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## **Caught between Innovation and Tradition: Young journalists as normative change agents in the journalistic field**

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### **Abstract**

*The necessity of innovation within the newsroom, and the rise of entrepreneurial initiatives outside it, have become increasingly apparent in the past decade. A common thread in this discourse is the desire for young journalists to be “change agents” who foster innovation and thus stretch existing boundaries in the profession. Employers hope new hires, seen as attuned to their generation’s news use and as offering fresh knowledge and insights, will be able to drive new journalism initiatives that can attract a younger audience and so improve the enterprise’s odds for economic sustainability. Using a longitudinal three-wave survey among students enrolled in two leading journalism programs in Britain and the Netherlands, we explore whether students’ perceptions of innovation and entrepreneurialism are in line with this optimistic industry discourse. Do students perceive themselves as change agents who will be challenging and potentially shifting the boundaries of journalism? Or do they adhere to traditional ideas about norms and behaviors that have been ingrained in the doxa and habitus of the journalistic field over previous decades? We find that although journalism students favor the idea of “innovation” and see the value of engaging audiences, they define change predominantly in terms of technology rather than more substantive cultural transformation.*

### **Keywords:**

Boundary work; Bourdieu; digital technology; entrepreneurial journalism; field theory; innovation; journalism education

Journalism students seeking to enter the news industry face high expectations. News organizations, whether legacy media or start-ups, expect proficiency with digital tools and platforms. However, these skills are no longer sufficient to enable potential new employees to stand out, given the technological expertise already available in contemporary newsrooms (Usher, 2016). Today, young professionals are hired only in part because of a capacity to contribute to existing editorial processes; they also, even primarily, are brought on board in the hope they will bring new ideas to the table. The assumption is that they are attuned with their generation's news use, and have fresh knowledge and insights to promote journalistic initiatives that will attract a younger audience and make the enterprise more economically sustainable. In other words, in discourses on the necessity of innovation within the newsroom and the rise of entrepreneurial initiatives outside it, young journalists are increasingly expected to be "change agents" (Ottaway, 1983) capable of shifting professional boundaries.

Journalism was long regarded as one of the most conservative economic sectors because its business model – resting almost entirely on advertisers and audiences, one way or another – was so profitable that only incremental innovation seemed necessary (Broersma and Peters, 2013). But in the past decade, declines in both traditional revenue streams have shaken up the industry. Conversely, the digital transformation of the media also has provided opportunities for news startups that are offering an alternative, if challenging, route to success via entrepreneurial journalism (Briggs, 2012; Bruno and Nielsen, 2012; Marsden, 2017). Journalism education has catered to this perceived industry need by introducing classes on entrepreneurship and paying attention to innovation, in particular incorporating training with digital tools in the core curricula (Creech and Mendelson, 2015). Although the extent to which new approaches have been adopted varies widely, many programs now include these new concepts and competencies to better prepare students for a future in an increasingly digital – and increasingly competitive – professional environment.

This study focuses on the ways that tomorrow's entry-level journalists perceive journalistic innovation and entrepreneurial journalism, two perceived routes to a sustainable future for news organizations. The first concept encompasses many potential aspects of change, both disruptive and incremental; the latter points towards specific innovations that aim to be disruptive and are directly linked to business pressures and opportunities. Our study examines data collected in three consecutive years from students in two leading journalism programs, in Britain and the Netherlands, in an effort to understand how people preparing to enter news work weigh the necessity of journalistic innovation and entrepreneurialism. Do they perceive themselves as change agents who will be challenging and potentially shifting the boundaries of journalism? Or do they adhere to traditional ideas about norms and behaviors that have been ingrained in the *doxa* and *habitus* of the journalistic field over previous decades?

We ground our analysis in two conceptual paradigms: field theory and boundary work. Pierre Bourdieu's field theory provides a framework for interpreting the tension between professional norms and potentially conflicting outside forces that challenge the status quo or even threaten a field's existence. This approach suggests that journalism students, who typically are educated according to dominant occupational norms and practices, might be inclined to perceive innovation and, especially, entrepreneurship as trends alien to the journalistic field. Boundary work provides a second conceptual lens to interpret our results. Rooted in the sociology of professions, and the work of Thomas Gieryn (1999) in particular, it theorizes how social boundaries are erected between professions, and how these are shaped in rhetorical struggles about legitimacy, jurisdiction, autonomy, and control. In our case, we are interested in whether journalism students perceive themselves as defenders of existing boundaries or as change agents who – either inside the traditional industry or as outside competitors – aim to fundamentally disrupt the field of journalism.

## Challenging the boundaries of the journalistic field

Following the work of Pierre Bourdieu, we conceptualize journalism as a field demarcated from other fields in society. According to the French sociologist, society consists of “semiautonomous and increasingly specialized spheres of action” such as science, politics, religion, and journalism (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 2-3). Bourdieu developed his field theory to explain how power relations structure social action, offering a meso level of analysis in which institutional structures and social practice are brought together. Essentially, a field is a constellation of forces in which agents “occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field” (Bourdieu, 2005: 30). Agents within a field, such as journalists and news organizations, strive for economic, cultural, and symbolic capital to distinguish themselves from others, obtain more power, and improve their position in that field.

The level of autonomy of the journalistic field is limited compared to other fields since there are no strict entry requirements such as licenses or diplomas. Moreover, news organizations and journalists are highly dependent on other fields both economically and for access to news events, places, and actors. Nevertheless, over the twentieth century, the journalistic field developed into a separate domain with recognizable and broadly shared norms, practices, and textual conventions. These are fundamental to the field’s *doxa* – the tacit and taken-for-granted assumptions, or principles, that underlie a field and organize action within it. Agents who aim to be part of a field need to subscribe to its *doxa*. Those who do not adhere to these unspoken rules – for instance, about the fact-based nature of reporting or the need for editorial independence from commercial influence – are not accepted as legitimate agents within the field. Journalism schools traditionally help maintain ideational and practical orthodoxy in the field. The *doxa* ingrained in the students’ thinking over the course of their studies goes largely unchallenged when they enter the profession.

Worldwide surveys among journalists suggest considerable agreement about the *doxa* of the field. *The Global Journalist* (Weaver, 1998) and its update 14 years later (Weaver and Willnat, 2012a) studied 35 countries, including Britain and the Netherlands, and surveyed tens of thousands of journalists. Findings indicate that the quintessential journalist is college-educated, young, and representative of the dominant cultural groups in his or her society. Journalists broadly agree on the importance of reporting objectively and accurately, publishing news quickly, and analyzing issues and events (Weaver and Willnat, 2012b). Similar findings emerged from The Worlds of Journalism studies, which compared how journalists in 67 countries perceive their roles and responsibilities in society (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Between 2007 and 2016, more than 27,500 practitioners participated in these studies, which highlighted local differences but mostly found transnational similarities in practitioners’ roles (constructed as populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, critical change agents, or opportunistic facilitators; Hanitzsch, 2011), ethical concerns, occupational influences, and perceived autonomy (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

Closely connected is the concept of *habitus*, or the “rules of the game” that structure practices. Bourdieu described *habitus* as a “structured and structuring structure”. It is structured because of journalists’ upbringing, education, and socialization in the newsroom; structuring because journalists’ *habitus* guides their professional behavior; and a structure because it provides a stable foundation for day-to-day journalistic practices (Maton, 2008: 51). It is all about “having a feel for the game”, as practitioners internalize norms, habits, practices, conventions, and dispositions of journalism in general as well as of specific newsrooms (Schultz, 2007).

Fields are structured around two poles: the autonomous one, which represents the cultural capital specific to the field, and the heterogeneous one, which pivots on external economic and political forces. The level of autonomy of a field rests on how dependent it is on one of these poles. In the journalistic field, for example, a main mechanism for guaranteeing journalistic autonomy has historically been “the wall” between the editorial and commercial departments of a news organization; this is “one of the foremost professional markers of journalism, a principle that is reinforced most strongly in the central sites of its socialization” (Coddington, 2015: 67). However, contemporary journalism has been criticized for becoming more heterogeneous and less autonomous (Bourdieu, 2005: 43). Declining profits and the erosion of previously reliable business models have left the field open to increasing influence from commercial actors.

Field theory is particularly useful for our study because it highlights processes of change (Benson, 1999; Broersma, 2010). A field is never static; rather, it is a constellation of forces, and power lies in the ability to be transformative (Bourdieu, 2005). A continuous, often subconscious, struggle for power occurs between agents seeking to improve their position within the field. These “position-takings [are] being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field” (Bourdieu, 2005: 30). New entrants to a field can secure their position by challenging the status quo, introducing new heterodox ideas and practices. In every field, there is therefore a struggle “between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out competition” (Bourdieu, 1993: 72). However, to be accepted as legitimate players within the field, new entrants cannot deviate too much from the accepted doxa and habitus in the field. If they did so, they would not be recognized as being part of that field.

In other words, new entrants who aim to improve their position in a field can either comply with the dominant norms, practices, and textual conventions or challenge its principles. When they choose the latter, they engage in boundary work. Building on Bourdieu, the sociologist of knowledge Thomas Gieryn (1999) is concerned with how people claim the legitimate right to “perform an action or occupy a social space” (Carlson, 2015: 3). This construction of social boundaries between fields takes place rhetorically. The impact of digitalization has increased the salience of questions about what journalism is, who counts as a journalist, and what acceptable professional behavior looks like. At stake is “epistemic authority,” the “legitimate power to define, describe, and explain bounded domains of reality” (Gieryn, 1999: 1). By stretching boundaries within the limits of what is still accepted, agents can acquire economic and symbolic capital within the journalistic field.

Occupational newcomers such as journalism students can either decide to adhere to the hegemonic principles in the field and compete on the same turf as established journalists, or they can position themselves as change agents who aim to fundamentally disrupt the field of journalism as either internal or external competitors. Falck and Barnes (1975) outline three types of behavior that change agents can adopt when entering a new field or organization. They can show *normative behavior*, adapting to the dominant norms in the field and bringing in new ideas that support its normative structure; this choice will not produce fundamental change. When newcomers display *deviant behavior*, they reject the dominant norms within a field and try to replace them with alternative structures. They likely would meet opposition, marginalizing the change agent’s position. A third option is *non-normative behavior* in which existing norms are neither supported or opposed; instead, change agents adopting this approach argue for bringing different skills, ideas, and abilities to the field. In this case, new ideas stand a good chance of being integrated into the existing structures in a field.

## **Entrepreneurial journalism and innovation as boundary work**

Entrepreneurship and business-oriented innovation – and the discourses around them – aim to challenge the status quo in the journalistic field and stretch its boundaries. They have been introduced largely in response to the financial challenges facing the news industry in the digital era. As both circulation rates and advertising revenues have fallen, proponents have argued that entrepreneurship outside legacy media organizations, or radical innovation within them, might help sustain journalism as a public good. The disruption is seen as potentially enabling journalism to align more closely with digital trends and shifting audience preferences, and to do so more seamlessly than is possible for established news organizations within the field (Witschge and Harbers, 2018).

However, some aspects of this perspective are fundamentally opposed to values that helped shape the journalistic field in the first place. Norms such as autonomy and independence, not just from politics and sources but also from audiences and commercial interests, have historically been important rhetorical strategies to carve out distinctions between journalism and neighboring fields such as the PR or entertainment industries (Coddington, 2015; Singer, 2017). Entrepreneurial journalism and business innovation try to disrupt journalism at its heterogeneous pole, while field-specific capital seeks gain at its autonomous pole. The tension leads some journalism professionals to be skeptical about entrepreneurship or even to distrust it, questioning if we can still speak of independent journalism in an entrepreneurial environment where “the traditional divide between the values of journalism and those of business seem to blur, and disappear” (de Cock and de Smaele 2016: 263).

Journalism studies scholarship has, until recently, mirrored this attitude. In addition to the potential to erode the “wall” seen as helping safeguard the autonomy of editorial and commercial decisions, as indicated above (Coddington, 2015; Porlezza and Splendore, 2016), the precarious working conditions of journalistic entrepreneurs – who not only must combine reporting and commercial tasks but also often work long days for little money – are considered problematic. Performing commercial tasks and attending to other business-related necessities can take time away from in-depth reporting and writing in the public interest (Compton and Benedetti, 2010; Hunter, 2016).

But other scholars have treated the rise in entrepreneurial journalism more positively, particularly in terms of the potential to generate innovation. For instance, studies have shown how journalistic start-ups have positioned themselves in their manifestos as reforming the field by embracing technological innovation, along with a simultaneous affirmation and critique of traditional journalistic practices (Carlson and Usher, 2016; Harbers, 2016). A related body of work has focused on the potential for freelance journalists, who typically need to perform non-journalistic activities to survive economically (Gollmitzer, 2014), to serve as change agents for legacy media. Holton (2016) suggests that freelancers’ skills in using social media to engage with and build audiences enable them to gain power in the newsroom and become “intrapreneurial informants” (917). Brems et al. (2017) have confirmed that in the Netherlands and Flanders, freelance journalists spend much more effort on branding themselves on social platforms than their employed counterparts do.

Within journalism education, now the dominant provider of socialization into the journalistic field for new entrants, entrepreneurship and innovation were long ignored. University journalism curricula, which traditionally prepare students to work on the editorial side of “the wall,” are in many countries closely connected to the hegemonic agents in the field – think of trade association accreditation for British programs or the industry funding that supports many programs around the world one way or another. Engagement with

commercial considerations were considered to jeopardize professional standards and autonomy, threatening what Bourdieu would term the symbolic capital of the journalist.

Over the past decade, however, a growing number of observers have proposed that journalism schools should be preparing their students to be entrepreneurs. Studies in this vein argue that students should be more familiar with business aspects of the news industry, for instance involving audience research and marketing (Quinn, 2010), and able to detect opportunities for innovation. A grounding in such entrepreneurial perspectives would provide students with “the knowledge and skill sets to create their own jobs” (Ferrier, 2013: 229). Baines and Kennedy (2010: 97) agreed that students should be empowered to become “entrepreneurial self-employed agents, who might compete with, as well as service, other media organizations,” increasingly important in a precarious work environment. Mensing and Ryfe (2013: 27) similarly argued that entrepreneurial skills would enable journalists to “compete with the core news industry” by inventing “practices that will ultimately replace the news industry we have now.” The future of journalism, they suggested, “will be shaped by entrepreneurs who develop new business models and innovative projects – either working on their own, with startups, or within traditional media companies” (32).

This discourse has been appropriated by journalism schools, Besbris and Petre (2020) argue in a study based on in-depth interviews with journalism educators in the US. Journalism schools now actively promote entrepreneurship as a means to embrace the precarity and professional contingency that characterize the current job market. By “professionalizing contingency,” the authors say, educators not only propose that labor market instability has become the essence of what journalism is but also safeguard their universities’ position as training institutions.

However, when journalists without practical business skills or experience seek to start their own news enterprise, evidence suggests they struggle to make the sound fiscal and management decisions needed to sustain a news operation (Bruno and Nielsen, 2012). Moreover, studies have indicated that not all students have any desire to become entrepreneurs. Goyanes (2015) found that the entrepreneurial intention of Spanish journalism students was very low, although later work shows the economic situation in journalism might be making the idea more palatable (Lopez-Meri et al., 2020). Other research has suggested that student attitudes are predictive: those who are open to new experiences and ideas, and have an extravert personality, are more likely to start their own business. On the other hand, emotional instability and low resilience reduce entrepreneurial intention (Buschow and Laugemann, 2020). A study by Alborno and Amorós (2016) found that only classes that are attended voluntarily have a positive impact.

In comparison to the perceived dangers of entrepreneurialism, innovation has received a far better press among students and scholars (Vos and Singer, 2016). As suggested above, field theory offers an explanation why: start-ups are located at the heterogeneous pole, often regarded as outside attempts to challenge the field’s status quo. Innovation, on the contrary, is usually located at the autonomous pole, attempting to improve the creative and economic strength of journalism within existing institutions, structures, and doxa. Indeed, it has been depicted as “key to the viability of news media in the digital age” (Pavlik 2013, 181). Organisations that fail to innovate are seen as mired in institutional stasis (Lowrey, 2011), and traditional entities have sought to boost their value by framing themselves as innovation champions (Lewis, 2012).

There is considerable scholarly disagreement about what constitutes innovation in journalism. García-Avilés and his colleagues (2018) distinguish among studies talking about products, production and distribution processes, organization, and marketing. Within these broad domains, scholars have focused on how citizens can be involved in making and selecting news (Ahva, 2017; Lewis, 2012; Raetzsch, 2015), on journalistic business models

(Günzel and Holm, 2013; Nel, 2010), and on workforces and occupational networks (Hatcher and Thayer, 2017; Hellmueller, Cheema and Zhang, 2017). Other work has focused on new approaches to journalism such as constructive journalism (Mast, Coesemans and Temmerman, 2019) or solutions journalism (McIntyre, 2017).

That said, a large body of journalism research has viewed technology as the main driver of innovation in the profession (Evans, 2018), exploring how the emergence and evolution of digital tools have changed journalistic products and practices. These studies have presented the introduction of new technological assets by journalists and news organizations not just as inevitable but also as a main reason why innovation succeeds (Steensen, 2011). While some scholars have raised concerns about such a “celebratory focus” on technology and its role in downplaying normative concerns about journalism’s democratic function (Creech and Nadler, 2018: 182), most have emphasized technology as change-maker for the news industry in general and journalism practice in particular (Prenger and Deuze, 2017). Indeed, technical experimentation has been positioned as central to occupational innovation (Kreiss and Brennen, 2016).

## Method

This exploratory study aims to understand how people preparing to enter news work weigh the necessity of journalistic innovation and entrepreneurialism, as well as how they assess their own role in instigating either form of change. We thus analyze how they position themselves discursively within the journalistic field against the backdrop of its dominant *doxa* and *habitus*. Our overall research question asks whether journalism students perceive themselves as change agents who will be challenging and potentially shifting the boundaries of journalism, or whether they adhere to traditional ideas about norms and behaviors that have been ingrained as part of the journalistic *doxa*. We also ask if any cross-national differences are apparent between Dutch and British students.

### *Cases, Population, and Sample*

This study is based on questionnaire data from three consecutive academic years, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018. We surveyed all students enrolled in the journalism programs at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands and City, University of London, in the United Kingdom – both leaders in their respective countries. In addition to our own previous work on this topic (Singer and Broersma, 2020), the two nations have featured in other cross-national explorations of journalistic products and cultures (Akkerman, 2011; Bakker and Paterson, 2011; Deuze, 2002; Porlezza and Splendore, 2016). Both are high on the Global Entrepreneurship Index (2018), which ranks entrepreneurial ecosystems in 137 countries. They also both have a large proportion of self-employed media workers. In the UK, 40 percent of people self-identifying as journalists work as freelancers (Ponsford, 2017), while about a third of all Dutch journalists do freelance or other work that merges personal and professional spaces and times (Kivits, 2015);. Those numbers likely have been boosted by the Covid-19 crisis, which has increased the difficulty of obtaining and retaining journalistic employment.

In Britain, despite economic concerns and deteriorating working conditions, most journalists have expressed satisfaction with their jobs. They believe that “reporting things as they are” is their most important role, but also set great store by educating the audience. However, role perceptions seem to be shifting, with journalism students ascribing less importance than older British journalists to adversarial or watchdog roles (Sanders and Hanna, 2012). In recent years, journalists in the UK have noted growing pressures on their work, including from advertising and PR; they report longer working hours and an increased

emphasis on enabling their employer to turn a profit (Thurman, 2016; Thurman and Kunert, 2016).

Similarly, Dutch journalists have seen their most essential role by far as being “to report things as they are.” They consider investigating government claims less important and attach more weight to making complex information accessible, providing interpretation and analysis, and signaling new trends. Dutch journalists primarily see themselves as gatekeepers whose task it is to determine what information citizens actually need and are relatively less concerned with audience demands (Pleijter, Hermans, and Vergeer, 2012). Like their British counterparts, they experience a lack of resources and time pressures, saying they work longer hours yet have less time available to research stories. Although they value their considerable autonomy in writing and reporting the news, a majority also report that market-related influences are on the rise, including pressure from advertisers, more emphasis on making a profit and a trend toward more sensational news (Hermans, 2016).

Within these complementary cultural settings, the journalism programs at City and Groningen universities, where our respondents were enrolled, are broadly comparable but do exhibit some structural differences. Journalism is taught at both the BA and MA levels in the UK, but at only the MA level in the Netherlands. This disparity is reflected in enrollment numbers and therefore in the size of the census drawn for this study. The Dutch cohort consisted of a total of 45 MA students in 2015-16, 42 MA students in 2016-17, and 32 MA students in 2017-2018. A total of 506 BA and MA journalism students were enrolled at the British institution in 2015-16, 601 in 2016-17, and 526 in 2017-2018.

At Groningen, responses were received from 12 MA students enrolled in 2015-16 (26.7%), 20 in 2016-17 (47.6%), and 6 (19%) in 2017-18. At City, responses were received from 78 students enrolled in 2015-16 (15.4%), 91 in 2016-17 (15.1%), and 58 in 2017-18 (11%). Online surveys typically obtain a low rate of completion relative to paper ones in an educational environment (Nulty, 2008).

All six sets of respondents had a nearly identical average age, between 22 and 24. The UK students were more likely than their Dutch counterparts to have had prior journalism work experience, especially in full-time roles. Only 27 students (13.4% of the total answering the question) held a previous degree in journalism; the vast majority of the MA students at both institutions had undergraduate degrees in other fields. While most respondents were European – 89.5% of the students enrolled in the Dutch program, and 78.3% of those in the British one – every continent was represented in our sample. Although not all were studying in their home country, students are identified below as “British” or “Dutch” for convenience.

### *Research Design*

The questionnaires were created in SurveyMonkey and distributed to students early in the first term, ahead of any instruction on the topic of interest. No in-class activities were connected to the questionnaires. To avoid translation issues, the questions were in English and were identical for both institutions. In accordance with both universities’ ethical guidelines for human subjects research, confidentiality of all respondents was guaranteed. It was not known to the researchers which students completed the questionnaire and which did not, to avoid any perception of repercussions in relation to program expectations or assessments. It therefore was not possible to compare respondents with non-respondents.

The questionnaire contained a series of 5-point Likert-scale questions, asking respondents to agree or disagree with statements provided; for clarity in reporting, “agree” and “strongly agree” responses have been combined here. The 2015 questionnaire contained 12 such questions. In 2016, seven new questions were added in order to further explore issues suggested by the literature and by findings from the previous year; one further question about the perceived future for journalism was added in 2017. The concepts of, and context

surrounding, both “innovation” and “entrepreneurship” are of course rapidly evolving; however, we structured our closed-ended questions to reflect concepts identified in the literature and the trade press discourse at the time of each wave of the study. Additional questions covered demographics, education, and previous journalism experience.

We used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative data. Although necessarily limiting the scope of the analysis, descriptive statistics are appropriate given the use of a census or non-random respondent population; the different sizes of the two programs and therefore of the potential respondent pool; and the relatively small number of completed surveys from each set of students. Results therefore are indicative but not generalizable.

In addition, respondents each year were asked to list three words or phrases that they associated with the term “journalism innovation” and three that they associated with the term “entrepreneurial journalism.” The responses to these open-ended questions were subjected to a textual analysis that identified discursive clusters, with close attention to widespread use of particular terms and metaphors (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Singer and Broersma, 2020). Taken together, the closed- and open-ended questionnaire items reflect the application of both inductive and deductive approaches to addressing our research question.

## Results

Journalism students in our study firmly believed that the field is in flux. More than 90% of respondents in all years agreed that “journalism today is different from journalism a decade ago.” Large majorities also agreed that continuous change is a prerequisite for journalism to remain relevant in society (see Table 1).

[Include Table 1 here]

These indications of shared awareness that change is an inherent and necessary force within the journalist field are supported by answers to the open-ended questions asking students to provide three words or phrases that they associated with “journalism innovation” and three associated with “entrepreneurial journalism.” Terms referencing something “new” or “novel” appeared 70 times in our data set, almost equally divided across both topics. “Change” also appeared on both lists, 26 times in all, while “innovation” was rhetorically linked with entrepreneurial journalism 34 times (see Table 2).

[Insert Table 2 here]

However, relatively few students saw themselves as the agents of this change. A large majority of Dutch students did not anticipate being a journalism innovator – and the percentage who believed they will fill this role decreased steadily over our longitudinal study, from 58.3% in 2015 to 30% in 2016 to only 16.7% in 2017. British students were more sold on the idea of acting as change agents within the field, with a sizable majority agreeing each year. However, asked whether they would rather work for a legacy media organization than for a digital-only one, both sets of students were less enterprising. Only 15% of the Dutch students in 2016 and 33% in 2017 preferred a digital-only outlet, as did 26.7% and 22.4% of the British students in the same years. A large majority preferred working for a newspaper or broadcaster, or expressed neutrality on the issue.

As described above, change is a force that mainly impacts journalism from the outside, located at the heterogeneous pole of the field. Our student respondents reflected this sense of externality in the overwhelming dominance of terms related to technological change in their open-ended responses. Four of the top five categories encompassing the most

frequently offered terms, particularly for “innovation” but also for entrepreneurship, referenced the prominence of technology in students’ perceptions. Social media (mentioned 93 times), online and the Internet (93), technology (85) and digital (61) were among the most frequently offered terms, as table 2 indicates.

This understanding is reflected in the way journalism students interpreted transformations in the field: related much more to digital technology than to anything that would fundamentally alter the underlying doxa. Students almost unanimously agreed with the necessity of being able to handle the latest digital tools, as shown in Table 3. But by overwhelming majorities, in both countries and in all years, they also saw traditional reporting, writing, and editing skills as essential to thriving in the journalistic field. They also subscribed to long-standing norms, with Dutch students slightly more willing to venture beyond the dominant doxa.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Journalism students also strongly supported traditional journalistic norms that align with autonomy and independence. Large majorities, particularly among the British cohort and somewhat at odds with some earlier findings (Sanders and Hanna, 2012), agreed that “journalism should be about holding those with power to account” and that “journalism should contribute to positive change in society.” These responses provide even stronger evidence of the extent to which these students have incorporated the hegemonic doxa within the journalistic field in thinking about the occupation they are preparing to enter. They feel that journalistic norms closely related to the autonomous pole of the field are still crucial to obtaining symbolic capital (see Table 4).

[Insert table 4 here]

Being an entrepreneur did not sound like an appealing option to most students, either. Around 40% of the Dutch and British students in the first two waves expected at some point in their career to start their own business, but that number dropped in 2017 to 31% of the British and 16.7% of the Dutch students. However, students were still quite open-minded about the business side of journalism at the heterogeneous pole of the field. Most cohorts agreed with the statement that “journalists need to understand basic business principles,” although Dutch students were more ambivalent than their UK counterparts, with only 45% of the Dutch cohort in 2016 and 50% in 2017 in agreement (see Table 5).

Although they were dubious about becoming journalism entrepreneurs, students generally embraced statements that position journalism as concerned with audiences, competitors, and economics – three core components of a business enterprise. More than 95% of the UK respondents in all years, and more than 80% of the Dutch respondents, agreed that “journalists need to be knowledgeable about their audiences.” Large majorities in all cohorts also agreed that “journalism must find an audience in order to be valuable.” British students were especially likely to agree with the need for journalists to know about their competitors.

[Insert Table 5 here]

Students were more likely to locate entrepreneurialism than innovation at the heterogeneous pole of the field – and in many cases even outside it. In response to the open-ended questions, business was almost exclusively related to entrepreneurial journalism (mentioned 54 times, compared with just five times for innovation). A similar trend appeared with mentions of start-ups (26 versus three times) and money (28 times, only related to

entrepreneurialism). Students conflated entrepreneurialism with freelancing, as well; of the 36 mentions of freelance work, only five (all from UK students) were connected with “journalism innovation” (see Table 2).

More generally, students in all years and both countries communicated normative concerns about entrepreneurial journalism in particular. In addition to terms such as “risk” and “risky,” their proffered terms indicated a range of perceived dangers, from bias to a lack of plurality to “compromised” to clickbaiting. While some students did acknowledge the creative potential of entrepreneurialism, or simply called it “fun” or “interesting,” those who found it distasteful were crystal clear in expressing their dislike, supplying such disparaging terms as “being a sleaze” and “advertising slave.”

## Discussion

Although position-taking is at the core of structural relations within the journalistic field, it is even more important for new entrants. Journalism students anticipating a career in the news industry have ample opportunity to gain power within the field, whether by starting their own business, working with a start-up, or presenting themselves as innovators in legacy news organizations. These strategies to distinguish themselves become increasingly important in a precarious and crowded job market where almost all entrants have the necessary digital skills. Moreover, many established agents in the field expect new hires to bring something distinctive to the table. To gain capital, they often are expected to be “change agents” – not always in the sense of being disruptors, but at least in terms of contributing to positive change that can help improve the odds of sustainability for the news company.

In other words, employers increasingly hope that journalism students will have “the right mindset” for change. Journalism schools anticipate these demands, and growing numbers are trying to prepare students for self-employment as freelancers or entrepreneurs in a contingent profession. In this study, we asked if journalism students do perceive themselves as change agents who will be challenging and potentially shifting the boundaries of journalism, or whether they adhere to traditional ideas about norms and behaviors that have been ingrained in the journalistic *doxa*. In line with previous research (Goyanes, 2015), attitudes of the students indicate the latter. Although they are very aware of the necessity for change in journalism, they see that change largely in terms of applying (existing) digital technologies within the existing *doxa* of the field. They do not generally perceive themselves as actually becoming disruptive innovators, and they feel even less inclined toward journalistic entrepreneurship.

Students thus interpret change merely as something that takes place at the heterogeneous pole of the field: an outside force mainly in the form of technological change. While they consider it important to be skilled and knowledgeable about new tools, those tools are seen as being applied to and absorbed within the traditional confines of the journalism field. Students have adopted long-standing occupational discourse around practices (reporting, writing, editing, and general “storytelling”) and normative roles (adhering to traditional ethical principles, holding those with power to account, and contributing to positive social change).

Entrepreneurship is also mainly associated with heterogeneity. Although students do believe they should know about issues that are important for the economic survival of journalism, such as business principles, audience demands, and competition, they are largely suspicious of commercial influences on journalism. While they may mentally try to align business imperatives with the dominant *doxa*, they do not see themselves as active change agents in bringing these ideas to the fore.

According to students, capital within the journalistic field is most likely to be obtained at the autonomous pole. In line with other scholars (Lewis, 2012; Lowrey, 2011; Pavlik, 2013), our study suggests that innovation generates more positive sentiments than entrepreneurial journalism. While the first seems mostly to be associated with incremental progress within the boundaries of the field, the latter connotes disruption from outside the field. Maybe not surprisingly, given that most were still outsiders at the time of the study, students are not engaging discursively with boundary work. Following the model of Falck and Barnes (1975), our data offer no evidence of deviant behavior in which the doxa would be rejected and attempts made to discursively replace it. Perhaps more surprisingly, Dutch and British students do not exhibit non-normative tendencies, a productive offering of a “third way.” Instead, the great majority express perceptions in line with existing norms, adapting to the dominant doxa and only offering “new” ideas that support it.

We did not find major differences between students studying journalism in the UK and in the Netherlands, suggesting widely shared acceptance of the dominant doxa, especially given the international nature of both cohorts. However, we need to be cautious about any claims of generalizability since an important limitation of our study is that we surveyed students in only two countries and at two universities – ones that in fact pay considerable attention to journalistic innovation and entrepreneurial journalism. Although students had not yet been exposed to classes covering these topics when they completed the survey, their decision to enroll in one of these programs might still have been influenced by the inclusion of these topics in the curriculum, thus biasing our results. The relatively low response rates are another limitation; an expanded data set would enhance our findings now that entrepreneurialism is gaining a foothold in journalism curricula around the world (Baines and Kennedy, 2010; Besbris and Petre, 2020; Ferrier, 2013). Moreover, it would be useful to add more characteristics of the doxa to future survey questions, and follow-up interviews would add nuance to our findings.

Nonetheless, we believe our study sheds light on how journalists at the start of their professional career anticipate change in the profession. Their perceptions seem to be in contrast with dominant discourses among employers who voice expectations of new hires contributing to change in the news organization. Our findings also have implications for journalism education. In the past decade, journalism schools have increasingly offered substantive training in concrete aspects of journalism, such as digital skills (Creech and Mendelson, 2015). However, one consequence might be that students perceive both innovation and entrepreneurialism as telling journalistic stories with new tools. If journalism schools want to meet industry demands for real change agents who can help news outlets respond to the fundamental disruptions ahead, or truly want to prepare students for self-employment and entrepreneurship, additional change needs to come.

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**Table 1.**  
**Journalism is changing ... but innovation may not include me**

<b>Journalism today is different from journalism a decade ago.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
54 (93.1%)	6 (100%)	85 (93.4%)	19 (19.5%)	76 (97.4%)	11 (91.7%)
<b>Journalism needs to continually change in order to remain relevant as society changes.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
50 (86.2%)	4 (66.7%)	84 (92.3%)	19 (95%)	74 (94.9%)	10 (83.3%)
<b>I anticipate being a journalism innovator during my career.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
37 (63.8%)	1 (16.7%)	53 (58.9%)	6 (30.0%)	50 (64.5%)	87 (58.3%)

**Table 2.**  
**Terms used at least 10 times or more to describe “journalism innovation”**  
**and / or “entrepreneurial journalism” \***

	Used to describe journalism innovation	Used to describe entrepreneurial journalism	Total unique times used
Social / social media / social networks	83 (N, UK) **	10 (UK)	93
Online / Internet	76 (N, UK)	17 (N, UK)	93
Technology	65 (N, UK)	20 (UK)	85
New / novel	36 (N, UK)	34 (N, UK)	70
Digital	52 (N, UK)	9 (N, UK)	61
Business	5 (N, UK)	54 (N, UK)	59
Freelance / freelancer / freelancing	5 (UK)	31 (N, UK)	36
Innovation / innovative	-	34 (N, UK)	34
Independent / independence	7 (UK)	25 (N, UK)	32
Start-up	3 (N, UK)	26 (N, UK)	29
Money	-	28 (N, UK)	28
Multimedia	24 (N, UK)	3 (UK)	27
Change	18 (N, UK)	8 (N, UK)	26
Interactive / interactivity / interaction	24 (N, UK)	1 (UK)	25
Creativity / creating / creator / creation	10 (UK)	14 (N, UK)	24
Blogs / blogging	5 (N, UK)	9 (N, UK)	14
Adaptability / adaptation	8 (UK)	5 (N, UK)	13
Citizen / citizen journalism	11 (N, UK)	-	11

\* Similar words (“freelance” / “freelancer” or “digital” / “digitization”) are counted as one term. Words used in combination but expressing related concepts also are clustered together. For example, “business” includes the word by itself plus “build a new business,” and “business plan,” among similar terms.

\*\* The number of times the term appeared in our data set across all years is provided. “N” and “UK” indicate whether the term was used by students from the Netherlands (total n = 38) and / or the United Kingdom (total n = 226), respectively.

**Table 3**  
**Digital tools are important, but I still need traditional skills and ethical principles**

<b>Journalists need to know how to use digital technology</b>					
City 2017	Groningen 2017	City 2016	Groningen 2016	City 2015	Groningen 2015
56 (96.6%)	6 (100%)	85 (93.4%)	19 (95.0%)	78 (100%)	12 (100%)
<b>Traditional reporting, writing and editing skills are essential for journalists today.</b>					
City 2017	Groningen 2017	City 2016	Groningen 2016	City 2015	Groningen 2015
55 (94.8%)	5 (83.3%)	84 (92.3%)	19 (95.0%)	74 (94.9%)	10 (83.3%)
<b>Adherence to traditional ethical principles is essential for journalists today.</b>					
City 2017	Groningen 2017	City 2016	Groningen 2016	City 2015	Groningen 2015
48 (82.8%)	4 (66.7%)	78 (85.7%)	14 (70.0%)	74 (94.9%)	10 (83.3%)

**Table 4.**  
**Traditional normative understands of journalist's social role still work for me**

<b>Journalism should be about holding those with power to account.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
45 (77.6%)	6 (100%)	81 (89.0%)	12 (60.0%)	(not asked)	(not asked)
<b>Journalism should contribute to positive change in society.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
51 (87.9%)	4 (66.7%)	80 (87.9%)	14 (70.0%)	(not asked)	(not asked)

**Table 5.**  
**Attention to journalism as a business is important ... but I won't be an entrepreneur**

<b>Journalists need to understand basic business principles.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
42 (72.4%)	3 (50.0%)	66 (72.5%)	9 (45.0%)	63 (80.8%)	8 (66.7%)
<b>Journalists need to remain uninvolved with matters related to generating revenue.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
15 (25.9%)	1 (16.7%)	36 (39.6%)	1 (5.0%)	29 (37.3%)	1 (8.3%)
<b>Outside funding sources ... will be increasingly important to journalism.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
43 (74.1%)	5 (83.3%)	63 (69.2%)	15 (75.0%)	(not asked)	(not asked)
<b>Journalism must find an audience in order to be valuable.</b>					
<b>City 2017</b>	<b>Groningen 2017</b>	<b>City 2016</b>	<b>Groningen 2016</b>	<b>City 2015</b>	<b>Groningen 2015</b>
43 (74.1%)	6 (100%)	75 (82.4%)	13 (65.0%)	(not asked)	(not asked)