

#instajournalism

The Boundaries of Journalism
in the Age of Social Media Influencing

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This thesis explores the professional boundaries between journalism and social media influencing. Since the arrival of social media, influencers have emerged in the journalistic sphere of producing and disseminating information of public relevance. The aim of this study is to find out how journalists discursively (re)construct the boundaries of their profession in relation to these new journalistic actors. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with five participants from four media organizations about the use of the social media platforms Instagram, YouTube, and/or Snapchat. Critical discursive psychological concepts of interpretative repertoire and subject position were employed to analyze the interview data. The results of this study suggest that influencer content on lifestyle topics was constructed by the participants as having journalistic characteristics or being journalism. Furthermore, the concept of boundaries between journalism and influencing seemed to be a more familiar construction for journalists with young target audiences. Two prevalent interpretative repertoires with subject positions were found in the data: repertoire of adaptation and repertoire of resistance. Repertoire of adaptation emerged when three participants with young target audiences talked about how journalists (need to) adopt the authenticity norm associated with social media influencers in order to build trust between themselves and audiences. Repertoire of resistance emerged in the discourses of four participants, including those with young target audiences, when they talked about how journalists (need to) maintain the journalistic norm of autonomy from advertisers and audiences in order to build trust between themselves and audiences. This study indicates that especially journalists with young target audiences engage in reconstructing and reinforcing the boundaries of their profession in relation to social media influencing.</p>	
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FOREWORD

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1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has fundamentally transformed the role of journalism in society. Whereas previously journalistic organizations controlled the flow of information to the masses, practically all individuals with a social media account can now produce content on socially, culturally, or politically relevant topics. Furthermore, at the same time that journalistic organizations are struggling with declining audiences and advertising revenues, a new group of professionalized social media users have entered the journalistic sphere: *social media influencers*, regular people who earn an income from integrating advertising into their social media feeds (Abidin 2015; van Dijck et al. 2018; Hanusch & Banjac 2019). Particularly popular among young social media users, influencers often aim to create a sense of intimacy and low social distance between themselves and their audiences (Abidin 2015; Khamis et al. 2017). With hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers, their reach can rival that of traditional media outlets (Abidin & Ots 2016 p. 157). Influencers have become especially prominent in the field of lifestyle journalism (Maares & Hanusch 2018).

In this thesis, my focus is on how journalists construct the boundaries of their profession in the age of social media influencing. In other words, I am interested in how journalists position themselves vis-à-vis the new actors within the journalistic realm: what kinds of similarities and differences do they create between themselves and influencers. The theoretical framework in this thesis is that journalistic boundaries are maintained and reconstructed through *boundary work*: discourse(s) about norms with which professions assert their institutional legitimacy (Lewis 2012). **My research question is: How do journalists construct the boundaries of their profession in relation to social media influencing?** The research question is approached through in-depth semi-structured interviews with five journalists about the use of these social media platforms: Instagram, YouTube, and/or Snapchat.

In addition to presenting general findings related to how journalists talk about journalistic boundaries, the interview data is analyzed by employing the critical discursive psychological concepts of *interpretative repertoire* and *subject position*. This thesis is qualitative by nature: its purpose is to better understand the discursive construction of

journalistic boundaries in the social media age. As a relatively new industry, social media influencing has not yet been adequately studied within journalism research. Thus, this thesis responds to the growing need to understand whether and how journalism is affected by influencing. Quantitative questions, such as how many journalists talk about the same norms or how many norms can be found, will not be addressed in this study.

This thesis is structured as follows. After this introduction, in Chapter 2, I will present the theoretical background of this study: previous research on journalistic boundary work, social media cultures, and social media influencing. Next, in Chapter 3, I will describe the data of this study and how it was collected by using the semi-structured interview method. Furthermore, I will introduce the analytical concepts of interpretative repertoire and subject position and discuss how they were employed in this study. Ethical considerations will also be addressed. The results of this study – general findings along with interpretative repertoires and subject positions found in the data – will be presented in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the results and how they are connected to journalistic boundary work in the age of social media influencing. Finally, conclusions and suggestions for further research will be addressed in Chapter 6.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Journalism as Boundary Work

In the digital world, the question of what journalism is becomes relevant (Lewis 2012). When practically anyone can produce and disseminate knowledge, what is it that journalists do that differentiates them from others? At times when its boundaries become contested, Lewis (p. 841-2) argues that journalism engages in *boundary work*: discourse(s) about norms with which professions legitimate their institutional authority in relation to outside forces and actors. Boundary work is used to build social lines that serve the cultural and economic capital of those within them. Lewis (p. 837) points out how every profession is involved with some sort of boundary work in relation to adjacent professions or amateurs who threaten its legitimacy.

As a profession, journalism can be seen as having permeable boundaries (Lewis 2012). Unlike the more established professions, such as medicine or law, journalism does not for example have means to control who can participate in journalistic work: one does not have to have a certain education or work within certain institutions to be qualified as a journalist. As a result, the boundaries of journalism are largely constructed discursively with reference to *journalistic norms*, e.g. acceptable ways of doing things within the profession. Journalism has traditionally had a strong normative basis that journalists around the world more or less subscribe to (Deuze 2005), including Finnish journalists (see for example Pöyhtäri et al. 2016).

According to Lewis (2012), professional norms are not stable, but discursively constructed, maintained, and renegotiated. Over time, certain norms emerge and others disappear according to what kind of boundaries need to be drawn. This can gradually transform the logic of the profession: what members of the profession are expected to do in their normative roles. Because of its historical origins, journalism has developed what can be referred to as the logic of *professional control over content*: journalists or journalistic organizations can or should control the publishing, editing, and sharing of information in society (p. 850). However, the logic of a profession can gradually change over time: for example, health care has transformed from the idea of public service towards the logic of market efficiency (p. 841).

Truth-telling can be posited as the ultimate normative ideal within journalism: without the attempt to tell the truth, journalism loses its purpose (Karlsson 2011 p. 283). However, 'truth' as a concept has been proven notoriously difficult to define. Karlsson refers to Kovach & Rosenstiel (2001) who see the truth-telling ideal as journalism's most important but very ambiguous objective. It can, however, be broadly described as aiming to produce information about events in a way that does not mislead the public. Journalism has traditionally relied on the premise that accurate information can be extracted with the help of a strict journalistic procedure (Karlsson 2011; Bossio 2017).

Within journalism, truth-telling can be approached through the normative ideal of *journalistic objectivity*: because of their objective viewpoint, journalists are able to deliver neutral, unbiased, and factual information to the audiences (Lewis 2012 p. 843-

4). Objectivity has been invoked to bring journalism the authority to control the flow of information in society. At the same time, objectivity has also improved the quality of journalistic knowledge by highlighting its function as a public service. However, it should be noted that researchers and practitioners alike have debated the meaning of objectivity for decades (Blaagaard 2013 p. 1078). While contemporary journalistic understanding may acknowledge objectivity as an unattainable construct, instead using concepts such as ‘balance’ or ‘impartiality,’ the ideal of objectivity has and continues to have a significant effect on journalism as a profession.

Objectivity has served to guarantee that journalists can remain *autonomous* from the influence of politicians, audiences, and marketers (Lewis 2012 p. 844). For example, within journalism, it has been traditionally important to separate editorial content from advertising. However, journalism is no stranger to testing the limits of autonomy. In the online era, when commercial media companies struggle with dwindling advertising revenue, some have brought to life the traditional advertorial format in the form of native advertising: sponsored content that looks and seems like journalism (van Dijck et al. 2018 p. 61). As van Dijck et al. (p. 62) point out, this type of entanglement of sponsored content with journalism has raised some ethical concerns:

By hosting branded content that looks and feels like editorial content, news publishers are challenging the church-state distinction. The proliferation of branded content sits in tension with journalism’s core values as it means that commercial interests directly shape content production and distribution.

In the end, threats to objectivity and autonomy are related to journalism’s credibility and trustworthiness (Karlsson 2011). Journalism has what can be defined as informal power in society: its authority is based on the assumption that journalistic knowledge can be trusted. Karlsson points out how audience trust in the offline era was predominantly obtained through the promise of the journalistic process: news was delivered to the public only after having gone through a strict process of collecting and (re-)editing. The practice itself took place in newsrooms behind closed doors, and the public was not shown how the information was processed. Instead, readers, viewers, or listeners had to rely on journalists doing their jobs.

2.2 Previous Research on Journalistic Boundary Work

In this section, I will discuss previous research on journalistic boundaries. Boundary work within journalism has previously been studied in the context of citizen journalism (Örnebring 2013; Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti 2013; Maares & Hanusch 2018). As a phenomenon, citizen journalism emerged in the early 2000s, when amateur bloggers began to write about news events, thus challenging journalistic authority (Bossio 2017 p. 28). However, citizen journalism cannot be easily defined (Wall 2018). Some view citizen journalists as “accidental bystanders” who lack the professional skills of journalists, whereas others see them as freelancers, semi-professionals, or journalistic “inbetweeners” who may contribute to journalism on a regular basis.

This study is situated in the context of citizen journalism, because Hanusch & Banjac (2019) argue that social media influencing is one of the forms in which citizen journalism “has developed beyond [its] early days.” However, whereas the relationship between journalists and citizen journalists is often considered along the amateur-professional continuum, social media influencers may be viewed as professionals in their own right. Both journalists and influencers operate on the same social media platforms, producing content of public interest to their own sizeable audiences. Some influencers may have hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers, rivaling traditional media outlets in terms of their reach (Abidin & Ots 2016 p. 157).

Örnebring (2013) interviewed journalists from six European countries about their views on citizen journalists. They found out that professional journalists had difficulties in articulating differences between themselves and amateurs. Many of the participants were against the idea that citizen journalists could be considered as journalists, although some brought up that citizen journalism was valuable in its own way (p. 41-2). Professional authority was evoked with reference to expertise, duty, and autonomy. Expertise meant that journalists saw themselves as having certain skills that the amateurs lacked. Duty was used to bring up the social responsibility related to representing events in a truthful manner. Autonomy was expressed through working within established media organizations: because of the institutional status and resources, professionals were

capable of shielding themselves from outside influences. As one of the participants in the aforementioned study says:

No, we are not all journalists, I don't know how that would happen, it has to do with some kind of branding or quality assurance, a text published on 'Henrik's blog' is not the same as a text that's published on New York Times dot com, because there's a totally different ethics, tradition there, some kind of guarantee that what it says is true and if it isn't someone will have to answer for it. (Örnebring 2013 p. 47).

Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti (2013) studied journalistic boundaries in relation to citizen eyewitness images and videos. By interviewing Swedish and Finnish journalists, they identified three interpretive repertoires or meta-discourses. The repertoire of resistance emerged when journalists differentiated themselves from citizen photographers in terms of having certain skills as opposed to amateurs. The repertoire of resignation, on the other hand, was used to discuss how journalism in the digital age sometimes has to rely on citizen imagery. Finally, the repertoire of renewal emerged in the context of changing norms: citizen documentation of events was portrayed as something that leads to a more democratic form of journalism with more diversity. This repertoire manifested as expressions such as “coming down from the ivory tower” and being “humble” (p. 972).

Maares & Hanusch (2018) explored the boundaries of journalism by interviewing German-speaking Instagram influencers who produce content on lifestyle topics, a field of journalism that has perhaps been most affected by the arrival of social media influencing. Most of the participants drew similarities between their own work and lifestyle journalism. However, some influencers brought up that the norms according to which they worked differed from journalistic norms (p. 9-10). Objectivity was portrayed as less important in social media influencing, as it was assumed that the followers were more interested in the personal opinions of the influencer as opposed to objective information. Furthermore, the participants emphasized that it was important to distinguish sponsored content from editorial content, but also brought up that they could not always remain completely autonomous when advertising products or services.

2.3 Boundary Work in the Social Media Age

In this section, I will present academic literature on social media cultures and how they may be transforming journalistic norms. As discussed in the previous section, it seems

that journalism can no longer claim authority based on journalism as an institutionalized process (see for example Karlsson 2011). In the midst of various and competing voices brought about by online technologies, journalists and media organizations may now need to find new ways to demonstrate why their version of events should be accepted. Social media, once regarded as the harbinger of democracy and new forms of activism, has placed new demands on journalistic credibility amidst the spread of fake news, trolling, and disinformation (Lewis & Molyneux 2018 p. 12).

Detached objectivity, on which journalistic authority has traditionally leaned, does not go well together with the interactive nature of social media (Molyneux 2015 p. 922). Or, as Bossio (2017 p. 29) puts it, it is not necessarily objectivity that is at odds with social media cultures, but the social distance that it has historically entailed. Journalists have traditionally aimed to insulate themselves from audiences and other influences, eschewing personal involvement. Social media, on the other hand, encourages communication between journalists and social media users: it allows users to comment, criticize, and co-produce knowledge together with journalists (Karlsson 2011; Molyneux 2015).

As a consequence, the communication practices of social media cultures may be transforming journalism towards the normative ideal of *authenticity* (Bossio 2017). Authenticity refers to the representation of self in an online context in such a way that it can be seen as an extension of one's actual self-identity (p. 28-9). Authenticity as a practice has its origins in the technological affordances of social media platforms which have made it possible for individuals to share and interact with personal content. In this "culture of sharing," authentic self-representation has become a popular way of engaging with other social media users.

However, just like the concept of inauthenticity, authenticity can be seen as something that is socially and discursively constructed (Marwick & boyd 2010 p. 124). We rarely act in exactly the same way with everyone and in every situation. Instead, we can choose which aspects of ourselves to present to others in different social settings. Social media platforms, in particular, encourage users to choose which kind of details to share with followers. Marwick & boyd, for example, found out that some Twitter users considered

it as authentic to tweet as if they were tweeting to themselves. They rejected the idea of tailoring content to their followers, even though they were conscious of the fact that the tweets were seen by others.

Authenticity as a normative ideal contributes to the increasing use of emotion in producing journalistic content (Bossio 2017). Bossio (p. 30-1) takes the U.S. investigative journalism podcast *Serial* (2014–) as an example. The first season of *Serial* focused on examining the murder of high-school student Hae Min Lee in Baltimore in the late 1990s (About Season One 2019). By adopting an informal communication style and sharing details of the investigative process, e.g. new developments or uncertainties related to different theories, Bossio (2017) argues that the producers of the show are building emotionally close relations between themselves and the listeners. As Bossio (p. 31) points out:

[t]he investigation is never actually conclusive, and while that would often mean failure in traditional journalism, in *Serial* this is celebrated – and promoted – as testimony to the audience’s intimate relationship with both the subject matter and the producers themselves.

Hedman (2016), who uses the term personal transparency, points out how the norm(s) brought about social media cultures put emphasis on the trustworthiness of individual journalists as opposed to journalism as a process. In other words, trust becomes embedded in the relationship between journalists and their followers: journalists share personal opinions, experiences, and details of their private lives in an attempt to give an impression of authenticity and, subsequently, trustworthiness. Consequently, journalists are not only evaluated on their work but also on what kind of impression they give of themselves through their social media presence.

Therein also lies an opportunity for journalists to develop a credible personal brand, especially on platforms such as Twitter (Molyneux & Holton 2014; Molyneux 2015). For example, Molyneux (2015) found out that some journalists retweet negative feedback of themselves to their followers on Twitter. By doing so, Molyneux argues that journalists aim to demonstrate that they are unaffected by criticism, thus creating an impression of themselves as autonomous from outside influences – and therefore trustworthy. This personal brand development – and personal trustworthiness – stands in contrast with how journalists have historically worked in relative anonymity under news organizations, as

“cogs in a bigger machine” (p. 933). Even the most well-known journalists, such as news anchors, have usually become known as the representatives of their organizations (Molyneux & Holton 2014 p. 3).

2.4 Social Media Influencing

In this section, I will present academic literature on social media influencing as it relates to this study. While legacy media organizations continue to struggle in today’s media landscape, social media influencers have emerged in the journalistic sphere (Hanusch & Banjac 2019). As Hanusch & Banjac point out, having transformed “beyond the early days of citizen journalism,” these new journalistic actors are becoming increasingly professionalized, producing content that can more or less be considered as journalism. Influencers are especially popular among young social media users, who are used to producing, consuming, and sharing media online (Khamis et al. 2017).

Social media influencers – also known as microcelebrities, Instagrammers, or YouTubers – can be defined as regular people who have amassed a large number of followers on social media platforms and who receive an income from mixing advertising into their content (Abidin 2015). Some influencers produce content about their personal lives, whereas some may focus on a certain thematic topic, such as family, food, or style. According to Abidin, influencers often aim to create an impression of exclusive intimacy between themselves and their followers: they represent themselves as ordinary, interacting with followers in ways that create a sense of emotional disclosure and low social distance.

Abidin (2015) argues that influencers are more alluring than traditional television or radio personalities, because their content feels more personal, immediate, and interactive. Although television and radio celebrities can use an intimate tone when interacting with audiences, broadcast technology nevertheless encourages a more hierarchical delivery of information. Social media platforms, on the other hand, create a sense of unrestricted access to the private lives of other individuals. However, as Abidin points out, this does not imply that influencers constantly reveal everything about themselves. Social media

posts are often carefully constructed impressions of disclosure: e.g. “quick” selfies or posts about relationship problems that might attract followers.

Influencers often receive an income from advertorials (Abidin 2015). A combination of “editorial” and “advertising,” advertorials can be defined as customized and subjective posts in which influencers personally experience and promote products or services for a commission. Typically, advertorials are deeply woven into the social media feeds of influencers, making it difficult to discern them from other content. Indeed, the most successful advertorials are usually those in which followers are unable to separate paid thoughts from unpaid ones (Abidin & Ots 2016). As a result, influencer marketing has raised some ethical concerns. Advertising authorities in different parts of the world have taken steps to regulate the emerging industry, including the Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority (*Miten Kertoa Kaupallisesta Yhteistyöstä?* 2019).

Abidin (2015) argues that followers can overlook commercial intentions when they establish an emotionally close connection to the influencer(s). For example, Raun (2018) examined the Canadian YouTuber Julie Van Vu, who makes videos on transgender issues and lifestyle. Raun (p. 103) points out how advertorials have become such an integral part of Vu’s feed that she sometimes mentions when the videos are not sponsored. Raun argues that in order to remain authentic and trustworthy to her viewers, Vu reveals vulnerable aspects of her private life, even crying in front of the camera. However, this does not mean that influencers fabricate feelings for profit. Vu contributes to the trans community by sharing her experiences about transformation (Raun 2018). Similarly, Abidin (2015) discovered that, although excited about commodifying events in their personal lives, influencers genuinely enjoyed interactions with their followers and received comfort from them in emotionally difficult situations.

Thus, in the neocapitalist environment of social media, it becomes difficult to distinguish the self from advertising (Khamis et al. 2017). A distinctive public identity – personal brand – becomes a commodity that can be monetized through likes, shares, and the number of followers. In recent years, social media platforms such as YouTube have transformed from a community of amateurs to a heavily commercialized space with professionally produced content (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki 2018; Raun 2018).

Furthermore, on platforms such as YouTube, content is now organized into channels, giving the platform the “look and feel of television” (Raun 2018 p. 101). At the same time, social media users are increasingly considered as viewers – and consumers – instead of members of an interactive social group.

Thus, unlike journalists, who have traditionally aimed at the ideal of truth-telling by remaining autonomous from advertisers and audiences, social media influencers have emerged in an environment where amassing audiences and integrating advertising with editorial content is expected and even encouraged. Furthermore, within a relatively short time, influencers have established themselves as considerable counterparts in the journalistic field of producing and disseminating information of public interest. In this thesis, my focus is on how professional journalists construct the role and function of journalism in the light of these recent developments.

3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Collecting Data

In this section, I will present the data of this study and discuss how it was collected. A *semi-structured qualitative interview* was employed in this study. *Qualitative* approach seemed appropriate, because it is suitable for studying social phenomena in need of further understanding (Leavy 2014). Not much research yet exists on the boundaries between journalism and influencing (see for example Hanusch & Banjac 2019). *Interview* as a method was chosen, because journalistic boundary work largely takes place in and through discourse. The *semi-structured* format allows the researcher to keep the conversation on certain topics but also leaves room for participants to bring up perspectives that they consider as relevant (Brinkmann 2014). Although some questions were asked of all participants (see the appendix of this thesis), some questions were follow-ups to what the participants brought up during the interviews.

Five journalists from four media organizations were interviewed. According to Crouch & McKenzie (2006), a small sample allows for a more in-depth analysis of the data. The participants were contacted because of their involvement with organizational accounts on

Instagram, YouTube, and/or Snapchat. By using *purposive sampling*, my aim was to find journalists/organizations who/that use social media platforms as part of their everyday work. Furthermore, my aim was to contact journalists who produce content on socially, politically, or culturally relevant topics as opposed to topics such as celebrity gossip. However, the line between ‘hard’ news and ‘soft’ news is often blurry, with much falling into the lifestyle journalism category, and this was also evident in the data of this study.

The participants were aged 27 to 35. Although all participants were relatively young, my intention was not to interview individuals of a certain age: journalists above the age of 35 years were contacted, but none of them participated in this study. Two of the participants were women and three were men. Three worked in magazines with print and online content, whereas two worked in digital journalism. Three participants produced journalistic content for young audiences ranging from children to teenagers and/or young adults. The educational backgrounds of the participants ranged from journalism and social sciences to business economics and humanities. The participants had previous work experience in journalism, social media content production, and cultural production. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, and the quotes used in this study were translated into English. Every effort was made to ensure that the quotes were as close to the original meaning as possible.

The interviews were about the use of visual platforms that are designed for sharing images and/or videos: Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat. These platforms were included, because they seemed to be popular among influencers. First participants of this study were interviewed about their use of Instagram, as previous research on journalism and social media has tended to focus on one platform (Molyneux & Holton 2014; Molyneux 2015; Hedman 2016; Maares & Hanusch 2018). As the study progressed, however, restricting it to Instagram began to seem unnecessary, because influencers can be found on several platforms. Widening the scope of the study to other platforms made it easier to find participants whilst improving their anonymity.

Some parts of the interviews were not included in the data. The interview protocol originally included questions about two groups of actors on social media: social media influencers and audiences. In the course of the interviews, however, it soon became

evident that the data was going to be rich and thus difficult to analyze within a master's-level thesis. Consequently, a decision was made not to analyze the parts of the interviews in which the participants talked about audiences, unless those parts were somehow connected to influencers. Furthermore, the interview protocol consisted of questions about the use of the platform(s). In the course of the research, however, it became evident that discussing those parts of the interview could compromise the anonymity of the participants. Thus, those answers were also omitted from the data.

3.2 Interpretative Repertoires and Subject Positions

In this section, I will present the concepts of *interpretative repertoire* and *subject position*, which will be used to analyze the interview data. These concepts derive from *critical discursive psychology (CDP)*, a strand of discourse analysis that views language as a form of social activity (Edley 2001). CDP starts from the premise that language is used to construct social reality and identities in and through discourse. However, language also restricts its speakers: some ways of talking about things may be more acceptable or hegemonic than others. While we can to some extent decide how to represent ourselves and others, CDP posits that we often resort to familiar and common constructions that we know will be accepted.

Interpretative repertoires can be defined as relatively unified ways of talking about things and events that form a common social understanding of the world (Edley 2001). Edley (p. 198) compares interpretative repertoires to books in a local library that are permanently available to the members of a community. Speakers can “borrow” from various and often even conflicting repertoires within one conversation and alternate between them. Interpretative repertoires make possible certain subject positions, i.e. the roles that we create for ourselves and others in social interactions (p. 209-10). Similarly to interpretative repertoires, speakers can alternate between different subject positions during conversations.

According to Edley (2001), interpretative repertoires can be recognized as the frequently occurring ways of talking about the world: mental images, metaphors, or figures of speech. He points out how

[a]s an interviewer [...] there usually comes a time when one begins to feel as though you've heard it all before. People seem to be taking similar lines or making the same kinds of arguments as others previously interviewed. The same kind of thing occurs with the repeated readings of transcripts. (p. 198).

Following Edley (2001), I looked for interpretative repertoires in the data by reading the interview transcripts several times and underlining the parts – especially *mental images*, *metaphors*, or *figures of speech* – that seemed to occur in more than one interview. Although this study is qualitative by nature, and its purpose is not to count the occurrence of certain words or phrases, similarities spanning several interviews seemed significant and deserving of analysis. Within those interpretative repertoires emerging in several interviews, I searched for similarities in the ways in which the participants referred to journalists and influencers, e.g. subject positions that were given to the two groups of actors.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

In this section, I will discuss the ethical issues related to this study. In research involving human participants, ethical considerations are of utmost importance. When contacting participants, I explained the voluntary nature of the interview, the purpose of this research, and how the data was going to be used and stored. I also brought up these issues before the interviews and asked if the participant(s) had any questions or concerns. If the participant wanted to proceed to the interview, a permission to tape the conversation was requested. Informed consent was secured after the interview on tape. As qualitative studies are never completely anonymous (see for example Forrester 2010), the wishes of the participants regarding anonymity were discussed. If the participant wanted to remain anonymous, the means to achieve this were agreed. After the interviews, I gave my contact details to the participants and asked them to contact me if they had any questions or concerns.

A lot of time was devoted to thinking about the kinds of ethical considerations that might be related to interviewing journalists on journalistic boundaries. According to scholars such as Deuze (2005), journalists may be used to operating in the public eye and reflecting on their work. However, journalistic boundaries can also be viewed in terms of professional identity, and identity can be considered as a sensitive topic. Thus, my aim

was to adopt a considerate approach rather than assume that everyone feels at ease in the interview situation. This manifested as trying to be aware of the reactions that the questions awoken in the participants, reflecting my own behavior and linguistic choices during and after the interviews, and asking some participants how they felt about the interview and the questions.

In qualitative interview studies, it is important to consider the role and motivations of the researcher (Brinkmann 2014). As the one who designs the interview(s), the researcher controls the interaction by asking questions, and the participants may aim to help the researcher by giving ‘good’ answers to those questions. During the interviews, I tried to stay aware of these power dynamics e.g. by aiming to ask non-leading questions and assuring the participants that all of their answers were appreciated. Nevertheless, my appearance (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) and behavior (choice of words, facial expressions, body language, etc.) may have influenced the interaction in various ways that cannot be exhaustively considered.

Right at the beginning of the research process, a decision was made not to include the names and organizations of the participants in this study, as it did not seem relevant or necessary. The numbers of the participants do not reflect the order in which they were interviewed but instead were assigned randomly. The pronoun *they* is used to further anonymize the data. In addition, the names of the platforms have been removed from some of the quotes.

4 RESULTS

4.1 General Findings

In this section, I will discuss the ways in which the participants talked about journalistic boundaries between journalism and social media influencing. Lifestyle topics – such as traveling, food, product reviews, technology, and science – were mentioned by the participants as examples of social media content that has journalistic characteristics or is perceived to be the same as journalism. ‘Hard’ or breaking news, on the other hand, were constructed by some participants as something that only journalists are involved with.

However, one participant brought up that they have noticed influencers starting to delve into creating content related to news and/or current affairs.

Although all participants answered that influencing has journalistic characteristics or can be viewed as journalism, some participants expressed more hesitation than others. In critical discursive psychological terms, it seemed that the concept of boundaries between journalism and influencing was a more *familiar and common construction* for some participants than others. This seemed to be related to the age of the target audience: those participants with young audiences were more willing to draw connections between journalism and influencing. The age of the target audience was also brought up by the participants themselves. For example, one participant talked about how young people may not always differentiate between journalism and influencing.

Participant 5, who produces content for young audiences, begins with a reference to the changing role of journalism in society and proceeds by giving examples of what kinds of influencer content can be considered as journalistic – or journalism.

I mean journalism is now being redefined constantly. It's not what it was 30 years ago. And it is being done by those social media personalities or influencers who for example go outdoors and talk about what kinds of things you can do in nature. Go look at abandoned buildings [...] and lots of food accounts engage in journalistic work by for example finding out what processed food consists of. What's inside canned food. What else is in tomato soup than tomato soup. And they do that for fun and also to serve their followers. So yeah, I would consider it as journalism. (Participant 5)

Thus, they conclude by saying that they view (non-promotional) influencer content as journalism.

Other respondents with wider target audiences were also willing to view influencing from a journalistic perspective, but they expressed more uncertainty in their answers. Participant 1, for example, takes several pauses during their speech, using phrases such as “perhaps in a way” and “in some ways” and expressing that they have not previously thought about influencing from a journalistic perspective. Thus, their answer comes across as more hesitant, although they are not completely opposed to the idea that influencing could have journalistic characteristics.

Um. [silence] Well perhaps in a way sure, I mean many people tell a little story on [a social media] post or somehow use a similar narrative that not necessarily news media but magazines may use. So that could kind of be, but... [silence] Um, I have not really thought about it like that. [silence] And then

sometimes you see some posts where there are – I don't know – some kind of a mini photo reportage about certain place or a situation or something like that. So perhaps in their own way they can be seen as in some ways journalistic. (Participant 1)

4.2 Repertoire of Adaptation

In this section, I will discuss a *repertoire of adaptation* that emerged in the discourses of three participants when they talked about the similarities between journalists and influencers. All three participants who drew from this repertoire produced content for young audiences. The adaptation repertoire came up when the respondents talked about how, similarly to influencers, journalists today (need to) build trust between themselves and audiences through what can be described as an authentic representation of self in professional contexts. Authenticity was constructed as producing journalism by drawing from personal experiences and/or delivering journalism in a way that is consistent with one's personal identity.

Television journalism provided a reference point through which the participants contrasted authenticity with traditional ways of producing and delivering journalistic content. For example, Participant 5 explains how they attempt to deliver journalistic content in a way that would create an impression of authenticity. Reading from a teleprompter serves as a metaphor for undesirable communication style of distance and formality. By contrast, the participant aims to construct an intimate subject position between themselves and social media audiences by communicating the content in a way that is – or, more importantly, seems – true to their actual self-identity.

If I for example make a video to [social media], I aim to make the kind of video that I would like to watch myself. And to show my own [...] something friends. If I am able to be witty in my own way, authentic in a sense that it does not seem memorized or read off a teleprompter what I say or how I say it. And I am actually proud of it. (Participant 5)

Trustworthiness in the social media age was constructed by the respondents as something that is dependent on individual journalists as opposed to journalistic organizations. The respondents talked about how trust is formed on the basis of the impression that journalists give of themselves to the audience – or, in the promotional language of the social media age, how well they have branded themselves. Participant 5 draws parallels between the subject positions of television news anchors and influencers. Although neither of them are responsible for the content that they present – news anchors read news

written by other journalists and influencers integrate sponsored posts into their feeds – viewers nevertheless trust them more than organizations.

If for example Matti Rönkä becomes a brand like Arvi Lind in the sense that people did not so much trust in TV news but thought that Arvi Lind tells the truth. Although Arvi Lind did not write the news, he presented them. And so he was an influencer of his time. And on the other hand, there is nothing new about that, but perhaps media will at some point have to accept the fact that people trust individuals, not faceless organizations. And therefore media – like for example news, current affairs, commentary, columns, and so on – will become associated with those who do them. Or one of them, even if there is a whole team behind it. (Participant 5)

Some participants talked about how they have intentionally borrowed practices associated with influencers in order to appeal to their young audiences. For example, Participant 2 uses the term ‘non-newslike’ to describe journalistic content that has been inspired by YouTube personalities. Similarly to YouTubers, the participant steps at the forefront of the story, letting the audience in on their personal experience of engaging in an activity. Television news are constructed as a format in which the subject position of the journalist remains more distant and detached from the news narrative.

We have done [content] where I for example test something. Kind of bring sort of non-newslike concept to it, yeah, so that it would be perhaps closer to something that [young people] watch, YouTubers and so on. (Participant 2)

The participants also discussed how authenticity as a normative ideal has extended to traditional media. Participant 3, for example, talks about how they have noticed how television news have started to use less formal language. They point out how the shift to everyday language can be seen as an attempt to create low hierarchy between news anchors and viewers. This stands in contrast with the traditional way of legitimating news by positioning oneself as authoritative. By using the verb ‘rejuvenate,’ the participant evokes connections between informality and how young people use language.

And traditional media also looks for a kind of transparency and perhaps some sort of a feeling of low hierarchy to some extent. At one point, I was trying to look for a quote for an edit in which a news anchor would say “and good evening from the news” or was it “goodbye from the news,” one or the other. Something very classic like that. And I did not find it anywhere. I noticed that they had rejuvenated these phrases. They might say “and that’s all, bye-bye” or something very casual like that. I don’t remember how they phrased it. They have made the language of news anchors more informal. (Participant 3)

The participant also brings up how journalists can evoke trust through appearing as individuals: when audiences can see who is behind the news, they realize that journalists are just regular people who are trying to do their jobs. On the contrary, if faceless and distant organizations publish journalistic content, audiences can find it difficult to

evaluate the trustworthiness of that information and might begin questioning the motives of those organizations.

And that is probably the bigger trend. That kind of transparency and that [journalism] is not some information coming out of a monolith but instead is starting to have a face. [...] Perhaps it brings a kind of understanding of what news are. It brings the understanding that readers realize that some person has done this. And maybe it can bring general understanding and even compassion towards the journalist. That this is only a person who has aimed to investigate something, and this is not material produced by some faceless conspiracy machine. (Participant 3)

4.3 Repertoire of Resistance

In this section, I will discuss a *repertoire of resistance* that emerged in the discourses of four participants, three of whom produced content for young audiences. The resistance repertoire was used to distinguish journalists from social media influencers. Journalists were portrayed as professionals bound by a code of ethics that does not allow outsiders to interfere with the journalistic process. Influencers, on the other hand, were depicted as potentially untrustworthy actors whose ultimate objective may be to amass as many followers as possible and profit from them through advertorials.

Untrustworthiness was connected by the participants to the way in which the influencer industry operates: because they receive money from integrating advertorials into their posts, influencers need to produce content that both pleases advertisers and attracts followers. In a humorous way, Participant 4 talks about how pandering influencers are, producing content solely based on what interests everyone. A reference to Excel evokes images of a calculative process in which the number of views – not editorial control – is the ultimate objective. The participant contrasts this behavior with their own subject position as someone who is not focused on what kinds of social media posts garner the most attention.

Well maybe if you think of an influencer, the constant need for posting and being visible in people's feeds is not really how I operate [on social media platform x]. Trying to reach a maximum number of participants. I quite rarely even pay attention to the number of followers. I do not know how much people in general focus on that. Of course, some social media celebrities probably look at their Excels daily to see the development of followers and so on, what types of publications bring most followers, but I do not pay attention to that so much. (Participant 4)

Similarly, Participant 3 describes how influencers operate in an environment in which getting lots of followers is of utmost importance. They bring up how the social media logic forces everyone to look at viewer ratings and modify the content accordingly.

Finally, they compare the position of influencers to their own position as a journalist in which they feel less pressure to immediately look at how many people are viewing the content. Thus, the difference in ethics is placed at the level of professional logic as opposed to individual choice.

I think there is the logic that you want to succeed, because you need those viewers. And you kind of are ready to do practically anything. Some people are not necessarily affected by that so much in the sense that they would nevertheless like to do those silly challenges. But to some, it is a sort of a pain, kind of like “I don’t want to do a single marshmallow challenge anymore.” [...] And the benefit that you have as a [...] journalist is that you have the funding for your story and you don’t have to think about how many viewers start to roll in. Or it is not such an acute problem. (Participant 3)

On the other hand, some participants placed the trustworthiness of (individual) journalists on their position as professionals who have to behave according to a professional code of ethics. However, the views on this differed. One participant said that they trust the content created by some influencers and watch it as if it was journalism. Participant 5 talks about how their conscience prevents them from promoting any brands, ideologies, or companies, even when they have good things to say about them. Simultaneously, different subject positions are crafted for journalists and other actors on social media: individual journalists have to have a sense of moral integrity, as audiences have to be able to trust the information given by journalists.

For example if I go to a really good hotel, and it is the best hotel ever, and I really get my money’s worth of service and everything that I could ever ask for, and I would like to post a photo to [social media] that hey, visit this hotel, my conscience would bother me, because then my integrity would have been compromised [...] There can be really serious consequences for example in terms of my trustworthiness [...] that is probably the biggest [difference] is that I can’t advertise anything in my role even by accident. Or endorse anything, even if I should. (Participant 5)

In the same way, Participant 2 talks about how they have grown worried about how some young audience members do not seem to differentiate between journalists and influencers. They also bring up journalists as ethical actors who have to think about their actions in a different way from influencers. On a professional scale, they position journalists as the opposite of influencers whose opinions can be bought with free samples or monetary compensation. Similarly to Participant 5, they talk about how trust is connected to the impression that audiences have of individual journalists as truthful professionals. When that trust vanishes, the legitimacy of journalism as a profession goes along with it.

I mean I’m actually worried about how [young people] in the future will not understand what the difference is in that somebody is an influencer and somebody is a journalist [...] we are kind of at the other end of the spectrum from an influencer, even if there are similarities from the outside. And this is the kind of thing that can erode that trust that I considered as important. When it is not understood that

if we say that something is really good or something to that effect, it is actually an opinion and in terms of influencers it can be bought. (Participant 2)

5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will discuss the results of this study in the light of the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. My research question was: How do journalists construct the boundaries of their profession in relation to social media influencing?

In contrast to some previous studies (Örnebring 2013; Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti 2013), none of the journalists in this study were opposed to viewing social media influencing as having journalistic characteristics or being journalism. In this sense, the findings correlate with the study by Maares & Hanusch (2018), in which influencers saw similarities between themselves and journalists. Lifestyle and other ‘soft’ topics were brought up as examples of influencer content that can be viewed as having journalistic characteristics or being journalism. Thus, the results support the idea that influencing may permeate journalistic boundaries especially in the area of lifestyle (Maares & Hanusch 2018), although one participant brought up that influencers may have started to delve into news topics as well. The age of the target audience seemed to emerge as a significant dividing factor in terms of how easily the participants resorted to talking about the similarities and differences between journalism and influencing. Some participants themselves connected this to producing content for young audiences.

Two interpretative repertoires with subject positions were identified from the interview data: *repertoire of adaptation*, through which journalists positioned themselves similar to social media influencers, and *repertoire of resistance*, through which journalists differentiated themselves from influencers. Both repertoires of adaptation and resistance were connected to how journalists constructed trustworthiness in the social media age. Participants talked about how, in order to remain trustworthy in the eyes of their audiences, professional journalists need to adopt or have started to adopt the norm of authenticity associated with influencers. At the same time, however, the participants discussed how journalists (need to) reject the self-commodifying logic of the influencer industry in order to adhere to the journalistic ideal of autonomy from advertisers and audiences.

The age of the target audience also emerged as a significant dividing factor in terms of how journalists drew from the repertoires of adaptation and resistance. Journalists with young audiences seemed to resort to the adaptation repertoire, because, as some of them pointed out, influencers are popular among young people. Journalists thus (need to) adopt practices that are suitable for their target audience. Furthermore, four journalists, including those with young audiences, drew from the repertoire of resistance to distinguish themselves from influencers. It is possible that especially journalists with young viewers, listeners, or readers have the discursive need to differentiate themselves from influencers, as influencers are so popular among their target audience. Journalists with older target audiences may still have other ways of reaching their audiences and thus may not have the need to adopt or resist practices associated with influencers – or see the need to talk about them in the first place.

Similarly to Örnebring (2013) and Maares & Hanusch (2018), journalists differentiated themselves from influencers in terms of autonomy. In Örnebring's (2013) study, autonomy manifested as working for established media organizations. In this study, the opposite seemed to take place: journalists with young target audiences brought up how trust was formed at the individual level in contrast with journalism as an institutionalized process. This correlates with research on journalists on Twitter (Molyneux 2015; Hedman 2016), although journalists in this study were using organizational accounts as opposed to personal accounts. Thus, the findings of this study may indicate some sort of a change in the way journalism is legitimated in the social media era.

Differences to previous studies emerged in terms of the norms through which boundaries were drawn. Whereas Örnebring (2013) and Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti (2013) found out that journalists distanced themselves from citizen journalists in terms of having skills that amateurs lacked, none of the journalists in this study referred to influencers as less capable of producing content. This may be connected to the way in which influencers have become professionals in their own right. Having developed “beyond the early days of citizen journalism” (Hanusch & Banjac 2019), these skilled social media users now earn an income by producing content to a wide range of audiences, carving a space for

themselves as considerable actors in the journalistic sphere of information production and dissemination.

6 CONCLUSION

In this section, I will draw conclusions based on what has been discussed and give suggestions for further research. On the basis of this study, it seems that social media influencing may permeate journalistic boundaries especially in the area of lifestyle journalism and ‘soft’ news. In addition, talking about the boundaries between journalism and influencing seemed a more familiar and common construction for journalists with young target audiences. They discursively reconstructed the boundaries of their profession by adapting to the normative ideal of authenticity associated with influencers. At the same time, most journalists in this study, including those with young audiences, also reinforced existing journalistic boundaries by rejecting the self-commodifying logic of the influencer industry. In other words, while influencing and social media cultures may have changed journalism from detached objectivity towards the ideal of authentic self-expression, the normative ideal of autonomy remains. Furthermore, these changes seem to be more prominent among journalists who produce content for young audiences.

All in all, social media seems to present a very challenging landscape for journalists. The influencer industry thrives on social media platforms, where self-commodification is expected and even encouraged. Journalism, on the other hand, can be argued to be based on the ideal of separating advertising and audiences from editorial content. In other words, the two professions seem to have developed in different contexts with very different normative principles. Even if journalists marked their content as sponsored, the concept of amassing followers and promoting products and services with one’s personal identity may appear as inherently inappropriate. And, indeed, if journalists gave up on their *raison d’être* and commodified themselves, how would they differ from influencers? Thus, possibly for the above reasons, the emergence of influencing seems not to have transformed the journalistic logic of control over content.

This study was qualitative by nature, and the sample of participants was small. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to apply to journalists in

Finland or elsewhere. However, in my view, this study did manage to reveal a potentially significant emerging phenomenon in the journalistic field. It could be used as a preliminary study for further qualitative interviews with journalists. The interview protocol could be revised to better focus on influencers and social media cultures. The age of the target audience should also be featured more prominently in future studies, as it turned out to be such a significant factor. Furthermore, the age of the participants should also be considered: if journalists above the age of 35 were to be interviewed, the results might differ. In addition, something that did not emerge in the interviews was the image and/or video-centricity of platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat. Specific questions about the visuality of these platforms could be designed.

Based on this study, the boundaries between journalism and influencing should be further investigated. The findings suggest that social media influencing may permeate or threaten journalistic boundaries especially in the area of lifestyle journalism and especially among journalists who produce content for young audiences. However, this study has only touched upon the possible boundary tensions between journalism and influencing. Further research is needed to understand whether and how these two professions intersect in the social media age. It seems, however, that studies on this topic may turn out to be a valuable contribution to both journalism research and practice now and in the future.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank the participant for participating in the study.

Tell something about yourself: student in Media Management at Arcada, interested in the boundaries/relationship between journalism and social media. Own previous educational background and work experience.

Ask permission to record the interview. Obtain informed consent after the interview on tape.

Ethical considerations:

- Participation is voluntary
- The purpose of the interview
- How the material will be used and handled
- Participants and their organizations will not be mentioned
- How the thesis will be stored.

Ask if the participant has any questions or concerns.

Interview Questions

Part I: Background Information

- Age and gender
- What do you do at organization x?
- What kind of an educational background do you have?
- How have you ended up working for organization x?
- What does it mean to work as a journalist (at x)? Norms, values, practices.
- How would you characterize organization x as a media?

Part II: Use of Social Media

- What platform(s) do you use at work?
- How often do you use platform(s) x?
- Why did you/your organization start using platform(s) x?
- Who do you produce content for? Target audience.

- What is the content like? Format, topics, etc.

Part III: Journalism on Social Media

- How do you see your role as a journalist on platform(s) x?
- How does the content produced by you differ from the content produced by others? Social media influencers. Do you operate from similar or different starting points? Norms.
- Are there journalistic characteristics in the content produced by others? Social media influencers.
- Have you had interactions with audiences on platform(s) x? If you have, what kinds of interactions. Could you provide an example of a typical interaction.
- What kinds of interactions with audiences would you like to experience on platform(s) x? Could you provide an example of an ideal interaction situation.
- What are the pros and cons of using platform(s) x?
- What kind of a future does journalism have on platform(s) x/social media?

Part IV: Ending Question

- Would you like to say something else about social media/the platform(s)?

Conclude the interview by thanking the participant for participating in the study.

Give contact details.