

## Editor's Introduction: Innovations in the newsroom – and beyond

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On behalf of our authors, reviewers, and the Editorial Team of *The Journal of Media Innovations*, we welcome you to our second issue.

Our first four articles are devoted to matters of innovation in the newsroom. These are followed by a general article on social media and political communication, one that offers a number of important and perhaps surprising findings. More broadly – and perhaps also surprisingly – a common thread turns through all five articles: the primary brakes on media innovation, for better and for worse, are incorrigibly systemic. That is, they are rooted in various dimensions, including established practices and preferred work patterns, of the organizations and media sectors that may otherwise most loudly call for and genuinely need innovation. A second theme shared between two of the articles (Oscar Westlund and Seth Lewis, and Gunnar Nygren) concerns how far media innovations foster and/or hinder *autonomy* – whether consumer autonomy (Westlund & Lewis) or the autonomy of journalists (Nygren). As I will point out below, both of these thematic emerged in our Inaugural Issue as well – suggesting that these are important thematic indeed for both scholars and practitioners interested in media innovations.

Finally, our issue closes with two very helpful book reviews of significant 2014 publications.

### **Innovation in the Newsroom**

We begin with the more theoretical and move more and more towards the practical and the empirical. In their “Agents of Media Innovations: Actors, Actants, and Audiences,” Oscar Westlund and Seth Lewis take up a holistic approach – explicitly following the advice and example of Axel Bruns in his opening article for our Inaugural Issue (2014). Westlund and Lewis draw particularly on Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Social Construction of Technology Theory (SCOT) to help us break out of more prevailing theoretical boxes. In doing so, they specifically identify the need for better theory and conceptualization of “the agents of media innovations in order to understand and improve [the] activities of media innovations.” The resulting “Agents of Media Innovations” (AMI) model thereby helps bring to the foreground especially two categories of active participants implicated in the processes of media innovations that are otherwise downplayed or even ignored in some previous discussions – namely: (1) actants – i.e., the technologically-based agents such as APIs, web analytic engines, various algorithms, etc.; and (2) audiences whose responses and often highly interactive engagements with and shaping of especially newer forms of digital media are thus increasingly important to the construction and ultimate success and/or failure of media innovations created initially by editors, journalists, and technologists.

This approach thus brings to the foreground a particularly critical question for those who pursue media innovations especially by drawing on innovations and developments within ICT industries. On the one hand, as we saw in our Inaugural Issue, ICT developments and innovation tend to drive change and innovation in the media industries (so Bleyen, Lindmark, Ranaivoson and Ballon 2014; Dogruel 2014; Bierhoff and Kruitwagen 2014; cf. Ess 2014a, p. 4). At the same time, however, this points to the central question raised here by Westlund and Lewis: “... to what extent are new combinations of market principles – the business logic (Hamilton, 2004) – and technologist-driven cultures, norms, and practices – the technology logic (Lewis & Usher, 2013) – working to shape the editorial logic of news organizations and its subsequent incorporation of native advertising, branded content, and related experiments in business, technology, and news?” (2014, p. 20). This question is especially salient, as both scholars and society at large become increasingly aware, for example, of the role of innumerable algorithms in both making our lives more convenient – and, it is noted, more homogenous. For example, as algorithmic recommender systems help us “choose” our next musical selection or movie through a streaming service such as Spotify or Netflix – in both cases, as based on increasingly sophisticated systems that analyze both our own previous choices and those affiliated with us throughout our various networks – the upshot in the long run may be *less* choice and diversity in both the production and consumption of such cultural products (e.g., Barile & Sugiyama, forthcoming; Sørheim, 2014). The irony would then be that ostensibly innovative technologies would end up restricting the range of audience choice – and where audiences are understood as key components of

media innovations processes, this could threaten to become a vicious circle that steadily reduces rather than enhances such innovation.

We will see a similar concern raised in the last article in this section – namely Gunnar Nygren’s findings that journalists’ increasingly reliance on social media may lead to an increasing *homogenization* of journalism, even while in other ways digital media more broadly may entail greater autonomy and creativity for journalists. These findings and tensions can be helpfully compared with what emerged as a prominent “red thread” in our Inaugural Issue – namely, just the question as to how far new media technologies and innovations may foster and/or frustrate *autonomy* (Bruns 2014; Jennes, Pierson and Van den Broeck 2014; Nyre 2014).

Our second article narrows our attention somewhat to a critical component of the *interdisciplinary* approaches that are more or less universally recognized as essential to media innovations – namely, specific forms of *cooperation* between the multiple constituents required for such innovation processes. So Gerard Smit, Yael de Haan, and Laura Buijs identify four types of such cooperation in their “Working with or next to each other? Boundary crossing in the field of information visualization,” namely: enforced, dominated, fractionated, and attuned. Drawing on both case studies and expert interviews in the field of information visualization, they find that any of these forms may be successful in media production processes – but that two particular sorts of *trading zones* (either internal or external) are critical to such success. Such trading zones allow collaborators to successfully recognize one another’s expertise and thereby to more effectively coordinate their respective tasks. While such recognition, as they note in closing, may be “self-evident in theory” – their case studies, however, make it clear that this recognition is “not common in daily practice” (2014, p. 50). Consistent with one of the central lessons drawn from our Inaugural Issue, we often find that the enemy of media innovations is ... us, meaning the professionals from various backgrounds and experiences who have difficulty in understanding and respecting the viewpoints and capacities of their colleagues from different professional domains. This sort of professional insularity is, of course, by no means restricted to media industries (cf. Ess 2014b): on the contrary, such insularity seems part and parcel of a larger human condition – our very strong tendency to prefer what we know most intimately from our own experience, and to regard with some suspicion, if not simple contempt (or worse), that which and/or those who are different. But however common and in that way understandable – such insularity (along with its larger versions in the form of provincialism, ethnocentrism and so on) would appear to inevitably block the sorts of cooperation demonstrated here to be critical to innovation processes.

Smit and his colleagues thus provide us with critically important *practical* guidelines for undertaking the challenging but essential work of interdisciplinary collaboration. Their insights resonate with and are further complimented by the empirical findings reported by Oscar Westlund and Arne Krumsvik in their “Perceptions of Intra-Organizational Collaboration and Media Workers’ Interests

in Media Innovations.” Westlund and Krumsvik report on their quantitative study of newspaper executives’ perceptions of (a) interest in digital media innovation across the diverse sectors of their organization, and (b) how far – if at all – collaboration across these sectors (editorial, business, and IT departments) has increased.

The findings are disappointing for those who hoped that digital technologies would somehow enhance our capacities for collaboration. At least, the general finding is that various efforts to enhance collaboration via digital media have not in fact resulted in any increased cooperation. Rather, it appears that colleagues within the business and editorial sectors are *less* interested in digital innovation work in comparison with those in the IT department. This finding is of interest for its own sake – first of all as it highlights what appears to be an important *block* to media innovation and efficiency of change within legacy news organizations, specifically newspapers. Moreover, these findings thereby resonate with and illuminate the various barriers to cooperation elaborated by Smit and his colleagues. Finally, these two articles taken together thereby add to and reinforce the findings noted in our Inaugural Issue (Bleyen et al 2014; Dogruel 2014; Bierhoff and Kruitwagen 2014) – namely, that media innovation is more generally led from the IT sector rather than from within media-specific sectors.

Fortunately, we are able to close with a somewhat more positive set of insights, as offered up in Gunnar Nygren’s “Multiskilling in the newsroom: De-skilling or re-skilling of journalistic work?” As his title suggests, Nygren wishes to empirically address the so-called “de-skilling hypothesis.” This hypothesis observes that with increasing usages of digital media in the production and distribution of news – journalists are pushed in multiple ways into “multi-skilling”: they must become adept with not “just” collecting information for the sake of producing clear, cogent, fair and accurate text – but they increasingly take on more and more of what used to be separate roles, such as photography and then (to some degree) editing and distribution (e.g., through social media of various sorts). The de-skilling hypothesis argues that this multi-skilling thereby entails a *loss* of skill *within* what were once distinct roles and specified forms of labor (“Taylorism,” as Nygren notes). (For readers who want to pursue these matters in greater detail, it is important to note that this push towards multi-skilling includes a push towards greater collaboration and cooperation between what were once more separate spheres in the journalistic process – i.e., the collaboration found to be difficult to achieve for reasons elaborated by Smit et al.) Against this view, more positive takes on such multi-skilling have emerged, including claims and observations that multi-skilled journalists may enjoy greater degrees of freedom and creativity in their work.

To determine how far either set of claims may be true, Nygren and his colleagues surveyed and interviewed some 1500 journalists in Sweden, Poland and Russia. Happily, they found that among journalists who describe themselves as multi-skilled, a large number agree that such multi-skilling provides them greater autonomy and creative opportunity. Less happily, however, their findings

show a strong (but perhaps not surprising) gap between the views and experiences of such multi-skilled journalists and those of their older colleagues – most especially between those affiliated with the shrinking “print culture” of the traditional newspaper and the “cross-platform productive cultures” of TV and radio in which multiskilling is now the norm.

As Nygren notes in closing, however, there is a further dark side to contemporary multi-skilling practices. As fewer journalists get out to undertake “shoe-leather” reporting, and more and more spend their time behind computer screens monitoring news wires and social media – the upshot, as Nygren puts it, is “a process of homogenization.” Such homogenization recalls similar concerns we saw raised above by Westlund and Lewis – and again, intersects with larger concerns with how far new media more generally foster and/or hinder human autonomy, whether as consumers of news and/or journalists.

### General article

Sandrine Roginsky’s “Social network sites: an innovative form of political communication? A socio-technical approach to media innovation” takes up the critically important topic of how politicians use – or seek to use – social media as an ostensibly innovative form of media communication. Roginsky’s analysis is compelling first of all as an ethnographic and empirical analysis of how Members of the European Parliament and their staff utilize social media. And her findings are striking. To begin with, Roginsky documents in fine detail the broader pattern of how social media foster a convergence between media and political communication: as politicians become increasingly savvy users of social media networks, they are increasingly embedded in these networks so as to “essentially become media themselves” (2014, pp. 110f.). Moreover, *contra* the technological determinism that underlies what she characterizes as “celebratory accounts” of social media that claim that it is these *media* that are innovative – Roginsky documents how these users of the media bring about changes in the technologies themselves. In doing so, she underlines the social constructivist approach to technology (SCOT) that we’ve seen in Westlund and Lewis. At the same time, this contributes to Roginsky’s broader point: innovation here “takes place at the level of practices” (2014, p. 119) – a point emphasized in Axel Bruns’ opening article in our Inaugural Issue and one reiterated in a number of ways there (Bruns 2014; Ess 2014a, p. 4.) This further means, however, that any simple distinction between “old” and “new media” – especially as underlying the more celebratory accounts of “new” media as somehow dramatically transforming, if not simply eliminating, earlier practices – does not hold up in practice. Rather, Roginsky finds that “Social media technology is ... integrated into a more traditional global media system and generates new routines and innovative usages in political communication that are built upon interaction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media” (2014, p. 115).

Finally, Roginsky's analysis also reiterates the point now well documented in both issues of *JMI*: namely, that whatever celebratory language we may hear regarding the importance of media innovation – it is often the extant structures and practices within a given organization that somehow brake such innovation. Roginsky points out that this is not news: Norbert Alter already described in 2000 the “confrontation between innovation and organization: organizations crystallize social configurations that go against innovation” (Roginsky, 2014, p. 117). By the same token, Leyla Dogruel identified multiple ways in which media innovations depend on older media (2014; cf. Bruns 2014) – a dependency that can, worst-case, amount to the “suppression of radical potential” (so Winston 1998, cited in Nyre 2014, 105).

### **Book reviews**

This issue features two book reviews, the first of *Audience Research Methodologies*, edited by Geoffroy Patriarche, Helena Bilandzic, Jacob Linaa Jensen and Jelena Jurišić (Routledge, 2014), and the second of Nikki Usher's *Inside Innovation at the New York Times* (University of Michigan Press, 2014).

### **Future issues**

We would like to remind readers that the submission deadline for Volume 2, issue 1 is coming up soon – September 30, 2014. This next issue will also include a number of papers originally presented at the third annual *Symposium on Media Innovations* (ISMI'14), held in Oslo, April 24-25, 2014. (Still more details regarding our subsequent publication schedule can be found on the *Journal* website, under “Announcements.”)

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judgments regarding the thorny questions of what can be fairly published in the form of social media screenshots (see Roginsky, this issue).

Many additional thanks to Arne Krumsvik for his on-going work as Book Review Editor, and to Anders Fagerjord for his work as Layout Editor.

Finally, this issue marks a shift in Editorial Assistants, first by bringing to a close the extraordinary contributions of Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk. Karoline has played a central role in the development and realization of the *Journal* since its inception. She has now completed her PhD and, even better, found a desired and desirable position elsewhere. Happily, Anders Olof Larsson has ably taken up the position of Editorial Assistant. We warmly welcome Anders to our Editorial Staff and very much look forward to his collaboration and contributions to the *Journal*.

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