, 2012b et 2021). Elle ouvre la voie à d'autres œuvres où les façons de renouveler les formats journalistiques mèneraient à d'autres superpositions d'informations. Par exemple, plutôt que d'inclure les conditions de production dans la nouvelle, une œuvre pourrait superposer des réactions de l'auditoire à la nouvelle—montrant ainsi que l'auditoire peut contester, rejeter ou négocier le sens des informations qui lui sont diffusées (Hall, 1980). Ce serait une autre façon de briser le *status quo*, montrant cette fois que l'« autorité » du journalisme est contestée, que le récepteur des nouvelles n'est pas l'otage d'un cadre interprétatif rigide et contraignant.

Les méthodologies guidant la cueillette et le mixage final de « Journalisme multiplateforme, journaliste fragmenté » sont l'étude de discours (Wodak, 2013; Rose, 2016) et l'ethnographie du travail journalistique (Gans, 2004; Born, 2004; Schudson, 1995), le but étant de refléter « les textes et textures » (Wodack, 2013) de façon sonore.

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