

Anchoring Practices for Public Connection: Media Practice and Its Challenges for Journalism Studies

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This article develops a typology of anchoring practices of public connection to systematize how new forms of interaction, participation, and articulation in networked media now challenge the primacy of journalism to offer exclusive and authoritative representations of society. The first part offers a brief summary of core contributions and assumptions in practice theory, highlighting differences between strong and weak programs of practice-based research. The second part presents the concept of public connection and how it can be expanded to include media practice on a more general, analytic level. The third part discusses four sets of anchoring practices, which allow for very different intensities of public connection to emerge: practices of information retrieval, social orientation, (self-)representation, and public intervention. The concluding outlook section addresses challenges for the study of journalism, focusing on the relations between professional and nonprofessional practices of articulation, in which speaker and audience positions can alternate dynamically between different “layers of publicness.”

Keywords: media practice, anchoring practices, public connection, practice theory, journalism studies, layers of publicness

Routines of media exposure in the past often emerged around particular media technologies in rather unpredictable fashion before being routinized in particular modalities. The printed newspaper, radio, and television in their early days were also consumed quite differently than they are today. Each medium manifested and envisioned particular positions of its audiences, from the informed reader of the morning paper to the national listening public of radio to “couch potatoes” in front of television sets (Livingstone, 2005). Over the last 20 years, the digitization of all kinds of content and media has converged these previously distinct modes of production and consumption, which affects as well the position and practice of journalism in society. Journalism now competes for attention, advertising revenue, and audiences within the same networks and platforms, where new kinds of professional and amateur actors question the authority and legitimacy of journalistic representations of society. The central categories of public versus private communication, long established as hallmarks of modern societies, are fluid and no longer sufficiently distinctive. Instead, there is now what Peters and Schröder (2018) describe as a “personally-visible, but publicly-invisible practice” (p. 1080) of communication between individuals and collectives. The institutional borders around a privileged domain of journalistic production are becoming porous and partly disintegrate

in the “dark social” of private messengers (Swart, Peters, & Broersma, 2018) and unpredictable pathways of circulation online (Sumiala & Tikka, 2011).

Journalistic practices of articulation, representation, and news communication are adopted by users in various forms, spanning a broad spectrum from personal to public articulations, especially on social media platforms. Building on core insights from practice theory, this article addresses these challenges to journalism (and journalism studies) through an expanded notion of public connection, a concept previously developed in audience and reception studies. Public connection describes how members of audiences experience and make sense of their ties to a world through media consumption. The concept describes “an orientation to a public world where matters of common concern are, or at least should be, addressed” (Couldry & Markham, 2008, p. 9). With the proliferation of networked, digital media such as smartphones in many daily practices, public connection can now be performed in very heterogeneous ways, breaking up long-established routines of news consumption and widening the spectrum of public articulation beyond the professional realm of journalism.

There is now a growing interest in what constitutes the “worthwhileness” of journalistic media in news consumers’ daily practices (Schrøder & Larsen, 2010). Attending to news of personal or public relevance and sharing images, content, or links in small personal networks are now widespread practices among media users. Understanding the ways in which users of messaging apps and social media embed and interpret information about a larger, public world into their own personal networks and situational communication is therefore highly relevant for journalism studies (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2014). Engaging with journalistic and other kinds of news allows users to foreground “inclusiveness, engagement, relevance and constructiveness,” as Swart, Peters, and Broersma (2016) argue. Such an engagement underlines “*how news becomes meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile*” in everyday interactions (Swart et al., 2016, p. 903, emphasis in original) while “the socially integrative force of news media becomes more dispersed” (p. 909).

Through circulation in more or less private online spaces, it becomes even more difficult to ascertain how exposure to journalistic news sustains a connection to society at large. The pervasive “news democracy narrative” (Peters & Witschge, 2014; Woodstock, 2014), which underlies large strands of journalism research, has become increasingly problematic today. New explanatory models for the role and function of journalism in society are needed. This article argues that public connection can serve as a useful concept to answer this demand if its theoretical base is expanded. The article focuses on two core questions: (1) How can we analyze the relation between journalism and its audiences through the concept of media practice? (2) How can we capture the emergence of publics next to or in opposition to journalism? We suggest answering these two questions with the use of practice theory, outlining four sets of anchoring practices that allow for different intensities of public connection to emerge.

As part of a special section “Practicing Media, Mediating Practice,” this article outlines how media practice as an analytic concept can further develop public connection through the role of anchoring practices. In the first part, the article offers a brief summary of core contributions and positions in practice theory and how they are relevant to the study of journalism and its audiences. The second part presents the concept of public connection, initially coined by Couldry and colleagues (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010;

Couldry & Markham, 2007), to inform media practice in a broader and theoretically productive direction for journalism studies. The third part discusses four sets of anchoring practices developed as an empirical heuristic to study media practice. Specifically, we focus on practices of information retrieval, social orientation, (self-)representation, and public intervention. In the concluding outlook, we outline challenges for the study of journalism within a media practice perspective.

The Perspective of Practice Theory on Social Structures

Practice theory is becoming an umbrella term for an expanding field in sociological theory. Common to many practice theory approaches is the emphasis on everyday and routinized (inter)actions, forms of incorporated knowledge of actors, and the performativity of practice itself to sustain larger social structures. In the words of Theodore Schatzki (2016), the perspective of practice theory “as social ontology holds that the realm of the social is entirely laid out on a single level (or, rather, on no level)” (p. 28). It is a “flat ontology” of social order, Schatzki (2016) argues, where “‘macro’ and ‘micro’ cannot designate distinct levels of society” (p. 33). In the most radical view of practice, every kind of order (large or small, macro or micro, individual or collective) can be reduced to routinized practices. This branch of theory assumes that only recurrent “doings and sayings” (Schatzki, 2002) along with “material arrangements” (Schatzki, 2016, p. 32) can account for the composition, emergence, and disappearance of social structures. This drastic perspective on social structures—that there is nothing beyond practices as the final unit of analysis—needs to be qualified in more cautious terms when it comes to journalism and its public relevance.

The goal of using practice theory is not to endow any kind of public articulation with public relevance. Rather, journalistic practices need to be seen in their relation to nonprofessional, noninstitutionalized practices of public articulation without according higher or lower relevance to either side. This shifts attention away from the order of journalistic routines and institutional frameworks to analyze conflictual as well as complementarity dynamics of public contestation arising within the same or similar domains of networked communication. In this respect, it is helpful to use practice theory in a more moderate form, foregrounding how individual practices and larger social structures are mutually constitutive of each other.

To give a simple example of this perspective: A newsreader (obviously) cannot consume news through newspapers or websites unless news institutions provide content. In the perspective of practice theory, then, news institutions adapt their practices on a larger scale when consumption patterns of news change or fade entirely. Neither the level of structure nor the level of individual agency is sufficient to explain, for example, the transformation of public deliberation, negotiation, or journalistic routines of production. Practice theory rather allows seeing this mutual constitution of individual agency (in this case, news consumption) and social structures (ranging from journalism or media organizations to larger public spheres) through the adaptation of certain professional and audience practices at the same time. As Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) argue, “Everyday actions are consequential in producing the structural contours of social life” in which “the social world is brought into being through everyday activity” (p. 1241). In a perspective of practice institutions of society such as journalism are social relations that are built and stabilized in time through practices enacted by journalists and their audiences alike. Practice theory regards social order as the outcome of continuous processes of “structuration,” in which social structures and actors

mutually constitute each other, as Giddens (1984) argues. In such an understanding, practices can account for both stability of social structures (routines) and social change (rupture) at the same time.

Another core assumption of practice theory is that the situated, embodied, and often implicit knowledge of actors invoked in daily routines is central to understanding the social:

Practice rests on something that cannot be reduced to words. This non-propositional approach foregrounds the role of the body and artefacts in all human affairs; it also posits that intelligibility (how we make sense of things) and practical knowledge (the learned capacity to go on with things without thinking first) rather than rules and decisions organise human activity and inter-activity. (Nicolini, 2017, p. 20)

The knowledge invoked in practices or daily routines needs to account for the situated relation of actors to their own social world and wider social structures. The performance of a practice develops its own rationality, its own mode of joining stakes of knowledge to adapt and act in a changeable social environment. Practices can be understood as "regimes of a mediated object-oriented performance of [an] organised set of sayings and doings" (Nicolini, 2017, p. 21). Such regimes have a performative and processual character, in which embodied ways of knowing, the implication of materiality in social actions, and the temporality of practices over time are central to the analysis. In distinction from mere actions, practices have a history of being performed: What "makes them distinctively 'the same' across space and time" (Giddens, 1984, p. 3) is the prime interest of practice theory, which offers a "vocabulary" (Nicolini, 2017) rather than a fixed method for understanding the continuities and changes in social structures.

Empirically, practice theory can be both used deductively to provide a basic framework for the study of regularity and stability in actors' practices (Giddens, 1984; Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2017) or it can be developed inductively from empirical case studies to show how social orders are upheld and can change (Bourdieu, 1977; Schatzki, 2002). The tension between both interpretations of practice (as ways of doing things vs. its role in social structures on a theoretical level), as Nicolini (2017) argues, leads to a "weak and strong program" for theories of practice: There are many detailed studies of social phenomena that "limit themselves to naming, describing and listing practices," employing a "naïve quasi-praxeology" (p. 23). And there are broader theoretical approaches to understanding social change in public life or political participation through a perspective of practice. Both programs emphasize the "inherent processual nature of the practice approach" (p. 21) but differ in their scope and comparability of findings. Simply stating that a practice is routinely performed is different from explaining in what ways the specific performativity of a practice (i.e., its processual logic from the perspective of the actor) contributes to or alters a larger social structure. Our aim here is to develop a strong program of "media practice" that allows for an understanding of new modes of public connection emerging from "doings and sayings" with digital media that are available as part of quotidian routines of individuals.

A broad range of scholars and disciplines has adopted practice-based approaches to study emergent social developments, in which media, to paraphrase a popular idiom by Bourdieu (1977), are both *structuring for* and *structured by* collective practices. Such studies include investigations of social media usage and mobile phones (Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2013; Gentzel, 2015), studies of citizen media and social

movements (Askanius & Gustafsson, 2010; Caballero & Gravante, 2018; Kubitschko, 2015; Mattoni, 2012, 2016; Stephansen, 2016; Stephansen & Tréré, 2019), urban politics and media spaces (Rodgers, Barnett, & Cochrane, 2014), and social inequality and media use (Sims, 2014). Practice-based research methodologies foreground the process of social structuring in which actors mobilize a broad range of competences and resources in recurrent fashion. This structuring as process may be without any initial aims or goals, but is seen as emergent from the performance of certain practices and their adaptation to new circumstances. Thus, practice-based research is interested especially in social processes, in which structures are continuously evolving and changing, where institutionalization has not yet happened, is fundamentally challenged, or is not even possible.

In journalism studies, practice theory is employed for understanding the “structure of public communication” between journalists and their audiences (Raetzsch, 2015), between established actors and “in-betweeners” such as part-time bloggers or civic tech activists (Ahva, 2016; Baack, 2018). Practice theory foregrounds the relation between professional routines on the side of journalists and the practices of those engaging with or challenging journalistic content as complementary (Buschow, 2018). This also allows us to differentiate which kinds of public articulation are direct challenges to journalism or remain tied to notions of audiencehood (Bird, 2010). The perspective of practice stresses that habitual actions lend stability to social relations over time: The practices of audiences through which journalistic communication is made meaningful are no longer subordinate but central for evaluating how journalism remains relevant in society. Because the exposure to journalistic news is less and less bound to established routines (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018; Toff & Nielsen, 2018), attention to the ways in which audiences now interact with such news and with each other becomes important for journalism studies (Heikkilä & Ahva, 2015). Such a perspective on the mutual constitution of journalism and its audiences helps to “open the black boxes of normative definitions of journalism and democracy” and “[distance] research from the strong normative tradition that has guided journalism studies for decades” (Domingo, Masip, & Costera Meijer, 2014, p. 64).

Based on practice theory, the central problem of how public connection is performed in daily practices needs to be reframed. In particular, practice theory allows us to regard audiences as equally important for the maintenance of a social structure called journalism, not only in their role as news consumers. Approaching journalism through practice theory highlights how practices that are performed on a quotidian basis can become appropriated for various forms of public connection, from forms of social orientation to forms of public intervention.

From Public Connection to Media Practice

The concept of public connection aims to show how citizens as audiences have multiple ways of observing, making sense of and interacting with a social world through mediated relations, for example, through routinized attention to media in general and news media and journalism in particular (Coudry et al., 2010). Its key interest is to reveal how audience members make sense of their own media consumption and the stakes of knowledge they invoke in these practices. The search for practices of public connection was from its start linked to a critique of normative assumptions about the role of journalistic news in democratic society. Yet, this critique urged consideration of “the continued relevance of *traditional media*,

and the links between everyday media consumption and the wider *social* contexts” (Couldry et al., 2010, p. 185, emphasis in original). The concept relies on methodologies that foreground the meanings associated with habitual media consumption through the reflexivity of the actors themselves (Markham & Couldry, 2007). Practice theory was here used to bypass an overt focus in media studies on either media texts or media institutions (Couldry & Langer, 2005). Couldry’s (2004) widely cited article “Theorising Media as Practice” was an important contribution in media and communication studies in this respect because it sought to open the domain of audience and reception studies to a more thorough sociological framework. But it was also written at a time when Web-based communication was only on the verge of becoming pervasive.

With the ubiquitous convergence between mobile media and online networks (e.g., social media, location-based services, or Web-based communication), media have now become embedded in everyday practices and proliferate in domains that used to exist without any significant influence of media before. The concept of public connection, which initially did not entail the domains of social media platforms or networked communication (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2017), needs to be expanded and adapted. Following Swart and colleagues (2016), public connection now includes “the various shared frames of reference that enable individuals to engage and participate in cultural, social, civic, and political networks in everyday life” (p. 906). The question then is how this connection is individually and collectively performed and stabilized as a part of new social structures and as an adjustment of existing ones.

Couldry’s (2004) initial concern was to analyze how a “range of practices are oriented to media and . . . the role of media-oriented practices in ordering other practices” (p. 129; cf. Couldry, 2012, p. 34). This means, if we take an example, that the practice of family pictures clearly did not emerge with digital cameras or camera-equipped mobile phones. But the meaning and circulation of such photographs in daily practices has changed, as Lobinger (2016) points out. The instantly taken photo can be used as an object of reflection or be embedded in “phatic” speech acts that continue and affirm social ties. Images exchanged on a quotidian basis through mobile phones are media-oriented but alter established practices of relating to each other, organizing daily life, or navigating social spaces—beyond media themselves. In other words, practices do not need to originate with new technologies, but they can be substantially reordered once they are performed with particular media technologies, as in the practice of selfie photography on instant messaging services (Weilenmann & Hillman, 2019).

The shift to theories of practice in media and communication research (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010; Pentzold, 2015; Raetzsch, 2015) reflects a wider recognition that media technologies (as artefacts), media configurations (as ensembles of different media technologies), or networks (both social and technological) are embedded in structures of social life and are conditioned by and continuously reinvented in social practices. Despite the nominal focus on media, the concept of media practice emphasizes that larger social phenomena such as publics need to be theorized from the vantage point of the quotidian use and embeddedness of media in various kinds of social practices (Lünenborg & Raetzsch, 2018). A non-media-centric research program (Morley, 2008) on the emergence of publics means to foreground how quotidian practices of articulation, navigation, and networking over time challenge and shape new conditions for public articulation. This “doing media” has become a central mode of interacting with the world, allowing for new

speaker and audience positions to emerge and requiring new kinds of competences—from personal communication to civic participation to journalistic and political communication.

The distinction between a weak and strong program in practice theory (see above) can here be used to differentiate studies of “media practices” (in the plural) and the overarching concept of “media practice” (in the singular). The widespread use of *media practices* in current scholarship underlines that there are multiple ways of acting with and in media that change gradually how communities are organized and interact with a wider public world (Kubitschko, 2017; Mattoni, 2016; Treré, 2015). Such approaches draw attention to the mutual and recurrent implications of actors’ “knowledgeability” and levels of agency with material resources. They are especially useful for studying articulations outside journalistic media, for example, when victims of sexual violence create a sense of solidarity through hashtags and other forms of “affective media practices” (Lünenborg, 2020; Lünenborg & Maier, 2019) to challenge mainstream journalistic narratives (Brantner, Lobinger, & Stehling, 2019). The vocabulary of practice theory foregrounds the importance of this reflexive knowledge of actors to underline how routines become social practices by being continuously modified in changing circumstances and conditions over time.

On a more theoretical level, the concept of media practice (in the singular) seeks to go beyond describing the myriad ways in which technologies are used to shape and enable particular communicative routines. Media practice is thus aimed at establishing a strong program of practice-based research, understanding practice as a continuous linking and decoupling of meanings, competences, and materialities (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). Media practice regards media as a resource for the performance of public connection, asking how media are embedded in and made meaningful through social practice beyond the merely representational level of media content and the immediate patterns of media use. As personal networks of individuals become more visible as part of the performance of public connection, transitions between personal and public modes of articulation can occur more frequently. Such transitions can be conceived of as the crossing of different “layers of publicness,” requiring us to regard practices of personal communication in a convergent media environment as constitutive or challenging for larger social structures such as journalism. This ongoing processual character of “going public” for personal as well as public concerns is captured by the notion of “performative publics” (Lünenborg & Raetzsch, 2018).

The concept of media practice is based on the assumption that “technology is not valuable, meaningful, or consequential by itself; it only becomes so when people actually engage with it in practice” (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1246). The overt emphasis on content and institutions of public opinion cannot adequately address the role that mobile and networked media technologies have assumed today for performing a broad range of quotidian activities: from coordination (via phone and messaging) to managing (schedules, banking, travel) to information seeking (via search, databases, updates, and news feeds), networking (social networks), mobilizing (newsletters, activist platforms, open petitions), and maintaining personal ties across distance. Media have in this sense become “polymedia” (Madianou & Miller, 2012), inserted in quotidian social routines of communication, in which it is “the combination of thing and use that makes a resource” (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1246). At their current level of ubiquity and pervasive adoption, media are no longer discrete objects that can be studied independently from daily practices in which they become meaningful as environments and resources to accomplish certain tasks.

Media practice analytically focuses on the enabling and constraining dynamics involved in acting with media, going beyond the domain of usage. It highlights how structural constraints and individual autonomy of acting with media need to be seen in relation to each other. The concept delivers a theoretically informed approach for mapping the enabling and constraining forces, in which autonomy and actors' reflexivity are nowadays negotiated to perform public connection. Media practice assumes that new constellations of articulations and speaker positions in public discourse need to be grounded in an analysis of how public connection is both anchored in social practices and performed repeatedly. To translate these theoretical assumptions into an empirical approach in journalism studies, we suggest considering the transformation of public connection from the vantage point of four sets of anchoring practices. These anchoring practices allow analytical mapping of the situational as well as routinized crossing of layer of publicness—from personal practices of information retrieval and social orientation to the public-oriented practices of (self-)representation and intervention.

Anchoring Practices for Public Connection

The notion of "anchoring practices" was brought up by Swidler (2001) to ask whether practices could be mapped in hierarchies, whether some practices were indispensable for framing and facilitating the performance of other practices. According to Swidler, an anchoring practice "encodes the dominant schema—encodes it as a pattern of action that people not only read but enact—a schema that is never explicitly formulated as a rule" (p. 83). A dominant schema can be understood as a course of action for a given purpose, in which certain meanings are stabilized over time. For example, the rituals of news creation and consumption can encode a particular schema of citizenship based on the notion of the informed voter. When schemas are stabilized in practices, they endow social structures with certain meanings. Schemas make resources meaningful as part of practices. But such schemas can also be transposed to different domains, where they may acquire new meanings and contribute to the formation of new practices (Sewell, 1992). Take the practice of making selfies with mobile phones: When this mode of self-representation and playful performance is embedded into a political demonstration, its schema can become associated with protest and mobilization, with politicized strategies of identification or deliberate anonymization.

Building on Swidler's (2001) argument, Couldry (2004) asks, "What if one of the main things media do is anchor other practices through the 'authoritative' representations and enactments of key terms and categories that they provide" (p. 122). The specific performance of public connection, that is, for example, embedded in following a daily news program or the ritualized coverage of political debates, can be regarded as a way of anchoring a sense of belonging to a national public through following established schemas of journalistic coverage. The performance of such practices of public connection, both on the side of audiences and on the side of journalists, depends on certain schemas being publicly "enacted" and encoded as parts of practices. Journalists speak on behalf of audiences to politicians, for example, and citizens interpret news about society to make sense of their own position within it. The regular exposure to journalistic news (or the deliberate avoidance thereof; see Syvertsen, 2017; Woodstock, 2014) can thus serve as an anchoring practice for performing public connection in various ways.

When a schema becomes publicly observable through its enactment in a practice, it also becomes useful as a resource to sustain new or derivative practices. In social networks and on online platforms,

observing how others communicate and what schemas they use is part of the learning experience for anyone wishing to participate. Thus, public connection can be established by subverting, opposing, or ironically reinterpreting established patterns of (self-)representation. Celebrity culture is another domain in which cultural schemas are performatively enacted (Couldry & Markham, 2007), offering routines of (self-)representation as deeply gendered, class- and race-based performative acts that can be adopted or ironically subverted in different quotidian contexts. Exposing the “backstage” life of celebrities, for example, is a particular schema of performing intimacy to connect celebrities to audiences (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Adopting the schema, however, can also endow divergent and critical practices of (self-)representation with legitimacy, in which feminist critique, self-exposure, and negotiations of personal versus public life can take place (Cefai & Couldry, 2017; Senft, 2008). Practices of observation, keeping up-to-date with others, and networking then can contribute to hybrid forms of media parody through practices of subversive cultural production and self-representation (Boxman-Shabtai, 2018). The same transposition of schemas from observed routines of others to scripts of personal communication can be found for teenagers learning to employ social media for personal networking (Sánchez-Navarro & Aranda, 2013) or the practices of selfie photography and experiencing one’s own corporeality in an online media space (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015). Adopting the concept of anchoring practices in conjunction with public connection shows how media are realized as resources in divergent ways. It also demonstrates how particular routines of embedding media become prerequisite conditions for adopting other practices.

Four Sets of Anchoring Practices

Starting from Couldry’s (2012) typology of “media-related” practices (pp. 43–57) as well as Baym and boyd’s (2012) idea of “socially mediated publicness,” we suggest four sets of anchoring practices for public connection in which different layers of publicness are negotiated. These sets of anchoring practices delineate a spectrum from personal to public communication, in which both ends of the spectrum are no longer conceived as binary or opposite, but can assume situational relevance depending on the given case or position of an actor. This list of practices does not aim or claim to be exhaustive, but is developed as a heuristic to differentiate and make comparable emergent forms of public connection. It ranges from actor-oriented practices of information retrieval and social orientation to public-oriented practices of (self-)presentation and intervention in public discourses, reflecting both ends of a spectrum of layers of publicness.

Practices of information retrieval and accessing content. At the individual level, this set encompasses practices of searching, accessing, or curating (digital) content in general (e.g., public and personal information, entertainment, journalism, or social media communication). This involves the acquisition of competences as well as the adaptation of practices observed among other actors. Although some routines of accessing content may be learned elsewhere (e.g., in relation to a newspaper) and be simply continued through an app, there are basic shifts from push to pull information retrieval combined with complex affordances to decide on trust of sources (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Broersma & Peters, 2013). Active practices of “social browsing” and “incidental news exposure” require the development of new kinds of competences among actors (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2014). The influence of personal networks on search strategies as well as on credibility assessments of sources on social media here needs to be analyzed (Newman, Fletcher, Antonis, & Kleis Nielsen, 2019). In regard to performing public connection, it is of interest to what degrees, over what periods, and at what times serendipitous browsing alternates with

purposeful search and how value judgments about the relevance of search results and online content are stabilized.

Practices of social orientation. Social media in particular require (and even enforce) positioning oneself in the context of others while allowing browsing, lurking, observing, or interacting at a distance. Social orientation is central to public connection in two ways: On the one hand, orientation refers to the observation of a personal or public world, represented through public actors or particular portals, media schemas, and services. These practices are akin to the schema of “keeping up with the news,” although “news” now encompasses all kinds of personal and public messages not being normatively selected by their public relevance (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Peters, 2012; Raetzsch, 2015). In a second sense, orientation includes the capacity to situate oneself in relation to others, to become aware of new schemas being enacted, of learning practices from others and adjusting one’s own position. Orientation also includes practices of negotiating forms of belonging to (or exclusion from) the social world (be it a nation state, a neighborhood community, or gendered identity) and its normative dimensions of sociality. In such an understanding, the management of social orientation includes the self-reflexive observation of inclusive and exclusive patterns in different cultural contexts (Hegde, 2016). As a permanent adjustment of one’s own position in the social world in relation to others, orientation is central to sociality in general, whether online or offline.

Practices of (self-)representation. Social media enable (and constrain) manifold forms of (self-)representation in which individual users have to decide on their degree of visibility and/or anonymity (van der Nagel, 2017; van Dijck, 2009). Because it is a particular feature of social networking sites, practices of representing oneself to others (known or unknown) can be mapped on a spectrum of deliberate obfuscation (staying largely anonymous) to open online presence (e.g., through networking different online profiles, blogs, or websites; using a given name or consistent username). The variety and intensity of becoming visible to others in digital media as professional, citizen, parent, or fan provide information on the diverse modes of public connection and its potential linkages or transgressions. This might cause conflicts as the distinct social roles do not need to stay distinct in online communication (i.e., as is the case with “context collapse”; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Such practices of (self-)representation help to differentiate spaces of discourse that initially are limited to personal or protected “safe spaces” of interpersonal exchanges, but can as well provide platforms for affecting wider publics.

Practices of public intervention. Such practices necessarily build on the previous ones, enabling actors to assume speaker positions and intervene in networks of limited exposure or in public fora. Public intervention can range from personal or small-group interactions to public positions. This may include direct forms of commenting on social media sites or journalistic media, addressing other actors, or seeking and creating audiences in support of particular (marginalized or invisible) positions. The range of intensities for intervention can encompass practices from simple liking, forwarding, citing, and sharing to openly articulating support or opposition through direct means of address and the creation of content. “Public intervention” is not limited to explicitly political issues and general social interests, but may develop out of personal concerns and grow in personal and public networks. A large body of research in social movement studies has frequently affirmed a continuous linking between personal practices in media that contribute to and shape forms of public intervention (see Cammaerts, Mattoni, & McCurdy, 2013; Della Porta, 2011; Kavada, 2016; Stephansen, 2016; Treré & Mattoni, 2015). Within a media practice framework, it is of special

interest to analyze whether occasional forms of intervention contribute to long-term stabilization of practices. We can ask how practices then change or are endowed with new meanings, whether actors begin to position themselves in opposition to or in alliance with established actors such as journalists or activists.

Taken together, these sets of anchoring practices reflect conditions to participate in society through communication but allow for different intensities and levels of involvement. Not every publicly posted comment on a social network site is intended as a position in a public discourse that challenges journalistic authority. It may remain entirely on the level of the personal communication although it is publicly visible. Yet, the practices that are established around quotidian and personal modes of communication can become stabilized in new practices that reshape public intervention and create new senses of public relevance. The performance of these anchoring practices is likewise shaped by the material possibilities and often opaque mechanisms of particular media environments, platforms, and devices (Morley, 2017), which need to be actively managed and negotiated by users (Burchell, 2017).

Performing public connection through such anchoring practices highlights how “doing media” is embedded in navigating and constituting the social in general, especially when practices are altered that were previously not concerned with media at all. Such practices become more central for organizing sociality on many levels—from the personal network to peer group activities to anonymous forms of “mass” communication. They also open up different “layers of publicness” for actors when different speaker and audience positions become available. The performance of these practices is tied to different individual competences, available resources, and interpretive schemas, and thereby accounts for the possibility of switching between personal and public modes of articulation (Lünenborg & Raetzsch, 2018, p. 19). Referring to the longstanding feminist criticism of a dichotomist distinction between public and private (Elshtain, 1981; Fraser, 2009), layers of publicness need to be conceptualized in their gendered dimensions of speaker positions. The traditional distinction between public and private foregrounded certain topics with public relevance to be published and others to be left in private discourse. Instead, layers of publicness delineate a spectrum of speaker positions in both personal and public contexts that invoke “the co-presence of strangers,” as Warner (2002, p. 57) argues in a different context.

Based on the elaboration of anchoring practices for public connection, the concluding outlook redraws the current challenges arising for the study of journalism from this perspective. Specifically, this concerns the question of how a definition of anchoring practices affects journalism, when the practices that are used to sustain its public relevance are no longer exclusively circumscribing the domain of professional actors but have pluralized and been transposed to the domain of personal communication.

Outlook: Consequences for the Study of Journalism

Public connection was initially developed in the context of audience studies to offer a more holistic understanding of the multiple ways in which citizens felt embedded (or disembedded) in the wider social world, not just a (political) public sphere. As Couldry and Markham (2007) and Couldry et al. (2010) show, understanding the multiple ways in which a sense of belonging to this social world was established and maintained required focusing on actors’ reflection of their own media consumption and meaning-making processes. This practice-based approach did not cover the impending convergence of spheres of production

and consumption that characterize the Web and social media over the past 15 years. Although public connection tentatively included a critique of the normative dogma of “informed citizens” and their exposure to journalism primarily, it did not directly address the practices of journalists themselves.

In contrast to previous media technologies such as television, radio, or newspapers, digital and networked media allow for very different constellations of actors to emerge, where the disruptive dissemination of “alternative” content can take place with low institutional barriers. Public connection can today be realized in varying intensities through a range of anchoring practices, in which speaker and audience positions can alternate, and where new competences and dynamics of networking complicate our understanding of how publics emerge and are sustained. Through the concept of media practice, we can account for divergent developments in which the networked nature, the mutability of digital content, and the acquired competences of individual actors together shape public connection and cause contention with journalism at the same time.

Instead of insisting on the specific professional competences of journalists to represent society, a more detailed look into the interconnectedness of practices of citizens and professionals is necessary. This means decentering professional journalism (as an object of study) and looking at the interplay of journalism with other public actors. The role of journalism in what Hartley (2000) calls the “redactional society” is increasingly to use professional routines to interpret public discourses, drawing together complexity rather than simply informing about what is going on. Media practice emphasizes that certain anchoring practices of information retrieval, social orientation, (self-)representation, and intervention in public discourses are now equally anchoring for professional as well as noninstitutional actors. There is no progress implied in acquiring competences in certain anchoring practices or performing them in specific ways. The likelihood or opportunities for transitions between personal to public communication are, of course, equally tied to differences in social and cultural capital, class, gender, race, and education (Hovden & Moe, 2017). However, this does not mean that practices of public connection are by default irrelevant or insignificant for the negotiation and contestation of issues of public concern. Giving up the normative emphasis on journalism or journalistic institutions as prime agents of public discourse draws attention to the social processes in which forms of media consumption and personal communication are endowed with new forms of public relevance and visibility.

An overt emphasis on the civic values in journalistic news obscures that such values now also emerge within sets of practices that have other civic purposes (e.g., the open data movement, local initiatives for a sustainable society, community organizations, and various forms of hashtag activism, e.g., #blacklivesmatter, #metoo). Methodologically, the concept of media practice can inform case study designs in which the learning processes of adopting anchoring practices can elucidate how journalism is contested or interpreted in actors’ reflexive contributions to issues of public relevance. What is needed in the study of journalism is a central analytic category to include the self-perception (i.e., actors’ knowledgeability) in the profession as much as a systematic analysis of the performativity of public connection among non-journalistic actors. With this ambition in mind, media practice and the role of anchoring practices in constituting public connection can offer a sufficiently broad yet systematic framework to achieve a higher level of comparability among studies of practice(s).

The goal of an orientation toward media practice is to draw in new actors and their contributions to current dynamics of public contention. This orientation will be needed in journalism studies to overcome an overt focus on traditional institutions and practices that shaped the public sphere but that are no longer exclusive or uncontested. With an orientation toward media practice, journalism studies can regard journalism as a relevant but no longer exclusive node in a dynamic network of practices that allows for different intensities of public connection to emerge among different layers of publicness.

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