Normalizing Instagram

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ABSTRACT

In less than seven years, Instagram has grown five-fold and in, 2021, overtook Twitter globally as a source of news. Here we engage the recurrent debate regarding the normalization of digital tools through interviews with lifestyle journalists from Austria and the United States (n=63). Through the lens of Normalization Process Theory, we seek to understand how the routine use of Instagram has become embedded among journalists and elaborate on the nature of *normalization* in journalism. We argue that to engage with the normalization of a technology is also to consider the stacking of platform-specific routines. Journalists reflected that normalizing Instagram required them to apply many of the norms they developed using Twitter.

Keywords: DIGITAL JOURNALISM, NEWS PRODUCTION, IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS, INSTAGRAM, LIFESTYLE JOURNALISM

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INTRODUCTION

Matt Swider did not mean to become "the world's most powerful tech journalist" (Bernstein, 2021). As a tech journalist, Swider had always been keenly aware of what his audience wanted to know about and in November 2020 the need became obvious: his audience wanted to know how to buy the newest Playstation video game console. Swider leveraged the sources he had cultivated among retailers to send out "restock alerts" to help people know when to purchase Playstations from retailers. For those outside of Swider's audience, it may seem like a petty concern, but as Bernstein (2021) notes: "To understand the service Swider renders and the loyalty of his audience, it's necessary to understand what it's like out there for the poor souls trying to buy a PlayStation 5" (para. 10). Finding a Playstation, near release, was immensely difficult but Swider's Instagram feed features videos where he walks through restock schedules for consoles, photos of him at retailers celebrating with people who have received their video game console, and restock announcements—all featured on Instagram with the artful use of a photo of the console matched with a short caption revealing the restock details.

Matt Swider's Instagram reflects his tech-savvy audience—over-the-top excited images of him holding new gadgets and caption specificity regarding device particulars that enthusiasts would most appreciate (e.g. megapixels, storage capacity) (Bernstein, 2021). Noteworthy of his Instagram account? All of his posts (at time of writing) are under 280 characters. The 280-character limit is not an expectation of Instagram--which allows 2200 characters—but of Twitter. Swider's work distilling the complex technological information regarding how to track down commercially-hot products then would almost seem to be wasted on the structure of Instagram.

In 2021, the Reuters Digital News Report confirmed what news organizations had predicted just a year earlier (Rajan, 2020): Twitter had been overtaken by Instagram as a source

of news globally (Newman et al., 2021). Instagram, the report notes, grew five-fold just from 2014 to 2021. Yet, while some research has been conducted on journalists' use of Instagram (see Bossio, 2021; Mellado & Alfaro, 2020), it remains dwarfed by the substantive corpus of research related to journalists' use of Twitter and Facebook. To help address this shortcoming, this study explores the use of Instagram by journalists, like Swider, for whom the platform's affordances, audiences and focus on entertainment, guidance and place (Newman et al., 2021) appear particularly suited: those working in the area of lifestyle reporting.

Based on interviews with lifestyle journalists (n=63) from Austria and the United States, we aim to offer three contributions: (1) to explore, on a practical level, how lifestyle journalists have normalized the use of Instagram, (2) to root extant concerns regarding normalization in journalism studies literature within the robust theoretical framework of Normalization Process Theory, and (3) to invite an elaboration of what it means to *normalize* within journalism. In regards to the latter, normalization studies often reflect current digital technologies and their normalization relative to pre-digital workflows (see for example, Lasorsa et al., 2012; Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016). This is a vital but incomplete picture, in that--as we will argue--normalizing new digital tools means not only normalizing relative to pre-digital trends, but also relative to the digital trends that have already preceded a new tool. In regards to platforms, to normalize Instagram means to normalize *from* Facebook and Twitter.

Normalization Process Theory

Normalization Process Theory provides an avenue for understanding how new routines—which often result from new technologies—become embedded within everyday practice. NPT explores how "how knowledge is held, transferred, and created within and across professional

groups, but it also seeks to understand the work that actors …have to engage in to implement new knowledge in practice" (McEvoy et al., 2014, p. 2). Drawn from the health sciences, NPT is concerned with three core problems:

1. Implementation—the way an institution can bring "a practice or practices into action" (May et al., 2009, p. 2)
2. Embedding—the processes by which practices become a part of everyday work routines.
3. Integration—the processes by which practices are sustained socially within an institution.

While NPT has been applied quantitatively to study longitudinal embedding, it has also been applied—as with this study—on short-term embedding (Nordmark, Zingmark & Lindberg, 2016) and as a means with which actors can reflect on long-term routine embedding (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). In the health sciences, NPT has been used to assess and explore medical use of telehealth procedures, and the use of new technologies in patient intake and patient discharge (Bouamrane, Osbourne & Mair, 2011; Nordmark, Zingmark & Lindberg, 2016). The core concerns of NPT make this theory an ideal lens to consider digital adoption in newsrooms given that journalists in the past have complained about the institutional nature of digital adoption and the central questions of journalistic epistemology—knowledge claims, practices and norms—are shaped by concerns like those regarding digital adoption (Ekström, Lewis, & Westlund, 2020). In short, at stake in normalization processes are the ways in which journalists assess the knowledge producing, or epistemic features, of a routine (Ekström, Lewis, & Westlund, 2020). The embedding of new routines, from new technologies, then does not necessarily come from individual journalists but rather from top-down processes. Hence, the embedding of these routines can "come at the expense of the current workforce, a workforce without the core

competencies required or the desire to utilize innovation in the way necessary to attain idealized outcomes" (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021, p. 1445).

While NPT has been rarely or explicitly reflected in journalism studies scholarship, issues of normalization have been a central concern in journalism in the midst of the digital turn of the industry. Centered in normalization scholarship is the question posed by Tandoc Jr. and Vos (2016): *to which* norms are journalists normalizing? To that question, an equally relevant question from the NPT scholarship in the health sciences would be *from which* norms are journalists normalizing? Through the lens of NPT, it is worth considering that normed processes are revokable; the use of the typewriter—for example—has been denormalized as have the many routines associated with it (Murray et al., 2010).

In their metaanalysis of NPT research, McEnvoy et al. (2014) deliniated the key theoretical constructs of NPT in how they are operationalized. *Coherence* is reflected through a clear understanding of innovations and their own labor; in *cognitive participation*, actors reflect on legitimation and buy-in, in terms of their own involvement as well as the involvement of others; in *collective action*, the emphasis is on the resources, training, division of labor and the workability of the innovations; and for *reflexive monitoring*, the emphasis was on actors' assessment of the implementation (May & Finch, 2009). Generally, McEnvoy et al. (2014) found that actors blur these constructs in reflecting on the normalization of their routines. For example, in Sanders et al. (2011), health care workers reflected on a system for treating pain that would seem to reflect coherence, yet their description of the process simultaneously seemed to reflect collective action. In other words, journalists may reflect on multiple problems and constructs in reflecting on NPT, in that the process of adoption is rarely step-by-step (McEnvoy et al., 2014).

Normalization, of course, takes time (Molyneux & Mourão, 2019) and it can at times be uneven. For example, Holton and Molyneux (2017) noted a shift among much of the journalism on Twitter from *anything goes* to stricter organizational control of social media in order to conform the platform's affordances with organizational policies on brand and traditional journalistic values. Yet, not all features of Twitter, such as quote tweets and replies, were able to conform (Holton & Molyneaux (2017).

Journalists' adoption across platforms

Journalists' adoption of social media platforms reflects substantial concerns regarding who "can take charge over definitions concerning who is a journalist, and who produces misinformation" (Steensen & Westlund, 2021, p. 6). Indeed, the shape of journalism has changed to adopt different platform norms—not the other way around (Bruns, 2018); the overall transition of news from platforms produced and controlled by news media to platforms produced in Silicon Valley have forced journalists to "further develop […] their knowledge-based practices to fit the affordances of digital media platforms" (Ekström, Lewis & Westlund, 2020, p. 206). After all, "Silicon Valley perhaps did not build social media platforms with journalists in mind, and journalists are now the ones who must continually adapt to the affordances provided by the platform and its algorithms" (Molyneux, & Mourão, 2019, p. 249). Steensen and Westlund (2021) note that platforms can be "invisible" to journalists, given that it represents something "journalists do not need to think about in their daily practice, nor something they have wide awareness of or talk about" (p. 22). So journalists might not readily reflect on platforms, even as they play a pivotal role in "complicating how news functions as knowledge" (Ekström, Lewis & Westlund, 2020, p. 207).

Platforms have "gained significant influence as to the overall role journalism and news play in democracy" (Ekström, & Westlund, 2019), even as most scholarship examining normalization phenomena has focused on Twitter (Hermida, 2010). Instagram, for example, was founded in 2010, merely three years after Twitter, and has now reached more than one billion users, overtaking Twitter as a source for news globally (Newman et al., 2021). Yet, perhaps partly due to the slower uptake of Instagram among journalists, scholarship has so far also only rarely engaged with this particular platform. To better understand how journalists may be normalizing Instagram, then, it is important to review what we know about how journalists have rationalized other social media, such as Twitter. Such research has shown that, initially, journalists normalized Twitter into their existing routines, using the platform merely to promote stories (Lariscy et al., 2009).

Later research has explored the additional posting norms journalists reflect on social media, in particular for (1) finding sources (e.g. using platforms and chat apps to check and identify sources) (Belair-Gagnon, Agur, & Frisch, 2018; Paulussen & Harder, 2014), (2) to offer commentary (e.g. at times this is reflected in journalists offering transparency in how they obtained a story) (Molyneux & Holton, 2015; Canter, 2013), and (3) respond and interact with their audiences, (e.g. through thanking audience members who comment on or share their work) (Kananovich & Perreault, 2021; Molyneux & Holton, 2015; Said-Hung et al., 2014). Over time, Twitter has affected some journalistic routines more markedly, and most news organizations have reacted to the increasing importance social media play in all stages of news production and distribution by appointing and designated social media managers and editors, and implementing specific guidelines for using social media (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Duffy & Knight, 2019; Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016). Broadly, we can identify three ways in which journalists use Twitter

(Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016). First, journalists use social media to *monitor* news from sources such as "the government and from typical social media users" (Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016, p. 8). Second, journalists *interact* with their audiences, responding to and connecting with them. Third, journalists use social media to *promote* their work and deliver content. Tandoc Jr. and Vos (2016) emphasize the later use, noting–from the standpoint of normalization–that the process of dissemination is not a historically journalistic activity. Rather, marketing the news is a process that has been normalized into journalism via social media and as a result of management expectations responsive to platforms (Belair-Gagnon, 2015). In pre-digital times, the "newspaper delivery truck took care of dissemination. But now part of the expectations of journalists include delivering and promoting their own content" (Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016, p. 14).

While to some extent similar to Twitter, Instagram also differs in important ways. It is primarily a visual platform, is predominantly apolitical and reflects standard lifestyle journalism topics of travel, food, fashion and beauty (Al Nashmi, 2018). Given scholarship's historical bias towards journalism's relationship with political life at the expense of everyday life (Hanusch, 2012; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018), it may not be entirely surprising that Instagram has received comparatively less attention from researchers. Yet, recent scholarship has argued that Instagram is a particularly vital platform if we want to better understand particularly how *softer*, but highly popular types of news – such as lifestyle journalism – are developing through the use of social media platforms (Maares & Hanusch, 2020b; Maares, Banjac & Hanusch, 2021). Early theoretical work also points out some important differences in the use of Twitter and Instagram by journalists, even if they can be grouped within similar analytical dimensions (Hermida & Mellado, 2020). Instagram has quickly emerged as an important news source, and appears particularly suitable for lifestyle journalism with its focus on commercial values transported

through glossy imagery (Maares & Hanusch, 2020b). Journalists have commonly used social media as a means of promotion and self-branding (Molyneux & Holton, 2015) and, given a perceived weakness in the economic capital of journalism – notably in lifestyle reporting – it would make sense that journalists would increasingly look to social media as a means to monetize their relationships online.

An increasing number of journalists are developing active profiles on Instagram with the main objective to "make their own professional identity and role promotable and relatable" (Bossio, 2021, p. 14). As a platform, Instagram presents an avenue for "anyone to reach large audiences, broadening users' followership outside their personal contacts" (Maares, Banjac & Hanusch, 2021) but journalists differ in their use of the platform (Mellado & Alfaro, 2020). Mellado and Alfaro (2020) propose a typology of ways that journalists use Instagram "to obtain information, to report the news, to engage in branding activities" (p. 1272):

- An *adapted approach*: journalists report making conscious decisions about their use of social media often by following institutional guidance or advice (see Koliska & Roberts, 2015). Journalists using this approach also "make an effort to avoid crossing professional and personal boundaries in their accounts" (Mellado & Alfaro, 2020 p. 1273). Mellado and Alfaro (2020) saw this *adapted approach* more acutely applied on Instagram than on Twitter.
- A *skeptical-resistant* approach: journalists here report seeing platforms as places for "virulent discussion rather than as serious spaces for sharing and obtaining information" (Mellado & Alfaro, 2020, p. 1274). Journalists did not see Instagram as a valid professional tool for this approach and so if they had an account, it was only for private/personal use.

- A *redefiners approach*: in this approach, journalists considered Instagram a valid professional space for work, embodying Instagram in order to take advantage of it by reaching a new audience. Redefiners tend to operate individually and "value authenticity and transparency when using social media over other traditional media practices, providing opinions with no constraints and using different branding strategies under their own terms and personal 'editorial lines'" (Mellado & Alfaro, 2020, p. 1274).

Research on Instagram has often emphasized authenticity or the "the ability to build intimacy with followers by being relatable and accessible" (Maares et al., 2021, p. 8). Furthermore, this redefiners approach would seem to run counter to much of the literature on online news given that "individual practice has been downplayed as a determinant for innovation in online newsrooms" (Steensen, 2009, p. 822).

Lifestyle journalism and social media

While Instagram has assisted the emergence of new, peripheral actors in the lifestyle journalistic field (Perreault & Bell, 2022), especially so-called Influencers (Maares & Hanusch, 2020a; Perreault & Hanusch, 2022), professional journalists and news organizations around the world also use it regularly (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019). A study from Australia has shown that in 2016, lifestyle journalists already used Instagram as frequently as Twitter (Hanusch et al., 2016). Two-thirds used the platform at least once a week, while four out of ten did so daily. It is safe to assume that these figures have grown in the time since, in line with the strong growth in user numbers. Lifestyle journalism – defined as "the journalistic coverage of the expressive values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of

consumption and everyday life" (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2013, p. 947) and a "labor of love" reflecting journalists' love for the topics and people in *soft news* (Perreault and Bélair-Gagnon 2022, p. 5) – appears to be predestined for using a platform like Instagram. Indeed, we can already see how the platform's presence and popularity has affected a range of lifestyle journalistic areas, with "fashion shows, shop launches, or travel campaigns (…) conceptualized with distribution through social media in mind" (Maares & Hanusch, 2020, p. 266).

While there is relatively little research about specifically lifestyle journalists' uses of social media, let alone Instagram, existing research does point to substantial differences in role perceptions. Compared with their colleagues in other news beats, lifestyle journalists tend to place special emphasis on inspiring, entertaining, or providing guidance and advice (Hanusch, 2019). These roles seem to connect well with Instagram social media logics, leading us to assume that lifestyle journalists may adopt Instagram into their existing routines quite easily. Further, lifestyle journalism displays, more than other beats, particularly consumerist ideals (Hanusch, 2018), which are also in line with the consumerist nature of much of Instagram content. Research on lifestyle magazines and blogging has also recently identified journalists embracing digitalisation logics at least to some extent in that magazines are providing some participatory opportunities to bloggers within their content (Cheng & Tandoc Jr., 2021; Vos & Perreault, 2020). To what extent specifically lifestyle journalists are adapting to social media, however, has not yet been examined in sufficient detail.

To address these issues and to shed light on normalization processes of the social media platforms, particularly Instagram, in the field of lifestyle journalism, we developed the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do lifestyle journalists use Instagram as a part of their journalistic practice?

RQ 2: What normalization mechanisms of Instagram do lifestyle journalists identify in their work?

Method

To address the research questions, the authors conducted a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 32 Austrian and 31 US lifestyle journalists. For recruitment purposes, journalists were identified as those who primarily "work for a journalistic medium" (Fröhlich, Koch, & Obermaier, 2013, p. 815) and lifestyle journalists in particular were identified as those who reported on the expressed "values and practices that help create and signify a specific identity within the realm of consumption and everyday life" (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2013, p. 947). This is often reflected in reporting on lifestyle topics such as beauty and fashion, fitness, health, cuisine and cooking, family, technology, travel and celebrity (Hanusch, 2012). Austria and the US were selected as the sites for our study given that lifestyle journalism's growth has been primarily attributed to economically advanced Western countries (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2013) and as such journalists in these countries would be most likely to have evaluated the role and function of Instagram. Austria and the US have faced similar challenges in the transition to digital formats, consolidation of news organizations and a less trustful news readership (Jenkins & Graves, 2022; Sparviero & Trappel, 2022); that said, digital news has progressed less quickly in Austria than in the US, which has meant that a more vibrant newspaper culture still exists there (Sparviero & Trappel, 2022). Furthermore, the multi-country perspective is "central to the investigation of a number of general issues in journalism studies" such as normalization of technology" (Örnebring, 2012, p. 776). Our sample included journalists who worked for general-interest publications (e.g. magazines and newspapers), as well as specific lifestyle publications.

The research team recruited participants via email and interviews were conducted via online video (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom).

The interview question guidelines probed journalists' motivations for involvement in lifestyle journalism, their experience in the field, and their experience with integration of technology; this was guided by similar interview-based research on journalistic uses of technology and lifestyle journalists' roles (e.g. Perreault & Hanusch, 2022). The interviews resulted in a significant corpus of qualitative data, and for this study, we are analyzing data from three areas: (1) questions about journalist's experience with digitization in their news organizations (e.g. "how has digitization changed your reporting?" "how has digitization changed the quality of your reporting? And "how has digitization changed the types of reporting?"), (2) questions about their use of Instagram, professionally as well as personally, (e.g. "what role does Instagram play in your reporting?, "what does Instagram deliver that other social media cannot?" and "what are you trying to achieve with Instagram?") and (3) questions about how journalist's perceive the future use of Instagram and similar digital tools in lifestyle journalism (e.g. "How do you think your journalistic niche will develop in regards to digitization?"). All interviews were conducted between September 2020 and February 2021. Semi-structured interviews lasted about 45 minutes to an hour and a half each. Anonymity was granted to all participants in part because we were only interested in generating themes and general concepts regarding normalization processes related to Instagram.. Hence, in the findings, respondents are quoted without identification, but are given additional context--country of reporting, niche, medium--where it may help with interpretation, while not jeopardizing the anonymity of participants.

All 63 participants were located in the United States or Austria. Reflecting a largely female presence in lifestyle journalism (Hanusch, 2019), the sample skewed female (n=43). Interviews were conducted by trained interviewers in German in Austria and in English in the US and were conducted until the research team felt they reached saturation of ideas. Interviews were then transcribed for textual analysis. One research team member is an English-only speaker and the other is a native German and English speaker. German interviews were translated into English through a three-step method of (1) initial online transcription via DeepL Translate and Google Translate, (2) trouble areas in translation were spotted via a close reading by a bi-lingual research assistant and then retranslated, and (3) a bi-lingual member of the research team checked all quotes against original transcriptions used for additional accuracy. This was done so that the research team members could jointly analyze the research data.

The constant comparative approach was employed here in order to address the research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). While the constant comparative method may commonly be associated with grounded theory, Fram (2013) argues that it is also well suited for both emic coding—driven by themes that emerge from the data analysis—as well as etic coding—driven by theory and literature. The research team read through the data as a corpus, considering responses that alluded to process normalization, Instagram, and digitization. The research team compared the themes that emerged in order to establish resonance and find associations, differences and similarities among them. In an initial reading of the data, we operated with the assumption that the US and Austrian journalists represented two separate datasets. The research team found that, while prior literature reflects meaningful differences between journalism in Austria and the US (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), the similarities that emerge contextually from being situated in developed Western countries made such differentiation insensible. In particular, respondents

reflected on the use of Instagram and digitization in a relatively consistent manner, suggesting substantial similarities across countries.

This study was done in accordance with the [REDACTED FOR BLIND REVIEW] Review Board (approval #19-0041). Participants in Austria and the US were verbally consented for participation--and informed their participation was voluntary--and all participants were deidentified. Hence, in this study we will use quotes from participants with limited descriptors, except where context is germane, in order to ensure anonymity of respondents.

Instagram as a means to reach the lifestyle audience

In regards to RQ 1, which was interested in the ways in which lifestyle journalists used Instagram, the interviews identified a range of different purposes. Our respondents argued that Instagram was used primarily as a means to reach a different audience, to highlight visual stories, and to identify future issues they should cover. As we discuss below, these align broadly with general findings about journalists' uses of social media.

Journalists argued that Instagram primarily provided an avenue to audiences who differed from their usual audience. This was particularly the case in terms of reaching younger and more feminine audiences. As one respondent put it: "In theory, everything you post on Instagram could also be posted on Facebook….it's just that Facebook is out of date" for their audience. The participant went on to add that they were more likely to reach a younger audience through Instagram, even as they noted that Facebook and Instagram were run by the same company, and this is an audience "on the forefront of technology...and that drive traffic" back to their news organization's website. As a platform, journalists said, Instagram represents a more positive platform for storytelling whereas they perceived other platforms to be more negatively oriented.

Furthermore, one journalist argued that “Instagram is a more feminine” platform because it’s “so image-heavy” and doesn’t require the user to be constantly promoting their opinion as with Twitter. And with both of these perspectives--that Instagram is better for reach youth, women--this reflects a more general consensus that Instagram allowed the journalists to find particular audiences for their niche; audiences that may be inaccessible through other means.

Our respondents also argued that Instagram presents an ideal way to present more visual stories in that “image processing is simply nicer and better on Instagram” than other social media platforms. One journalist noted that “it is the best platform for the fashion industry; because fashion lives through pictures and videos, it is actually perfect for fashion companies” and it is perfect because Instagram better facilitates a connection between the visuals and the market. They noted that one can easily find information and shop through Instagram and so as a result “you don't have to leave Instagram anymore and can scour the whole fashion world.” In a similar manner, one journalist argued “Instagram has insane potential for travel journalism” and another argued Instagram is “most important platform for travel journalists.” In both fashion and travel, journalists attached the value of Instagram primarily to the niche itself--as a platform, Instagram allowed journalists to tell particular types of stories in an ideal manner. By contrast, gaming journalists argued that the platform provides a way to “pitch” the overall story to the audience through an image and a small amount of text. One journalist said they liked to do this in discussions about the hard-to-attain video game console, the Playstation 5, given that it attracts attention and builds enthusiasm:

> It’s usually very focused on an image and like a few words....so when people are scrolling through their feeds they see that and it catches their eye and they’re like

> "what, what is- oh Playstation oh let's see what this is--oh man this is awesome, I have to tell my friend."

Finally, journalists saw Instagram as an avenue for identifying future issues they could cover. As one Austrian journalist put it, when they "started in 2010, maybe 15 percent of Austrians had a smartphone...now it is unimaginable that someone does not have a smartphone." In other words, there are more pictures being taken by users and, for niches such as travel, this means journalists can learn much about a given place--from the perspective of their audience--just by following Instagram. The appeal of Instagram as an avenue for sharing is that it "offers a sense of belonging to a certain community" and hence, people find themselves sharing "timely information" that's not necessarily "the whole story, but it'll give you enough to say…'this is a story that we're covering.'" As one journalist put it, Instagram allows the journalist to keep their "ear to the ground" in order to sense what stories are trending. It also allows journalists to gain an "Instagram presence" respondents said had helped them garner more freelance work and to be able to learn about new stories.

> So I'm new to Columbus [USA], and I can bop around my community and take pictures and tag, you know, such-and-such company, organization, person, writer, whatever, in Columbus. And that way those people see who I am, that I'm new here, this is the type of stuff that I'm covering and interested in.

All of this is to say that journalists regarded Instagram as a part of their process that helped them identify new or elusive audiences, to better report more visually oriented stories and as a tool for gaining information about their story and the stories they could be reporting. These notions align with much of the existing research on journalists' use of social media. On one hand, much like Twitter quickly proved useful to journalists for finding stories (Tandoc Jr. &

Vos, 2016), Instagram is now a common resource for lifestyle journalists to identify topics they want to cover. Given that Instagram focuses on lifestyle topics like travel and fashion, and is concerned with positive stories, there appears to be a clear and natural synergy between lifestyle journalism and Instagram. In terms of identifying new audiences and telling stories visually, our findings relate to aspects of promotion and marketing of their own work (Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016; Molyneux & Holton, 2015). Given that, as noted earlier, journalistic (self-)promotion was not the norm in pre-digital times (Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016), and Twitter first allowed this role of journalists marketing the news to emerge, our findings point to a further extension of this paradigm through Instagram. Seen in this light, journalistic cultures have progressively embraced a marketing culture which can be observed across their use of all social media. With Instagram again a more natural fit for lifestyle journalists, they see ample opportunities in this regard. Notable in our respondents' answers was a lack of discourse related to interacting with audiences. Research on Twitter has noted that interacting with audiences was another important area of usage (Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016), but our findings suggest this is not so much the case for lifestyle journalists and Instagram. We think there may be multiple reasons for this. On the one hand, increasing dissatisfaction with negative online feedback may have reduced journalists' willingness to interact with audiences (Frischlich et al., 2019). On the other, Instagram may simply not be as interactive a platform as Twitter, based on its affordances. As Hermida and Mellado (2020) note, Instagram restricts interaction to occur mostly within the platform, limiting the extent to which users can repost or directly talk to one another.

Instagram normalized through individual practice

Normalization, as noted earlier, occurs through the four generative mechanisms of coherence, cognitive participation, collective action and reflexive monitoring, In regards to our second research question, which addressed the normalization mechanisms that exist among journalists' narratives about the use of Instagram, we found that journalists emphasized reflexive monitoring and coherence, while collective action and cognitive participation were deemphasized. This is perhaps owing to journalists' need to consider the best avenues they could individually use to reach their audience. Overall, our findings reflect a siloed approach to normalization that perhaps speaks to a comparatively high level of autonomy granted to journalists in integrating Instagram into their reporting process.

Coherence. The ability for a process to be coherent is an essential component which requires not just an understanding of a practice, but also the context in which it occurs. For our respondents, this appeared through acknowledging that Instagram was first, and foremost, a social media platform that operates with an algorithm. As one participant noted, Instagram was a platform preferable to Twitter and Facebook in part because "you have the opportunity to be seen by every single one of your followers." The participant went on to note that, were the same content posted on Facebook, "only about 6.5% of [your contacts] actually see what you're going to do, because that's their business model." They conceptualized it in quantitative terms—in order to obtain the same quantity of views on Twitter or Facebook, a journalist may need to post something 10 times or more. Similarly, journalists conceptualized Instagram as the *hook* that would draw readers deeper into a story. Particularly in the case of gaming journalists, respondents reflected on Instagram as a way to share a strategic image—a game, gaming console—paired with a release date or a reviewer score as a way to start conversation and draw

people into their news organization. Hence, the main use of Instagram as a tool for promoting content, as discussed earlier, is noticeable here again in their discussions of what Instagram *is*.

Reflexive Monitoring. Furthermore, journalists were reflexive on the platform, largely assessing it relative to Facebook or Twitter. When asked about Instagram, many participants rationalized their use by comparing it with other platforms through comments such as "I don't like Facebook at all," "I only use Facebook because my audience is local and older," "I use Twitter and Facebook for business but not Instagram" and "Facebook is bigger…[but Instagram] could play a bigger role" in the future. The latter participant noted that her job predominantly encouraged her to use Facebook, yet she also acknowledged that (1) her daughter refused to use Facebook, but loved Instagram, and (2) indeed, most of her audience was older. In other words, with this particular journalist, a U.S. based travel reporter, her comments connected her perceived lack of engagement with Instagram with the possibility that she was missing a key, young subset of her audience. In this comparison, it is worth noting, Instagram largely appeared positively compared to other platforms, given that Instagram "has a certain brand identity that I think is more welcoming and pleasurable to interact with than Twitter or Facebook—which is just all like insane old people freaking out about everything all the time."

Cognitive Participation and Collective Action. Journalists' *cognitive participation* was deemphasized largely given the nature of how these mechanisms are defined within the theoretical framework—as reflected in the process of local (physical) organizations. Given the increasingly remote nature of the work within the field, it would then make sense that these mechanism would be less reflected in the way in which Instagram has normalized. In other words, given that these mechanisms often occur through newsrooms, journalists were bound to struggle with these mechanisms. However, conversant with Mellado and Alfaro's (2020)

redefiner approach, lifestyle journalists in this study articulated their approach to Instagram as a norm developed and operated on an individual level. This *redefiner* approach does reflect a small degree of *collective action*--not collective in relation to a particular newsroom, rather a reshaping of behaviors amidst the field itself.

Journalists were explicit that their work in adopting Instagram was work done solo. They argued that Instagram was normalized in their practice simply because it kept them individually afloat within the field. As one participant put it, "we're nomads, we go where the food and water is." The journalist added: "So a lot of people are in industry, and you have to be on Instagram, or else you're missing part of the perspective, not being responsible to your wide mainstream audience." This individualized approach to normalization is also reflected in how they chose to build an Instagram following—with their personal account. Indeed, many journalists noted that they did not have a professional Instagram and, if they did, they rarely used it. As one journalist noted, everything is mixed in lifestyle journalism "the private with the public' it's a mixture, you can't separate it." That said, journalists also argued that using a singular account allowed them to make the best use of the platform. As one journalist put it, a unified account helps a journalist "strengthen one's own brand and to position oneself and also to make oneself visible to the outside world for which topics one stands for." Hence, we can see similar issues surface in lifestyle journalists' mix of personal and professional uses of Instagram that have already been discussed in relation to other social media platforms and journalists more generally (Hanusch & Bruns, 2017).

Taken together, this paints a picture of journalists operating in a largely siloed manner in normalizing Instagram, hence deemphasizing the mechanism of cognitive participation.

Conclusion

Through the lens of normalization process, the question of "*to which* norms are journalists normalizing" (Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016), we could then add "*from which* norms are journalists normalizing." Clearly, what the journalists in this study are normalizing *from* are the norms of Twitter, which reflects a *coherence* regarding the platform (Ekström & Westlund, 2019; May & Finch, 2009). Instagram, rather like Twitter, would seem to make the biggest impact from shorter entries. More specifically, journalists normalized *from* greater platform interactivity (Frischlich et al., 2019; Hermida and Mellado, 2020)—which journalists in our sample embraced, perhaps because of the negative online feedback. However, what journalists were normalizing *to* would certainly be reflected in their described playful use of images and graphics.

Lifestyle journalists in our sample reflected on their use of Instagram as a platform increasingly normalized within the subfield. In regards to RQ1, lifestyle journalists primarily used Instagram as a means to reach a new/different audience, to emphasize visual stories, and to identify future areas of reporting. In regards to RQ2, lifestyle journalists had a siloed approach to normalization--with journalists normalizing in reflection to practices within the field as opposed to within their own newsrooms.

From the viewpoint of normalization process theory, journalists would seem to have implemented Instagram in relation to expectations of the field more so than in their local newsrooms—and this was reflected in the generative mechanisms employed. Journalists reflected throughout in ways that reflected *coherence* of the platform. Indeed, their ability to spot the specific uses of the platform--for audiences, visual storytelling, targeted reporting--display that journalists understood the meaningful qualities of Instagram in regards to its operation (May

& Finch, 2009; Scaraboto et al., 2020). Moreover, journalists' ability to reinvent the processes they employed for Twitter in order to better use Instagram would seem to reflect a *collective action* within the field; the ability to reshape existing practices and reporting behaviors does not exist in a vacuum, however, but rather--journalists reflected--evidenced by collective activity within the field (Bamford et al., 2012). Yet, noteworthy in the above is that journalists were normalizing in relation to the field--not their local newsroom. While normalization process in many cases has accounted--in successful situations--for the implementation of digital tools in local settings (Singer, 2005), this of course doesn't reflect the increasingly remote nature of reporting. Hence why, in regards to the second research question, less evidence was found of *cognitive participation*--given that this mechanism requires operationalizing an organization's policy decisions (May & Finch, 2009). Given that many journalists actually used their own personal Instagram, this mechanism seemed to be less in play in that their manner of normalizing Instagram perhaps reflected weaker ties to local newsrooms as they "go where the food and water is."

This points toward the key theoretical contribution in the study: the lens of normalization process theory itself as a means of considering the complex processes that accompany innovation in journalism. The mechanisms of NPT pinpoint journalists' work to assess the epistemic features of a new routine, such as posting to Instagram. In this case, journalists perceived posting to Instagram as conversant with existing norms of lifestyle journalism: an emphasis on fun, visuality and brand (Hanusch & Bruns, 2017; Hanusch, 2019). Lifestyle journalism, like all journalism, "must continually adapt to a changing online environment that is becoming a primary platform for presenting their work and also a primary place in which they encounter audience members" (Molyneux, & Mourão, 2019, p. 248), hence, why lifestyle journalists were keen to

make use of Instagram in the first place even in cases—such as gaming journalism—where the platform fit less with their existing practices (Mellado & Alfaro, 2020).

Furthermore, and in reflection of the platform dynamics within digital journalism studies (Steensen & Westlund, 2021), our results point to an important differentiation that needs to be made in relation to understanding process normalization in journalism. As we have noted earlier, journalism scholarship has identified important aspects of the normalization of social media in journalism (Lasorsa et al., 2012; Tandoc Jr. & Vos, 2016). Originally, journalists merely co-opted the possibilities of these new platforms into their existing routines. Over time, however, more profound, broader transformations have taken place. While they do not bear sole responsibility in the light of the increasing use of metrics and the financial crises of many news organizations, social media have contributed to the importance of promoting journalistic content -- a role that barely existed for individual journalists in the pre-digital age. Now, promotion has become the new normal and an *invisible* aspect of newswork given that it is taken for granted by journalists (Steensen and Westlund, 2021). Instagram is, arguably, being normalized into these new routines. It would be erroneous to examine the relatively more recent arrival of Instagram in the journalistic mainstream without taking account of the fact other social media platforms -- most prominently Twitter -- have already changed the game. Journalists have thus gone from putting old wine into new wine skins, to putting new wine into the *even newer* wine skins brought to them.

Limitations

All studies have limitations and this study does as well. First, the siloed approach to normalization may reflect the time period in which the study took place. From September 2020 to February 2021, journalists in both the US and Austria were adjusting to a remote work reality,

largely working from home as a result of pandemic restrictions (Perreault, Perreault & Maares, 2021; Price & Antonova, 2022). Hence, it may be that there is more cognitive participation among journalists but it was less easy for journalists to articulate when not physically embedded with their traditional newsroom environment. Second, we need to take journalists' accounts at face value based on journalists' narratives yet, as we know, journalists do not always do what they say they do. At the same time, we also know that a key part of normalization is the ability for journalists to make sense of a process's "meaning, uses, and utility" (May & Finch, 2009, p. 542), which certainly occurs through journalists' discourse.

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