Digital Journalism

ISSN: 2167-0811 (Print) 2167-082X (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rdij20

Theories of Journalism in a Digital age

An exploration and introduction

Steen Steensen & Laura Ahva

To cite this article: Steen Steensen & Laura Ahva (2015) Theories of Journalism in a Digital age, Digital Journalism, 3:1, 1-18, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2014.927984

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.927984

Published online: 10 Jul 2014.

THEORIES OF JOURNALISM IN A DIGITAL AGE
An exploration and introduction

Steen Steensen and **Laura Ahva**

This special issue introductory article investigates contemporary notions of theory in journalism studies. Many scholars have argued that we need better ways of conceptualising what journalism is and how it develops in a digital age. There is, however, a lack of knowledge regarding what the theoretical trends within the interdisciplinary domain of journalism studies are today and to what extent contemporary inquiries into journalism are framed by emerging theories and perspectives. To fill this knowledge gap, we have conducted an analysis of more than 9000 metadata keywords and 195 abstracts found in the first 14 volumes (2000–2013) of the two most internationally acknowledged journals dedicated to journalism studies: Journalism—Theory, Practice and Criticism and Journalism Studies. The findings indicate that there has been a move towards greater theoretical awareness in journalism studies since 2000 and that the variety of theoretical approaches has increased.

KEYWORDS abstracts; digital journalism; interdisciplinarity; journalism studies; keywords; theories of journalism; theory

Introduction

In the past 15 years or so, journalism research has paid much attention to how digitisation is changing journalistic practices, cultures and institutions. Early discussions revolved around the question of whether digitisation was bringing about radical changes or minor variations to journalism. However, recently there has been a move beyond discussing the symptoms of the alleged crisis of journalism towards more fundamental issues of digital journalism, such as what "the changing nature of the object itself" is (Broersma and Peters 2013, 2). Consequently, we see today the emergence of what we might call a "fourth wave" of research on digital journalism. This wave—succeeding the normative, empirical and constructivist waves (Domingo 2008)—theorises the field beyond the traditional institutions and understandings of journalism. It investigates, for instance, the "news ecosystem" (Anderson 2010), the "news landscape" (Peters and Broersma 2013), "ambient" (Hermida 2010) and "networked" (Heinrich 2011; Russell 2013) journalism—all of which have emerged because of practices predominantly related to social media.

What becomes evident in this fourth wave is that digitisation has brought a need to reassess the theories with which we make sense of journalism. Since the turn of the

Digital Journalism, 2015
Vol. 3, No. 1, 1–18, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.927984

millennium, scholars have called for a wider range of theoretical perspectives in journalism studies (Zelizer 2000, 2004; Franklin et al. 2000; Löffelholz 2008; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009). The fourth wave of digital journalism research has started to respond to that call, and this double special issue of *Digital Journalism* and *Journalism Practice* contributes with new answers—and new questions.

In this introductory article, we map out the landscape in which journalism has been theorised at the start of the twenty-first century. We do this by analysing the theoretical underpinnings of the articles published in the longest-running international journalism-centred journals of *Journalism Studies* and *Journalism—Theory, Practice and Criticism* from 2000 to 2013. Our approach can be regarded as an analytical exercise on the recent history of journalism research. We aim to examine notions of theory in journalism studies in the digital age—an examination that will offer a pathway into the articles of this double special issue.

The Growing Maturity of Journalism Studies

The phrase "theories of journalism" implicitly suggests that journalism studies is an academic discipline with a set of established theories that are recognised by a research community. However, such a presupposition can be contested. What constitutes an academic discipline can be evaluated in at least two ways, according to Becher and Trowler (2001, 47):

(1) The existence of a *structural framework* that identifies the discipline through manifestations in, for instance, the organisational components of higher education institutions; in scholarly organisations and conferences or designated divisions of such; and in academic journals dedicated to inquiries within the field.
(2) The existence of a *specific academic culture* with a shared set of theories and methodologies that are maintained through "traditions, customs and practices, transmitted knowledge, beliefs, morals and rules of conduct, as well as their linguistic and symbolic forms of communication and the meanings they share".

Journalism studies is ostensibly becoming an academic discipline in the first respect. Programmes in journalism studies have mushroomed at universities and colleges to such an extent that the field today is "one of the fastest growing areas of study within higher education" (Conboy 2013, xi). Divisions and sections for journalism studies have been established within major communication research organisations such as the International Communication Association (ICA), the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) and the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) since the turn of the millennium. Conferences solely dedicated to journalism studies—such as the biannual "Future of Journalism" at the University of Cardiff—have been established, and the beginning of the twenty-first century has seen the birth of several academic journals dedicated to the field, such as *Journalism—Theory, Practice and Criticism*, *Journalism Studies*, *Journalism Practice* and, most recently, *Digital Journalism*. Viewed through such a lens, journalism studies seems to move in the opposite direction compared to its object of inquiry: while journalism today is—not least due to digitisation—marked by the blurring of previously established boundaries and the consequent loss of autonomy as a profession, journalism studies is pushing for autonomy and demarcation from other disciplines.

However, if we consider the second point above, the picture becomes more complicated. Journalism studies is not marked by a specific and shared academic culture. As Zelizer (2004) notes, journalism studies is a highly interdisciplinary and thus diverse entity, shaped by national particularities, differences between journalism scholarship and journalism education, and by the fact that it has "borrowed unevenly from both the humanities and the social sciences" (19). Inquiries into journalism have drawn from a wide range of disciplines, predominantly political science, sociology, history, language and cultural studies. The result, according to Zelizer (2009, 34), "has been a terrain of journalism study at war with itself, with … a slew of independent academic efforts taking place in a variety of disciplines without the shared knowledge crucial to academic inquiry".

The recent emergence of the structural framework to support journalism studies as a possible discipline has, however, resulted in several attempts to stitch together the different pockets of scholarly inquiry into journalism, thus contributing to the coherence of the academic culture. Barbie Zelizer is, of course, a key contributor to this development, most notably through her published work but also as one of the founding editors of *Journalism*. In its first issue in 2000, she proclaimed the charter of the journal "to study journalism in all of its contexts and in so doing embrace a wider range of theoretical perspectives, cultural and historical circumstances, and research methodologies" (Zelizer 2000, 12). A similar agenda was launched the same year by the founding editors of *Journalism Studies*, who encouraged "contributions which represent the most diverse range of theoretical perspectives" (Franklin et al. 2000, 5). On the one hand, there is a wish to develop a shared understanding of journalism studies as a discipline, but on the other hand, the discipline is seen to be best served by a multitude of theoretical perspectives.

Furthermore, the last decade has seen the publication of several books bringing together the different approaches and perspectives related to the study of journalism: *Key Concepts in Journalism Studies* (Franklin et al. 2005); *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch 2009a), *Global Journalism Research* (Löffelholz, Weaver, and Schwarz 2008); *Journalism Studies: The Basics* (Conboy 2013); and *Journalism* (Tumber 2008)—a four-volume collection of the "canon" of journalism studies. This literature paints a picture of the theoretical evolution of journalism studies.

For example, Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009b) divide the history of journalism research into four phases: the normative, empirical, sociological and global-comparative phases. These phases coexist and overlap, but their emergence can be traced chronologically. The normative phase marks the origin of journalism studies at the beginning of the twentieth century (even earlier in Germany), when scholars were concerned with what journalism ought to be and how journalists should do their job. It was a phase concerned mostly with the journalist as an individual, and the level of theoretical complexity was therefore low (Löffelholz 2008, 16).

The empirical phase finds its roots in the United States and the establishment of professional journalism education. The year 1924 saw the birth of *Journalism Bulletin* (later to become *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*), which in its first issue contained a suggestion for empirical research on the form, content and effects of journalism (Singer 2008, 145). A strain of empirical research followed, which eventually led to the discovery of influential middle-range theories of journalism, such as White's "gatekeeper" theory in 1950 (Löffelholz 2008, 18; Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch 2009b,

6). This phase was influenced by the empirical turn in the social sciences at large and created a shift of attention from the individual to the organisational—a shift that was taken further in the sociological phase.

Two early examples of this shift are Breed's (1955) "Social Control in the Newsroom", which investigates newsroom policy in an ethnographic manner, and Galtung and Ruge's (1965) "The Structure of Foreign News", the "single piece of research that most cogently advanced a general understanding of news selection processes" (Zelizer 2004, 54). Furthermore, inquiries into the structures of news production boomed in the 1970s and 1980s, featuring critical examinations of the conventions, professional cultures and ideologies of journalism. Sociological approaches to journalism studies became more critical and diverse, as influences from cultural studies (in the United Kingdom and the United States) and systems theory (Germany) became significant. This diversity is identified by Schudson (2005) as four different approaches to the sociology of news: the economic organisation of news, the political context of news making, the social organisation of news work and cultural approaches.

The fourth phase of journalism studies as identified by Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009b)—the global-comparative phase—is currently expanding the myriad of theoretical approaches to journalism studies. This phase is marked by increasing cooperation and networking among scholars with an ascending international research agenda reflecting the global and digital nature of information systems. The global-comparative phase is therefore closely tied to what we here define as "the digital age", in which theories taking established structures and practices of journalism for granted may lose their hold. This phase is marked by the dissolving of many borders: between nation states; national markets; the local and the global; the public and the private; mass communication and interactive communication; professionals and amateurs; production and consumption; and professions—to name a few.

These changes have created a need to rethink what journalism is and consequently to reassess theories of journalism. However, we must not jump to the conclusion that previously established theories are no longer valid in our digital and globalised age. Löffelholz (2008, 25) argues, on the one hand, that normative theories of the past "are not flexible enough to cope with the new media and communication world" because they are framed by political understandings that today are shrinking in relevance. An example of this is the normative relationship between journalism and democracy, which has dominated political science perspectives on journalism. Zelizer (2013) argues that democracy as a concept has over-extended its "shelf-life" in journalism studies and needs to be retired. On the other hand, systems theory, cultural theories (e.g. critical theory, materialism, theories of linguistics and semiotics) and what Löffelholz (2008) labels "integrative social theories" (e.g. structuration theory, field theory and the theory of communicative action) all have "considerable room for new ideas and the improvement of concepts; they are in no way finished business" (25). The progress of journalism studies should, therefore, not be based "on the substitution of 'outdated' theories, but on the gain in complexity through the emergence of new theories and modifications of older theories" (26).

There is, however, a lack of knowledge concerning the extent to which journalism studies today is framed, on the one hand, by emerging theories and perspectives and, on the other hand, by modifications or adoptions of old theories—but also what constitute the theoretical trends within the interdisciplinary domain. To fill this knowledge

gap, we have conducted an analysis of all the volumes currently available of two internationally acknowledged journals dedicated to journalism studies: *Journalism—Theory, Practice and Criticism* (Sage) and *Journalism Studies* (Routledge/Taylor & Francis).[1] We must, however, note that this account of the recent history of journalism studies cannot fully grasp developments in different parts of the world, but it will, nevertheless, provide a portrayal of the field through two established publication routes.

The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

(1) What are the dominant disciplinary perspectives and theories articulated in these journals?
(2) Has there been any change from 2000 to 2013 in the theoretical framing of these inquiries into journalism?

Notions of Theory in Journalism Studies of the Twenty-first Century

To answer the research questions, we sampled (1) all metadata keywords from articles published in *Journalism* and *Journalism Studies* from 2000 to 2013 and (2) the abstracts of articles published in the volumes 2002, 2003 and 2012 of both journals.

Keywords and abstracts provide indicators of dominant themes and perspectives in publications and are therefore suited to trace possible theoretical trends within the field. Of course, there are no standardised procedures for article authors on what keywords to choose and what to include in an abstract. Nevertheless, abstracts and keywords represent well-known conventions or genres of academic writing. Abstracts are sites in which it is possible, even desirable, to make explicit the theoretical embedding and contribution of the work in a concise form (see, for instance, Day and Gastel 2012; Körner 2008).

The conventions pertaining to keywords, in turn, imply that the chosen words should (1) function as technical metadata identifiers for search engines and bibliometric classifications and (2) have a bearing on how we perceive keywords in a cultural sense. Concerning the latter, Williams (1985) notes that keywords are indicators of cultural change: keywords such as "culture" and "capitalism" acquire different meanings at different times across cultures. A keyword might therefore be defined as "a word or phrase, often mobilized by different groups of social actors for different purposes, whose meanings are contested during unsettled times" (Ghaziani and Ventresca 2005, 524). Keywords and abstracts in academic journals can thus indicate the discursive struggles and changes within a field.

We based our analysis on Zelizer's (2004) description of the dominant disciplinary perspectives in journalism studies:

- *Political science*: Research analysing the role of journalism and the media in different political systems, the relationship between politics and journalism, and sourcing patterns in journalism.
- *Sociology*: Research on the relationships, work routines and interactions among those who are involved in news production and the organisations, institutions and structures (including professional norms and values) that aid their work.
- *History*: Research that analyses past practices and structures of journalism, often to understand contemporary journalism.

- *Language*: Research that analyses journalistic texts, for instance by applying linguistic, semiotic, genre, discourse or framing theory. Included here are rhetoric, narrativity and literary theory.
- *Cultural analysis*: Research focusing on contextual factors that shape practices of journalism, the construction of news, the cultural symbol systems of the profession, journalistic self-reflection and identity, stereotypes, archetypes, myths, popular culture, and tabloid and mainstream journalism.

In addition, we included *economy*, *philosophy*, *law* and *technology* (cf. Zelizer 2004, 8) as disciplinary perspectives that influence journalism studies:

- *Economy*: Research on media management, business models, press subsidies, media conglomeration, etc.
- *Philosophy*: Research that focuses on the ethical, epistemological and ontological questions related to journalism.
- *Law*: Research analysing legal issues related to journalism, e.g. privacy law, freedom of information acts, etc.
- *Technology*: Research that takes technology as its starting point in the analysis of journalism, in either theoretical or practical terms, e.g. interactivity, multimedia, hypertext, etc.

This categorisation is, of course, debatable in that the borders are not always that clear, but we found it useful to anchor our analysis in an existing frame to avoid losing oneself in the interdisciplinary contours of the field. However, to maintain some flexibility, we also took into account the explicitly mentioned theories in the abstracts.

Keyword Analysis—Sample and Method

The aim of the keyword analysis was thus to map the theoretical perspectives and their possible fluctuation in the journal articles from 2000 to 2013. We extracted all keywords from the articles (excluding editorials, debate articles, book reviews, etc.) published in the 14 volumes of both journals from 2000 to 2013 from the journals' online archive (*Journalism*) and from the EBSCO database (*Journalism Studies*).[2] This resulted in a dataset as seen in Table 1.

There is a significant increase in the number of both articles and metadata keywords from the first to the second half of the period. In 2000, *Journalism* published three issues with five original articles per issue. This had increased to eight issues by 2013, with seven or eight original articles per issue. For *Journalism Studies*, the number

TABLE 1
Number of articles and metadata keywords in the dataset

	2000–2006		2007–2013		2000–2013	
	Articles	Keywords	Articles	Keywords	Articles	Keywords
Journalism Studies	252	2057[a]	359	4551[a]	611	6608[a]
Journalism	126	797	293	1769	419	2566
Both	378	2854	652	6320	1030	9174

[a]The number includes both the author- and database-provided keywords.

of issues increased from four to six during the same period, while the number of articles per issue stayed the same: eight or nine articles per issue.

Thus, the overall number of keywords in the journals had also more than doubled from the first to the second period. However, quantitative comparison between keywords in the two journals should not be made, since the sample from *Journalism* includes only the author-provided keywords, whereas the *Journalism Studies* sample also includes database-provided keywords, or "subject terms" as they are referred to in the EBSCO database. We were unable to separate the author-provided from the database-provided keywords in the extraction process. However, based on a manual reading of a subset of *Journalism Studies* metadata keywords, we could not detect any significant semantic differences between author- and database-provided keywords, the differences pertained mostly to form of expression. Hence we maintain that the dataset altogether represents the publications well, even if it does not provide possibilities for comparison between the journals.

The 9174 keywords in the dataset, as one might expect, contained many duplicates. When we removed them, we were left with 4545 unique keywords. However, due to the lack of standardised keywords, many of these were semantically similar (e.g. "journalistic ethics", "ethics" and "journalism ethics"). We therefore grouped all semantically similar keywords into clustered keywords, and thereby also reduced the possible skewing effect of the two sets of keywords in *Journalism Studies*. Furthermore, many keywords were not relevant for our analysis as indicators of theoretical perspectives. Among the most frequent keywords were general concepts such as "journalism" and "news"; many were indicators of geographical belonging (e.g. "American journalism", "Greece"); and some were names (e.g. "George Orwell", "*The New York Times*"). We coded all such keywords as "not relevant". Finally, we were left with 826 clustered and relevant keywords and were able to count their occurrence in the original set of 9174 keywords.

Keyword Analysis—Findings

Only 25 of the clustered and relevant keywords occurred more than 20 times in the whole dataset, indicating that metadata keywords in journalism studies are very much a story of the "long tail". More than half (445) of the clustered and relevant keywords appeared only once. The most frequent keyword during the whole period was "ethics", with a total of 149 occurrences, followed by "objectivity" (97 occurrences) and "professionalism" (94 occurrences).

In Figures 1 and 2, we have the 20 most frequent clustered and relevant keywords in the two periods 2000–2006 and 2007–2013. Thirteen of the keywords appear in the top 20 list in both periods, indicating certain continuity. However, the results also show that some themes and perspectives became less important and others more so throughout the whole period.

If we look at the clustered keywords that appear in the first period (2000–2006) but are *not* found in the most recent period—"campaign", "ideology",[3] "participation", "propaganda", "public relations" and "sociology"—we see that many of them are connected to the field of political communication, which belong to the broader perspective of political science (Zelizer 2004). This perspective is by far the most dominant in the

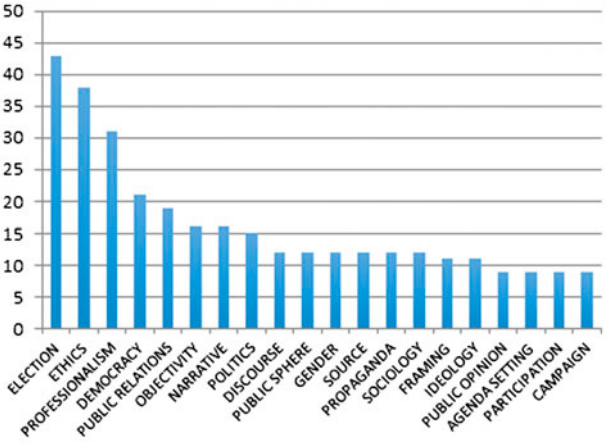

FIGURE 1
Occurrences of the 20 most frequent keywords, 2000–2006

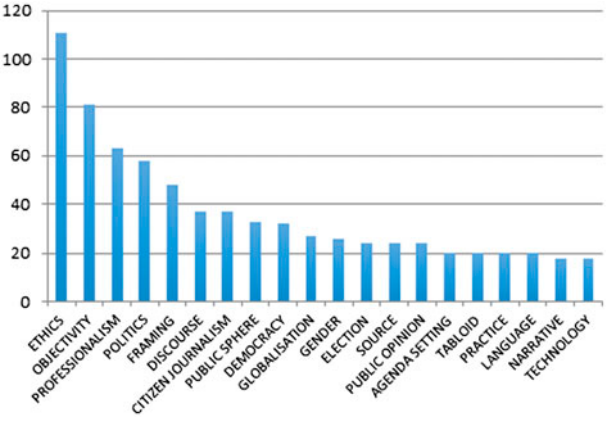

FIGURE 2
Occurrences of the 20 most frequent keywords, 2007–2013

first period. Twelve of the 20 most frequent keywords in Figure 1 can be categorised as belonging to the perspective of *political communication/political science* ("election", "democracy", "public relations", "politics", "public sphere", "source", "propaganda", "ideology", "public opinion", "agenda setting", "participation" and "campaign")—13 if we count "framing"[4] as belonging to the same perspective.

The next two most typical perspectives in the first period are *sociology* and *language*. According to our categories, both have (in Figure 1) three clustered keywords (*sociology*: "gender", "professionalism" and "sociology"; *language*: "discourse", "framing" and "narrativity"). The third perspective found among the top 20 clustered keywords in 2000–2006 is *philosophy*, with two clustered keywords: "ethics" and "objectivity".

However, it must be noted that many of these clustered keywords can belong to several perspectives depending on how they are framed within the articles, which is indeed a major limitation in this approach. Both "ethics" and "objectivity" can, for instance, be framed within a sociological perspective if these keywords are primarily

understood as aspects related to the norms and values of professional practice. We have, however, tried to minimise such overlaps in our analysis by, for instance, coding keywords such as "professional ethics" as belonging to the clustered keyword "professionalism".

In the most recent period, as seen in Figure 2, *political communication/political science* is still the most dominant perspective, but now with only eight clustered keywords ("politics", "citizen journalism", "public sphere", "democracy", "election", "source", "public opinion" and "agenda setting"). Compared to the first period, the most frequent clustered keywords in 2007–2013 belong to a greater variety of perspectives: "tabloid" was coded as belonging to the perspective of *culture*, which was not found among the top 20 clustered keywords in 2000–2006, while "technology", of course, belongs to the perspective of *technology*, also not found in the first period. Four clustered keywords were here coded under *sociology* ("professionalism", "globalisation", "gender" and "practice") and four to *language* ("framing", "discourse", "language" and "narrativity") —slightly more than in the first period.

While our analysis is perhaps able to provide only tentative indications of the dominant perspectives, it clearly presents the trends in how the 20 most popular keywords developed throughout the period. Figure 3 shows the increased/decreased use of these keywords relative to the general increase in keywords between the two periods. "Objectivity" is the keyword with the highest increase in frequency from 2000–2006 to 2007–2013 relative to the general increase. "Citizen journalism" has the second highest increase, and is therefore an appropriate example of a single keyword that makes a dramatic entrance during the studied period. At the declining end of the figure, we find "public relations", which can be seen as a sign of demarcation within the entire domain of communication research.

Abstract Analysis—Sample and Method

To obtain a deeper understanding of the dominant perspectives and the role played by theory in the articles, we conducted a content analysis of metadata abstracts associated with each article published in the 2002, 2003 and 2012 volumes of both

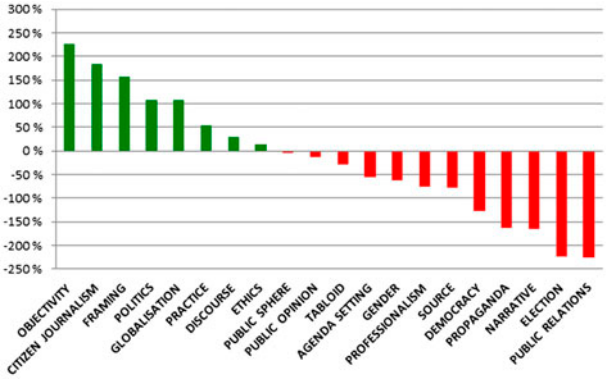

FIGURE 3
Trends among the 20 most frequent clustered keywords from 2000 to 2013, relative to the general increase in the number of keywords during the same period

journals. We chose 2012 instead of the perhaps more logical choice of 2013 since 2013 marked the launch of the new journal *Digital Journalism*, published by Routledge/Taylor & Francis. By choosing 2012, we were able to map the field as it was before the appearance of a journal distinctly dedicated to digital aspects of journalism. As we wanted to be able to map possible changes in the articulation of theory in the journals, we chose to have a point of comparison to the volume of 2012 from the start of the millennium. However, due to a significant difference in the number of articles published in the first two volumes of the journals, we chose to compare the later set with the volumes of 2002 and 2003. In 2002 the number of articles per issue increased from six to eight in *Journalism*, and in 2003 a fourth annual issue was added to *Journalism*, thus making the two journals more equal in size and together a more comparable set with the volume of 2012. A further reason for choosing two volumes from the early period was to reduce the possible impact of special issues with given topics.

All in all, we analysed 195 abstracts—90 from 2002/2003 (58 from *Journalism Studies* and 32 from *Journalism*) and 105 from 2012 (50 from *Journalism Studies* and 55 from *Journalism*).

All abstracts were carefully read and coded according to (1) what was regarded as the dominant disciplinary perspective; (2) the theoretical approach used (if any); and (3) whether a theoretical approach was explicitly stated or not. Each abstract was coded with only one perspective (according to the categorisation in Zelizer 2004), though many of them had elements from more than one perspective. Such abstracts were coded as belonging to the perspective that seemed most dominant. When in doubt, we consulted the original article.

No predefined categories were used for coding the theoretical approaches used in the studies. Here, each abstract was coded with all the theoretical approaches mentioned in the abstract. A test analysis of a subset of the abstracts revealed that many abstracts described an empirical article that built on previously established empirical knowledge without mentioning any specific theoretical approach. We therefore decided to code such abstracts under "grounded theory"—regardless of any explicit mentions of grounded theory in the abstract. Here, we understand grounded theory in a broad manner as a research stance that emphasises the role of empirical material as the basis for building theory.

Regarding the explicitness of the theoretical approaches, we coded each abstract with the variables "yes", "no" or "partly". "Partly" was used when the theoretical approach was visible without being explicit. Examples here include abstracts mentioning words such as "discourse", "frame" or "agenda" without stating that the article in question was based on discourse, framing or agenda theory. With this set of codes, we wanted to explore the role given to theory in abstracts.

Abstract Analysis—Findings

Figure 4 presents the distribution of dominant perspectives found in all abstracts: perspectives from *political science* and *sociology* dominate, while perspectives from *philosophy*, *economics* and *law* are barely present. The keyword analysis indicated the prevalence of keywords such as "ethics" and "objectivity", which we coded as belonging to *philosophy*. The abstract analysis, however, revealed that articles with such

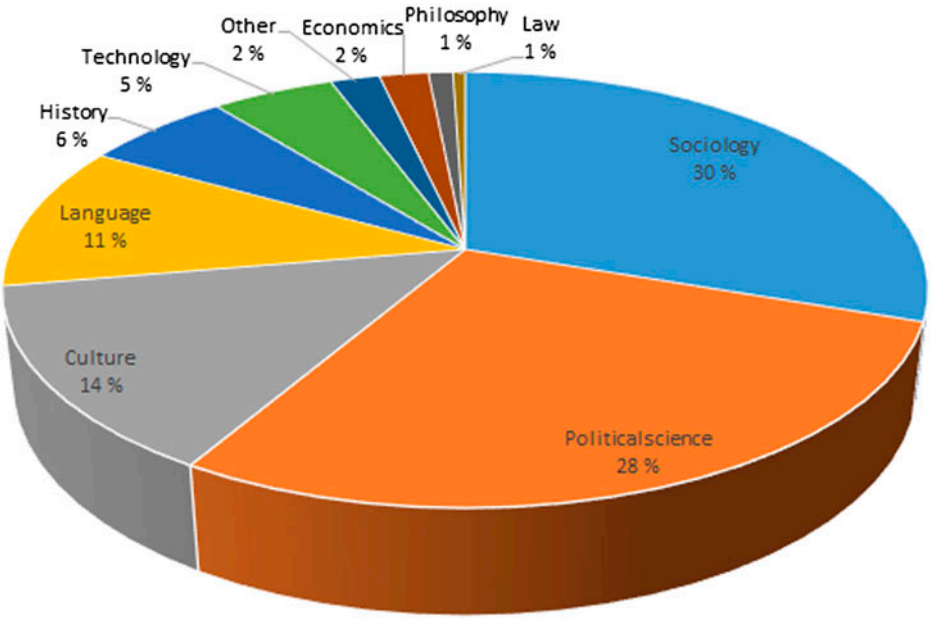

FIGURE 4
Dominant perspectives in abstracts in the 2002, 2003 and 2012 volumes ($N = 195$)

keywords are more likely to be embedded in a *sociological* framework, as such keywords are mentioned in reference to norms related to professional practice. The perspective of sociology with a focus on professionalism seems to have a firm position in the field.

The differences between the two periods regarding dominant perspectives in the abstracts are not as drastic as one might expect based on the keyword analysis. Perspectives from *political science* decreased from 32 per cent in 2002–2003 to 25 per cent in 2012, while perspectives from *sociology* increased from 26 to 34 per cent. *Culture* has decreased from 13 to 9 per cent, while *language* has increased from 8 to 13 per cent. Historical perspectives have decreased, while the booming perspectives are *technology* (from 3 to 7 per cent) and *economics* (from 0 to 4 per cent). All these findings are in line with the findings from the keyword analysis, but the image appears a bit more stable.

Looking at the most frequent theoretical approaches in the abstracts, we find that the grounded theory approach (as defined above) is by far the most popular. As Figure 5 shows, almost 20 per cent of all abstracts take such an approach in both periods on average. This indicates that journalism research is characterised by a perspective that constructs its object of study by drawing on empirical findings. There is, however, a significant decline in the grounded theory approach and an overall increase in other theoretical approaches from 2002–2003 to 2012, suggesting a move from empiricism to theoretical awareness—or at least a tendency to articulate theoretical orientations more explicitly.

Theories associated with *political science* ("democracy theory", "agenda setting", "media systems", "political economy" and "public sphere") and *sociology* ("professionalism", "field theory", "news values" and "gatekeeping") dominate the other most frequent theoretical approaches, but altogether the theoretical approaches—like the

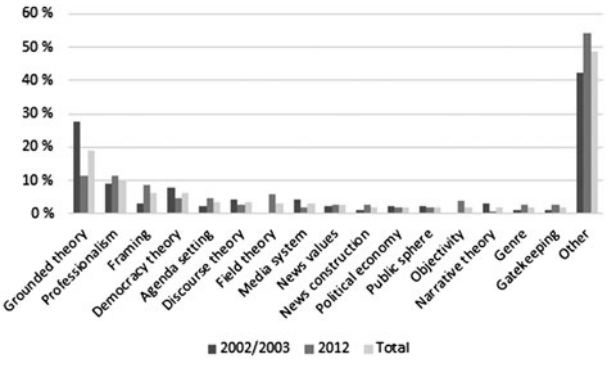

FIGURE 5
Theoretical approaches in the abstracts (N = 195)

keywords—are characterised by the "long tail". The "other" category in Figure 5 represents all the approaches that occurred only one or two times in the abstracts, ranging from "epistemology" to "orientalism".

The degree of theoretical explicitness in the abstracts differs slightly between the different perspectives. Abstracts with a political science, sociological and cultural perspective have a significant increase in theoretical awareness.[5] For instance, 61 per cent (22 out of 36) of all 2012 abstracts dealing with sociological perspectives specify the theoretical approach used, compared to only 26 per cent (6 out of 22) in 2002–2003. The move from empiricism to theoretical awareness is therefore most significant within sociological perspectives on journalism.

Altogether, in 2002–2003 only one-third of the abstracts explicitly name a theoretical approach, one-third mention an approach and one-third of the abstracts have no mention of any theories. However, in 2012, half of all abstracts explicitly mention a theoretical approach, and 34 per cent express a connection to a theoretical approach implicitly ("partly"), while 15 per cent have no mention of theories. The results thus suggest that there is an increase in explicit theoretical awareness, but the conventions of abstract writing also allow scholars to describe their research without references to theories.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of our analysis indicate that:

- There has been a broad paradigmatic change in journalism studies since 2000 from perspectives of political science to sociological perspectives.
- Journalism studies is dominated by an increasing variety of theoretical approaches. New approaches from technology and economics are influencing journalism studies, but in a limited manner.
- Aspects related to philosophical perspectives (e.g. ethics and objectivity) are becoming increasingly important for journalism studies. However, these aspects are not viewed through perspectives of philosophy but are analysed in a sociologically oriented framework, such as professionalism.

- There has been a move from empiricism to theoretical awareness in journalism studies since 2000, but (implicit) grounded theory is still the most dominant approach.

These generalised indications must, however, be balanced with the limitations of the dataset. First, the dataset consists only of abstracts and keywords from two journals. Even though they are the two most significant journals within journalism studies, many other journals within the broader field of media and communication studies publish studies on journalism. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of journals within the field at large and within journalism studies in particular since 2000. Of special significance here is the 2006 launch of the *Journalism Studies* "sister" journal *Journalism Practice*.

Second, journals might be more suited to empirically oriented publications than other means of publications, such as monographs. Given the limited word count, journal articles might favour presentations and discussions of empirical findings over elaborate theoretical discussions. This might explain the high degree of grounded theory empiricism found in our sample. However, it does not explain the increase in theoretical awareness that we found.

In spite of these limitations, we believe that our findings point to important trends in journalism studies, implying, at least in part, that the field is maturing and gaining increased autonomy as an academic discipline. As discussed above, a structural framework of a discipline has emerged since the turn of the millennium. It would therefore be nothing but expected that the theoretical awareness—perhaps also a more defined disciplinary identity—within the field has evolved during the same period.

However, the diversity of approaches and the interdisciplinary nature of journalism studies continue to thrive, which is indicated by the "long tails" of the keywords and theories. In the analysed abstracts, we found more than 100 different theories guiding the research, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of them were tied to the "old" perspectives of political science, sociology, language and cultural studies. This indicates that journalism studies still has not been able to "produce a coherent picture of what journalism is" (Zelizer 2009, 34). It is, however, debatable whether such coherence is a necessary or even possible aim in the digital era, where multiple journalisms coexist and the practice of journalism is dispersing. However, the first 14 volumes of *Journalism* and *Journalism Studies* have clearly achieved what the editors aimed for at the very beginning, to infuse the field with a wider range of theoretical perspectives (Zelizer 2000; Franklin et al. 2000).

Conclusions and Presentation of the Special Issue

Given the interdisciplinary nature of journalism studies (which we think is not weakened by the field's increased maturity and autonomy)—and given the increasingly blurred boundaries of journalism—we believe that there is a need within journalism studies to widen the scope of theoretical perspectives and approaches even further. A main aim of this special issue is therefore to contribute to such a change.

The spread of articles in this double special issue clearly points out that the research field is currently occupied with theorising the increasingly porous and

enlarged domain of journalism. This "mind-blowing uncertainty in the evolution of journalism" in the digital era, as David Domingo, Pere Masip and Irene Costera Meijer put it in their article, seems to be a common denominator in the foundation of the contributions in the issue. The uncertainty, however, has not paralysed scholarship: it has invited researchers to assume new avenues to theorising journalism or inspired them to reassess old theories.

In this special issue, we find contributions that tackle this challenge in four main ways. First, the articles offer *conceptual configurations* with which to grasp the domain of journalism (e.g. de-differentiation, circulation, news network or spatiality). Second, the articles provide concepts with which to theorise further *technology as a fundamental part of journalism* (e.g. actants or materiality). These articles are all batched together in *Digital Journalism*.

Third, a group of papers discuss the *latitude of user positions* in the digitalised domain of journalism (e.g. maximal–minimal participation, routines–interpretation–agency and mobility–cross-mediality–participation). Fourth, contributors provide theoretically informed tools with which to understand the *evolving practice(s)* of journalism (e.g. innovation, dispersed gatekeeping and mediatised interdependency) in different cultural contexts. These articles are published in *Journalism Practice*.

Presenting the articles in Digital Journalism

The *Digital Journalism* issue is opened by Seth Lewis and Oscar Westlund, who argue that the study of digital journalism is in need of a sociotechnical framework that would provide a counterweight to the sociocultural emphasis of the earlier studies in digital journalism. Their suggested framework recognises human actors, technological actants, audience positions and the activities through which these interact.

Alex Primo and Gabriela Zago tap further into the role played by technology in understanding journalism and its boundaries. By drawing on actor-network theory (ANT), they make a case against social determinism in journalism theories. David Domingo, Pere Masip and Irene Costera Meijer continue with ANT by arguing that it is useful in letting researchers understand journalism through the idea of news networks.

Wiebke Loosen discusses the situation in which various agents are becoming involved in journalism, thus "blurring the boundaries" of the domain. Loosen's starting point is that the entire idea of de-boundedness can gain theoretical insight from systems theory.

Juliette De Maeyer and Florence Le Cam propose a methodological and theoretical stance that underlines the importance of mapping out the social history of digital journalism through the prism of materiality. Henrik Bødker identifies three main ways in which circulation has been and can be understood in the context of journalism: material dissemination, the dissemination of meaning and the reproduction of culture.

Amy Schmitz Weiss thereafter suggests that journalism practice as well as audiences' news experiences may be understood through the concept of "spatial journalism".

Presenting the articles in Journalism Practice

Chris ***Peters and Tamara Witschge propose a move from "grand narratives" towards "small expectations" in understanding the role of journalism in democratic

participation. They argue for the necessity of an audience-inclusive aspect to theorising journalism and democracy. Ike Picone, Cédric Courtois and Steve Paulussen, in turn, suggest that journalism studies is in need of a "radical user perspective".

Heikki Heikkilä and Laura Ahva draw on practice theory to put forward a framework in which to study the construction of the relevance of news in the everyday practices of audiences. The legacy of practice theory to the study of journalism is further elaborated by Christoph Raetzsch. He advances an understanding of journalism as a structure of public communication enacted through practices by journalists and audiences alike.

Mattias Ekman and Andreas Widholm focus on the changing source relations in the digital environment related to social media, such as Twitter. They argue that a theoretical perspective that can best capture the current relationship between politicians and journalists is that of "mediatized interdependency".

This discussion of sources is broadened by Peter Bro and Filip Wallberg in their analysis of gatekeeping. They show that journalistic practice is currently captured by a model that emphasises the redistributed or eliminated nature of gatekeeping. In the final article, Hayes Mawindi Mabweazara presents a metatheoretical framework for the study of African journalism in the digital era that draws on sociology and a social construction of technology.

Blind Spots and Final Remarks

The articles in the special issue provide—at least—political, cultural, historical, sociological and technological perspectives for understanding journalism in the digital age. It also becomes very clear that the experiences and practices of users cannot be theorised separately from other aspects of journalism. The issue thus offers a rich pool of concepts to draw from and develop further.

Self-reflexively, it can also be noted that this special issue has some blind spots, which seem to be connected to the broader trends in which journalism is theorised. This selection of articles emphasises sociological perspectives and therefore falls in line with the main trend towards increased sociological inquiries found in the keyword and abstract analysis.

Furthermore, philosophical perspectives on digital journalism remain few. We believe that this is a blind spot not only of this special issue but of journalism studies at large. If we are to address the fundamental questions concerning the essential character of journalism, journalism studies should lean more heavily on perspectives such as ethics, ontology and epistemology. They liberate scholars from studying journalism only within the institutional framework.

We also believe that there is an increasing need to theorise the visual—and the entire blending of media modalities—in journalism. Digitisation brings forth many challenges to visual representations of reality. Such a discussion is opened by Henrik Bødker in this issue, but we believe this is an area that can gain from further theorising and tighter linkages with other research perspectives. Visual representations of reality in journalism tap into discussions of ontology and ethics and are therefore closely tied to philosophical perspectives. A forthcoming special issue of *Journalism Practice* on photojournalism edited by Stuart Allan will surely open up new perspectives on the increased significance of visual journalism.

In addition, the role of language as a theoretical perspective is not strong in this special issue. Even though our abstract analysis found a slight increase in language perspectives in journalism studies in the digital age, we believe that the field could benefit from an ever-greater inclusion of such perspectives in the future.

That being said, this special issue certainly contributes to the theoretical awareness for journalism studies in the digital age. The rapid technological development of the media landscape may sometimes seem like an impossible research context for scholars: the field is changing so fast that even empirical mapping seems to be lagging behind, not to mention theorisation. However, the contributions here indicate that it is possible and necessary to scrutinise digital journalism through a theoretical lens and that that lens can benefit from combining classical theories, explorative perspectives and empirical insight.

NOTES

1. *Journalism Studies* is the only international journal solely dedicated to journalism studies listed in the *ISI Web of Science Journal Citation Report* (JCR). In 2012, its impact factor (0.798) was ranked at 33 within communication studies. *Journalism* has been accepted for inclusion in JCR as of 2014. Both journals are associated with the journalism studies division of ICA.

2. The keywords and abstracts were extracted using the following procedure: the Firefox browser plug-in Zotero was used to download metadata for all articles published 2000–2013. When downloading metadata from the online archive of *Journalism*, the author-provided keywords were automatically downloaded as part of the metadata, but not from the online archive of *Journalism Studies*. For this journal, we therefore arranged a work-around involving the EBSCO database, from which keywords would download as part of the metadata. All the data was then exported from Zotero and imported into EndNote. We defined a tab-separated export style in EndNote where the journal name, article title, year and keywords (tags) were the only fields exported. This exported file was then imported into the Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

3. We clustered the keyword "ideology" as referring to ideology in a political sense. Keywords such as "professional ideology" were coded as belonging to the clustered keyword "professionalism". However, these choices, together with the nature of keywords as research data, may mask the influence of the cultural studies perspective (and the use of "ideology" in that context) on journalism research.

4. Frame analysis is a commonly used methodology in political communication, but as it deals with aspects of language, we have here chosen to categorise "framing" as a language perspective.

5. The sample is not large enough to show any reliable findings related to the other perspectives.

REFERENCES

Anderson, C. W. 2010. "Journalistic Networks and the Diffusion of Local News: The Brief, Happy News Life of the 'Francisville Four'." *Political Communication* 27 (3): 289–309.

Becher, Tony, and Paul Trowler. 2001. *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Culture of Disciplines*. 2nd ed. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Breed, Warren. 1955. "Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis." *Social Forces* 33 (4): 326–335.

Broersma, Marcel J., and Chris Peters. 2013. "Introduction. Rethinking Journalism: The Structural Transformation of a Public Good." In *Rethinking Journalism: Trust and Participation in a Transformed News Landscape*, edited by Chris Peters and Marcel J. Broersma, 1–12. Oxon: Routledge.

Conboy, Martin. 2013. *Journalism Studies: The Basics*. London: Routledge.

Day, Robert, and Barbara Gastel. 2012. *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*. 4th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Domingo, David. 2008. "Inventing Online Journalism: A Constructivist Approach to the Development of Online News." In *Making Online News. The Ethnography of New Media Production*, edited by Chris Paterson and David Domingo, 15–28. New York: Peter Lang.

Franklin, Bob, Gerd G. Kopper, Elizabeth Toth, and Judy Van Slyke Turk. 2000. "Editorial." *Journalism Studies* 1 (1): 5–7.

Franklin, Bob, Martin Hamer, Mark Hanna, Marie Kinsey, and John E. Richardson. 2005. *Key Concepts in Journalism Studies*. London: Sage.

Galtung, Johan, and Mari Holmboe Ruge. 1965. "The Structure of Foreign News the Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers." *Journal of Peace Research* 2 (1): 64–90.

Ghaziani, Amin, and Marc J. Ventresca. 2005. "Keywords and Cultural Change: Frame Analysis of Business Model Public Talk, 1975-2000." *Sociological Forum* 20 (4): 523–559.

Heinrich, Ansgard. 2011. *Network Journalism: Journalistic Practice in Interactive Spheres*. New York: Routledge.

Hermida, Alfred. 2010. "Twittering the News: The Emergence of Ambient Journalism." *Journalism Practice* 4 (3): 297–308.

Körner, Ann M. 2008. *Guide to Publishing a Scientific Paper*. Oxon: Routledge.

Löffelholz, Martin. 2008. "Heteregeneous—Multidimensional—Competing. Theoretical Approaches to Journalism: An Overview." In *Global Journalism Research: Theories, Methods, Findings, Future*, edited by David H. Weaver, Andreas Schwarz, and Martin Löffelholz, 15–27. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Löffelholz, Martin, David H. Weaver, and Andreas Schwarz, eds. 2008. *Global Journalism Research: Theories, Methods, Findings, Future*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Mitchelstein, Eugenia, and Pablo J. Boczkowski. 2009. "Between Tradition and Change: A Review of Recent Research on Online News Production." *Journalism* 10 (5): 562–586.

Peters, Chris, and Marcel J. Broersma, eds. 2013. *Rethinking Journalism: Trust and Participation in a Transformed News Landscape*. Oxon: Routledge.

Russell, Adrienne. 2013. *Networked: A Contemporary History of News in Transition*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Schudson, Michael. 2005. "Four Approaches to the Sociology of News." In *Mass Media and Society*, edited by James Curran and Michael Gurevitch, 4th ed., 172–197. London: Hodder Arnold.

Singer, Jane B. 2008. "Journalism Research in the United States. Paradigm Shift in a Networked World." In *Global Journalism Research: Theories, Methods, Findings, Future*, edited by Martin Löffelholz, David H. Weaver, and Andreas Schwarz, 145–157. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Tumber, Howard, ed. 2008. *Journalism*. Oxon: Routledge.

Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, and Thomas Hanitzsch, eds. 2009a. *Handbook of Journalism Studies*. Oxon: Routledge.

Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, and Thomas Hanitzsch. 2009b. "Introduction: On Why and How We Should Do Journalism Studies." In *Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, 3–16. Oxon: Routledge.

Williams, Raymond. 1985. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford University Press.

Zelizer, Barbie. 2000. "What is Journalism Studies?" *Journalism* 1 (1): 9–12.

Zelizer, Barbie. 2004. *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zelizer, Barbie. 2009. "Journalism and the Academy." In *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, edited by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, 29–41. Oxon: Routledge.

Zelizer, Barbie. 2013. "On the Shelf Life of Democracy in Journalism Scholarship." *Journalism* 14 (4): 459–473.

Steen Steensen (author to whom correspondence should be addressed), Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway. E-mail: Steen.Steensen@hioa.no. Web: http://home.hio.no/~steen/English.html

Laura Ahva, School of Communication, Media and Theatre, University of Tampere, Finland. E-mail: Laura.ahva@uta.fi. Web: http://www.uta.fi/cmt/en/contact/staff/lauraahva/index.html