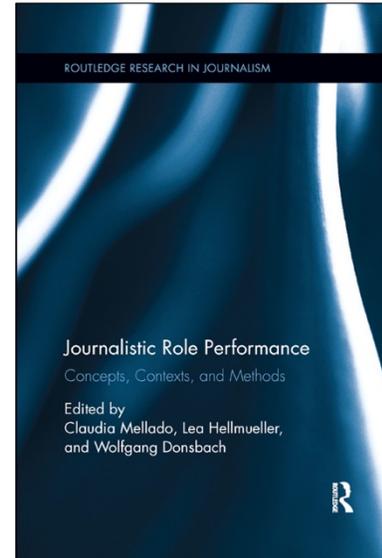


Claudia Mellado, Lea Hellmueller, and Wolfgang Donsbach (Eds.), **Journalistic Role Performance: Concepts, Contexts, and Methods**, New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2017, 263 pp. \$48.95 (paperback), \$120.67 (hardback).

Reviewed by  
Ruth Moon  
Louisiana State University

We know there is a gap between what journalists say they should do (i.e., role conception) and what they actually do (i.e., routines and other aspects of behavior). Social psychology research shows that individual roles guide behavior (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Scholars have likewise found that journalists are motivated to behave in certain ways based on their perceived roles (Donsbach, 2004). However, they don't always act consistently with their roles; in other words, there is "a disconnect between roles and content" (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014, p. 873). **Journalistic Role Performance: Concepts, Contexts, and Methods** focuses on the nature of that gap, providing tools for researchers interested in further understanding or studying the ways journalistic behavior are (and are not) linked to their beliefs about social roles.



In this volume, Claudia Mellado, Lea Hellmueller, and Wolfgang Donsbach have curated a range of helpful material on the topic. This edited collection summarizes a number of analytical and theoretical approaches to the concept of role performance, providing a valuable resource for scholars who want to research or understand the intersection of journalistic roles and behavior. Like many edited volumes, the chapters hold together on the theme but are also appropriate for standalone reading. As a result, this can be a good desk resource for anyone seeking to answer a particular question or, for someone invested in the entire topic, a thorough summary of the state of research. The chapters pull together information and approaches useful to ground a wide variety of research projects on role performance.

The book is situated around journalistic roles with the argument that a better understanding of role performance leads to a clearer grasp of journalistic roles more broadly. The methodological and theoretical approaches in each chapter are offered with the goal of

explaining the relationship and gap between news practices (i.e., journalistic performance) and normative ideals that have been central to the study of journalism in the past; and . . . assessing the contribution of professional journalism in the communication field. (p. 3)

To that end, it proceeds in three sections, devoted to conceptualizing role performance (Part I), understanding context (Part II), and adapting various methods to study the concept (Part III).

The first section surveys scholars' various concepts of role performance. In the first chapter, Claudia Mellado, Lea Hellmueller, and David H. Weaver provide a regionally oriented summary of previous research on role conceptions, concluding with the problems they observe in the current research. Roles have been neglected by theory-building in journalism studies; several different terms are used interchangeably, making the concept unclear to scholars and research subjects; study tends to be limited to hard news rather than all kinds of news production; and the area has not adapted adequately to the globally networked and international reality of contemporary news production. In fact, they argue that comparative studies such as the *Worlds of Journalism* project (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Ramaprasad, & De Beer, 2019) tend to reinforce "the development of a more Western stream of research" (p. 29) by imposing Western concepts and research styles on data gathered from other countries—a problem future role conception research should address.

The remaining chapters of Part I examine specific angles or approaches to role performance research. In chapter 2, Tim P. Vos outlines the historical development of roles in the United States, arguing that roles are constructed in the context of historical events and journalists' relationships with other social actors. Chapter 3 focuses on role performance as evident in the journalist's perception of the audience and their contribution to a public sphere, arguing that a major shift in roles occurred when journalists began to see audiences as consumers rather than citizens.

Chapter 4 examines journalistic ways of knowing, focusing especially on the role of objectivity as an entry point to the link between roles and performance. In essence, Henrik Örnebring argues, journalistic roles are defined in part by the tension between a belief in the importance of objectivity and distance with a reality of interconnection and dependence on other institutional actors for information and knowledge. In chapter 5, Martin Eide summarizes research on the democratic obligations and functions of journalism, suggesting a number of ways scholars could examine the relationship. In chapter 6, Mellado and Vos highlight the challenges of studying role performance across different news platforms, concluding with suggestions for operationalizing the concept in different contexts.

Part II examines relationships and contexts that may constrain and shape role performance: changes in news routines, emerging digital technologies, shifting roles of other professional groups, and nondemocratic governance structures. In chapter 7, David Ryfe summarizes the "practice turn" in journalism studies, showing how scholars integrate various approaches to practice theory to make sense of contemporary news production as a performance of roles (p. 131). In chapter 8, Wilson Lowrey brings an institutional perspective to the discussion, examining the ways technological change could affect the logics, or orienting frameworks, of practicing journalists; he suggests that digital logics introduce contradictory claims that can lead to behavior inconsistent with their stated goals and loyalties. Chapter 9 brings in the social relationships around journalists—including public relations, activists, citizen journalists, and computer developers and algorithms—arguing that those actors are part of the network within which journalistic roles must be considered. Chapter 10 extends the discussion to journalists beyond the West, with a reminder from Silvio Waisbord that non-Western journalism is understudied and, when it is the focus of research, it is often studied from the basis of Westernized assumptions about how journalists are motivated and oriented.

In Part III, scholars present several methodological approaches to studying role performance. First, Arjen Van Dalen, Claes H. de Vreese, and Erik Albæk present some considerations in using mixed quantitative

methods, including surveys, experiments, and content analysis; they also discuss how various terms can be operationalized across these forms of data. Jane B. Singer writes in chapter 12 about triangulation—using quantitative and qualitative methods together to holistically understand what, how, and why journalists act. Chapter 13 presents some considerations of using a particular qualitative method—discourse analysis—to study journalistic role performance, and chapter 14 describes liquid content analysis, an approach that examines texts as they emerge and disappear in online environments.

Like many edited volumes, the chapters present a variety of approaches, voices, evidence and theory, typically describing the state of current research and suggesting possible methods rather than offering new data or findings; this could be a disappointment to a scholar looking for groundbreaking research rather than a reference text. Another drawback of the book lies in the way it compartmentalizes journalism “beyond the West” into one chapter among 14, rather than integrating more diverse voices and approaches throughout the text. Several authors note their limitations in studying one country or a Western region, but this text as a whole points to the continued need for scholars who build and test theories in the vast variety of contexts where journalists do their work today.

These limitations notwithstanding, this is a useful manual for anyone interested in researching aspects of journalistic role performance. While it can certainly be read cover to cover as a primer on this area of study, many scholars might find it most useful as a reference text, turning to particular chapters for introductions to particular methods or theoretical approaches. It is an important resource text for university libraries, and certain chapters (or even the entire book) would provide a significant addition to graduate-level courses on the sociology of journalism.

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