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In their own words: A normative-empirical approach to journalistic roles around the world

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Abstract

Based on qualitative responses from journalists working in 67 countries, this article presents evidence from a comparative assessment of normative journalistic roles. Different from other types of journalistic roles, normative roles refer to professional aspirations as to how journalism and journalists are supposed to contribute to society. While these roles are typically studied through standardized sets of statements, this study builds on journalists' own assessments of what should be the most important roles of journalism in their societies. The material for this analysis was obtained from the 2012–2016 wave of the *Worlds of Journalism Study*. Responses of 20,638 journalists from around the world yielded 45,046 references to journalistic roles. Results show that journalists still see their normative roles primarily in the political arena – a finding that is consistent across the countries investigated. In non-Western countries, journalists articulated a normative demand for intervention in social processes and a more constructive attitude toward ruling powers. Overall, our analysis demonstrates that the normative core of journalism around the world is still invariably built on the

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news media's contribution to political processes and conversations, while other areas, such as the management of self and everyday life, remain marginalized.

Keywords
Comparative study, inductive methodology, journalism cultures, journalistic roles, normative theory

The study of journalistic roles has long been a dominant theme in journalism and mass communication research. In professional and public conversations, the discourse of journalistic roles has become a central arena where the legitimacy and identity of journalism is reproduced, contested, and negotiated (Carlson, 2016; Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). It is the place where actors – journalists and their stakeholders – struggle over the preservation or transformation of journalism as a social institution. Hence, investigations into the roles of journalists are key to a refined understanding of journalism's place in society. This is even more important at a time when journalism's social legitimacy and epistemic authority are being existentially questioned in a number of contexts.

Classic approaches have connected journalists' roles to ideas of surveillance, correlation, transmission, and entertainment (Lasswell, 1948; Wright, 1960). These concepts continue to form the normative backbone of professional consciousness and public conversations about journalism's contribution to society (Christians et al., 2009). The empirical-analytical tradition of studying journalistic roles has followed similar directions. A substantive stream of studies has identified a large and growing number of roles, starting with Cohen's (1963) early distinction between 'neutral' and 'participant' roles as well as Weaver and Wilhoit's (1986, 1996) influential classification of disseminator, interpreter, adversarial, and populist mobilizer roles.

A close inspection of the wealthy literature in this area allows us to identify a number of important shortcomings: First, journalistic roles have primarily been investigated by Western researchers in Western societies, with a number of notable exceptions (see below). As a consequence, much of the literature tends to pin journalism to the idea of democracy, despite the fact that journalism – as an institution, and practice – obviously exists beyond democratic lands. Zelizer (2013) argues that the centrality of democracy in journalism research has produced 'undemocratic journalism scholarship' in which variants of forms of journalism most germane to the core of democratic theory have been privileged over those that are not (p. 469).

Second, journalism scholarship has, for decades, focused on the roles of journalists in the political context. Other forms of journalism, such as service, sports, or lifestyle news, have been marginalized in scholarly discourse and occasionally discredited as unworthy other. In a world, however, where working on one's identity is increasingly an individual exercise (Bauman, 2000), journalism's contribution to society increasingly extends into the realm of everyday life (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018).

Third, and finally, much of journalism scholarship tries to get hold of journalistic roles through standardized survey measures, many of which date back to Johnstone,

Slawski, and Bowman's (1972) landmark study of journalists in the United States. Survey measures for roles of journalists have been reviewed and appropriated multiple times, and they have proven to be extremely useful in a number of comparative studies (e.g. Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). However, these measures may not fully capture the global panoply of journalistic roles.

This article seeks to close this gap. Through a content analysis of qualitative interview responses of more than 20,000 journalists from 67 countries, we widen the horizon to include a broad array of journalistic voices from all major world regions, including Western and non-Western countries as well as different types of political and media systems.[1] The major advantage of this study over similar undertakings in the past is that we did not confront journalists with ready-made statements but invited them to tell us, in their own words, what they thought the major role of journalists in their countries ought to be.

Understanding normative roles of journalists

By journalistic roles, we refer to particular sets of ideas by which journalists legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful (Hanitzsch, 2007). Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) have identified four different types of journalistic roles: normative, cognitive, practices, and narrated. Normative roles of journalists encompass generalized and aggregate expectations that journalists believe are deemed desirable in society (Donsbach, 2012). They speak to how journalists are expected to meet professional aspirations, cater to public needs, and, in so doing, contribute to society. These norms entail rules and standards that are intuitively understood by journalists as a professional community, and they guide and constrain their practice without the force of laws (Cialdini and Trost, 1998). Normative roles should be distinguished from similar concepts, such as performed or enacted roles of journalists, which may not fully map onto journalistic norms (Mellado, 2015; Tandoc, Hellmueller, and Vos, 2012).

Journalistic roles are discursively constituted; they exist because and as we talk about them (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). Belonging to a wider framework of meaning – of a discourse – roles of journalists set the parameters of what is desirable in the institutional context of journalism. As a structure of meaning, they are subject to discursive (re)creation, (re)interpretation, appropriation, and contestation. At the core of this discourse is journalism's identity and locus in society.

The context-sensitive nature of norms explains why some journalistic roles (e.g. the watchdog role) are more socially desirable in some contexts (e.g. in developed democracies) than in others (e.g. authoritarian regimes). Given that most studies were conducted in the Western world, normative roles of journalists are typically articulated from a point of view of democratic theory. The news media is expected to provide surveillance of and information about potentially relevant events and their contexts; to provide commentary, guidance, and advice; to provide the means for access, expression, and political participation; to contribute to shared consciousness; and to act as critic or watchdog to hold the government to account (Christians et al., 2009).

The Western tradition of studying journalists' normative roles is firmly grounded in the view that democracy fundamentally depends on a free flow of information and a

diversity of viewpoints. Seven decades of studying journalistic roles have produced a remarkable normative consensus about the essential tasks of journalism in society. Christians et al. (2009) have written an excellent summary of the commonly accepted canon of journalistic roles, according to which journalists are charged with acting in four principal roles: the monitorial role is about collecting, publishing, and distributing information; the facilitative role promotes social dialogue and stimulates political participation; the radical role provides a platform for constructive social critique; and the collaborative role calls on journalists to support authorities particularly in times of national emergency. Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), drawing on two large surveys of American journalists, have identified four major roles of journalists that have become extremely influential in the literature: the disseminator, interpreter, adversary, and the populist mobilizer.

These roles, however, have emerged from Western notions of democracy that emphasize individual liberties and freedom. Other societies may prioritize developmental goals and social harmony. In a number of non-Western contexts, for instance, journalists are expected to serve in the capacity of nation builders, partners of the government, and agents of change and empowerment (Pintak, 2014; Romano, 2005). The concept of development journalism, as a normative approach, emphasizes the idea of social responsibility and stresses a model that calls on journalists to act as partners of the government to help it bring about socio-economic development. Several scholars from Asia have linked the role of journalists to the preservation of social harmony and respect for leadership, which urges journalists to restrain from coverage that could potentially disrupt social order (Masterton, 1996; Xu, 2005).

A significant number of comparative studies tried to capture this global variation, and they did so more or less successfully. In two large compilations of survey evidence from around the world, Weaver (1998) as well as Weaver and Willnat (2012) concluded that strong cross-national differences seem to override any universal set of journalistic role conceptions. The *Worlds of Journalism Study* (WJS), drawing on surveys simultaneously conducted in 21 countries, found journalists' involvement in social and political matters to be a major driver of differences in journalistic cultures around the globe (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

In this article, we set out to further develop this work through building on a classification of journalistic roles recently proposed by Hanitzsch and Vos (2018). Integrating existing catalogues of roles, they organized journalists' professional views into two major domains: *political life* and *everyday life*. In the first domain, political life, the social contribution of journalism lies in providing citizens with the information they need to act and participate in political life and, if given a chance, to be free and self-governing. The authors have identified 18 roles that fall onto six elementary functions of journalism, each addressing specific needs of political life:

- The *informational-instructive* function most closely pertains to the idea that citizens need to have the relevant information at hand to act and participate in political life. Central to this function is an understanding of journalism as an exercise of information transmission, information (re-)packaging, and storytelling.

Emblematic of this function are roles such as the disseminator, curator, and storyteller.

- The *analytical-deliberative* dimension pertains to journalistic roles that are politically more active and assertive by making a direct intervention in a political discourse (e.g. by news commentary), by engaging the audience in public conversation, by empowering citizens, or by providing means for political participation (roles: analyst, access provider, and mobilizer).
- The *critical-monitorial* function, lying at the heart of the normative core of journalists' professional imagination in most Western countries, is grounded in the ideal of journalism acting as the 'Fourth Estate', with journalists voicing criticism and holding power to account and, in so doing, creating a critically minded citizenry (roles: monitor, detective, and watchdog).
- The *advocative-radical* function compels journalists to take a stance on political matters and reflect them in their coverage. Journalists of this kind do not consider themselves as 'neutral' and 'objective' observers but as participants in political life who bring a certain ideological bias to bear on their reporting – as adversaries of the powerful or as advocates of particular values and groups (roles: adversary, advocate, and missionary).
- The *developmental-educative* dimension is similar to the advocative-radical function in that it is profoundly interventionist. It compels journalists not to be outside the flow of events but to participate, intervene, get involved, and promote social change. However, the developmental-educative dimension takes this intervention beyond the discursive realm by actively promoting real-world change and by contributing to public education, social harmony, and other goals that journalists share with their audiences (roles: change agent, educator, and mediator).
- The *collaborative-facilitative* function emphasizes an understanding of journalists acting as constructive partners of government and supporting it in its efforts to bring about national development and socio-economic well-being. In such a role, journalists may be defensive of authorities and routinely engage in self -censorship, and they tend to exhibit a paternalistic attitude toward 'the people'. Journalists may be coerced into a collaborative-facilitative attitude but it can also be based on a shared commitment of journalists to goals set by the government (roles: facilitators, collaborators, and mouthpiece).

Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) further suggested another set of journalistic roles serving the public's needs in the domain of everyday life. As traditional social institutions are losing authority in delivering collective normative orientation for individuals in an increasingly multi-optional society, the authors argue, journalism has taken over this role by providing help, advice, and guidance for the management of self and everyday life. Here, journalism's contribution to people's everyday lives falls onto three interrelated spaces: consumption, identity, and emotion:

- The area of *consumption* has gained currency in the news as the media are gradually shifting the focus to matters of everyday life. Journalists increasingly address their audience as consumers, rather than citizens, by featuring various kinds of

products and patterns of leisure-time activities, thus contributing to the construction of consumer lifestyles.

- The area of *identity* becomes relevant for the news media as identities have become a matter of individual choice in modern societies. In many contexts in today's world, identity is not necessarily predetermined by social origin and social background. In other words, individuals are no longer 'born into' their identities but have greater leeway in choosing between options. As a result, establishing ones identity is more than ever an individual exercise.
- Finally, the area of *emotion* in journalism is related to the various ways in which news consumption can be an emotional experience. In this regard, journalists may simply provide entertainment and relaxation, but the news may also contribute to the emotional needs of different sections of the public as a source of positive and negative feelings. News coverage may trigger outrage and anger, on the one hand, and a sense of belonging, shared consciousness, and a positive attitude toward life, on the other.

In these three areas, a journalist can act in seven capacities, or roles – as guide, inspirator, marketer, service provider, friend, connector, and mood manager.

Data corpus and methodology

The results presented here are based on a qualitative analysis of empirical data compiled through the collaborative *WJS* between 2012 and 2016. The survey had carried an open-ended question that asked journalists to state, in their own words, the three most important roles journalists they thought have in their country. Altogether, more than 27,500 journalists had been interviewed in the survey. They came from 67 countries; together these societies cover almost three-quarters of the world's population.

In the majority of countries, the sampling process consisted of two steps. Researchers teams first constructed national samples of news media that reflected the structure of their country's media system. Typically, they used a quota scheme that specified the composition of media outlets and news organizations in the country with respect to indicators such as media channel, content orientation (e.g. 'quality'/broadsheet vs popular/tabloid), audience reach, and primary ownership. Within these categories, investigators then chose news media organizations randomly or systematically.

In the second step, researchers selected journalists from within the sample of news media organizations and content providers. Wherever possible, they chose journalists randomly or systematically from newsrooms. The survey was limited to professional journalists, broadly defined as those who have at least some editorial responsibility for the content they produce. To qualify as a 'journalist', individuals had to earn at least 50 percent of their income from paid labor for news media. In addition, they had to either be involved in producing or editing journalistic content or be in an editorial supervision and coordination position. Journalists from all editorial ranks and all kinds of news beats were considered for the sample.

Given the rather substantive variation in national conditions, research teams needed to exercise a certain degree of flexibility in the application of the methodological

framework. The project consortium has documented methodological variation on its website.[2] The minimal sample size required for each country was calculated based on a maximum margin of error of 5 percent (at a 95% confidence level). With the exception of five cases (Bulgaria, France, Singapore, South Korea, and Turkey), researchers in all countries managed to comply with this condition. More than half the research teams managed to achieve response rates of higher than 50 percent. In about one-fifth of the countries, response rates were lower than 30 percent.

Data for this study were obtained by asking survey respondents to respond to the following question: 'Please tell me, in your own words, what should be the three most important roles of journalists in [country]?' Journalists' responses were recorded verbatim; national research teams translated them into English. Overall, we compiled more than 70,000 entries from 20,638 respondents. Not all journalists responded to the question; some mentioned fewer than three roles, and several named more than three. The resulting data corpus underwent extensive cleaning to eliminate responses that were not related to journalistic roles specifically but to professional standards and practices more broadly, such as 'neutrality', 'impartiality', 'accuracy', 'objectivity', or 'honesty'.

We inductively coded the remaining 45,046 entries into 41 distinct normative roles, following a dictionary informed by both the academic literature and the coding experience itself. It took us several iterations to arrive at a sufficiently consistent way of coding. In the coding process, we (1) listed expressions and terms used most often, (2) inductively grouped coding units that express similar ideas or actions, and (3) extracted a definition for each set of grouped coding units. This strategy is based on progressive coding of vernacular language into more abstract language (Demazière and Dubar, 1997) by comparing the data corpus to the extant literature. We opted for an analysis based on a phenomenological comprehension of the data corpus and on principles of qualitative content analysis. The phenomenological approach of immersion, which took several weeks to complete, served to address two objectives: to absorb the full data corpus and to enable the researcher to produce first general observations through 'an authentic description exercise' of the corpus (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2003: 148).

The result of the process was an inductively generated dictionary that listed the terms and expressions through which a role was expressed. This process involved multiple iterations until it achieved a sufficient degree of clarity. Despite the many iterations, the classification suggested below may still be subject to debate, however. Another limitation of this analysis is that the substantive volume of manually processed data made it impossible to take the contextual conditions in which these roles were expressed by the journalists into account. As van Dijk (1993) has noted, textual expressions 'may imply concepts or propositions which may be inferred on the basis of background knowledge' (p. 114).

A global repertoire of normative roles

The 45,046 references of journalists to normative roles were inductively coded into 41 categories. Table 1 details the frequencies of these categories, their shares of the overall data corpus, and how often the interviewed journalists mentioned each role. Using the theoretical framework provided by Hanitzsch and Vos (2017), we classified the 41 roles into journalistic roles pertaining to political life and those referring to aspects of

Table 1. Normative journalistic roles mentioned by journalists ($N = 20,638$).

Role	Type of role	*N*	Percent of overall corpus[a]	Percent of journalists[b]
Informer	Informational-instructive	8035	17.8	38.9
Watchdog	Critical-monitorial	3627	8.1	17.6
Educator	Developmental-educative	3603	8.0	17.5
Reporter	Informational-instructive	2760	6.1	13.4
Investigator	Critical-monitorial	2598	5.8	12.6
Monitor	Critical-monitorial	2208	4.9	10.7
Entertainer	Everyday life	1932	4.3	9.4
Disseminator	Informational-instructive	1802	4.0	8.7
Analyst	Analytical-deliberative	1523	3.4	7.4
Revealer	Critical-monitorial	1340	3.0	6.5
Explainer	Informational-instructive	1335	3.0	6.5
Missionary	Advocative-radical	1322	2.9	6.4
Mirror	Informational-instructive	1014	2.3	4.9
Detective	Critical-monitorial	951	2.1	4.6
Critic	Critical-monitorial	916	2.0	4.4
Opinion guide	Analytical-deliberative	903	2.0	4.4
Storyteller	Informational-instructive	866	1.9	4.2
People's voice	Advocative-radical	681	1.5	3.3
Verifyer	Critical-monitorial	681	1.5	3.3
Debator	Analytical-deliberative	680	1.5	3.3
Advocate	Advocative-radical	674	1.5	3.3
Communicator	Informational-instructive	567	1.3	2.7
Contextualizer	Informational-instructive	544	1.2	2.6
Gatekeeper	Informational-instructive	445	1.0	2.2
Change agent	Developmental-educative	424	0.9	2.1
Adversary	Advocative-radical	380	0.8	1.8
Mobilizer	Analytical-deliberative	359	0.8	1.7
Observer	Informational-instructive	326	0.7	1.6
Mediator	Developmental-educative	313	0.7	1.5
Commentator	Analytical-deliberative	300	0.7	1.5
Facilitator	Collaborative-facilitative	287	0.6	1.4
Access provider	Analytical-deliberative	283	0.6	1.4
Agenda setter	Analytical-deliberative	258	0.6	1.3
Chronicler	Informational-instructive	230	0.5	1.1
Collaborator	Collaborative-facilitative	177	0.4	0.9
Popularizer	Informational-instructive	168	0.4	0.8
Inspirator	Everyday life	144	0.3	0.7
Advisor	Everyday life	123	0.3	0.6
Service provider	Everyday life	112	0.2	0.5
Alerter	Advocative-radical	92	0.2	0.4
Marketer	Everyday life	63	0.1	0.3
Total		45046	100.0	

[a]Percentage of all roles mentioned by the journalists.
[b]Percentage of journalists who mentioned that specific role.

everyday life. Political roles were further grouped into six subcategories: informational-instructive, analytical-deliberative, critical-monitorial, advocative-radical, developmental-educative, and collaborative-facilitative roles.

Based on the frequencies reported in Table 1, we can make three general observations: First, journalists' normative frameworks around the world are largely guided by a very few key roles. Altogether, the six most frequently mentioned roles account for slightly more than half of the answers provided by the journalists. These roles include the following: *informer* (18% of the corpus), *watchdog* (8%), *educator* (8%), *reporter, investigator* (both 6%) and *monitor* (4.9%).

Second, political roles assume centrality in journalists' normative frameworks around the world, while roles pertaining to everyday life appear to have very little weight in journalism's normative compass. In all 67 countries, references to political roles comprised more than 80 percent of all roles mentioned. Hence, normality in terms of journalists' normative roles is still constructed around the contribution journalism is making in the realm of political life. Roles that relate to the public's needs in the area of everyday life and that stress aspects of service, advice, and orientation with regard to consumption, well-being, health, leisure, and lifestyle do not seem to be in the focus of journalists' normative frameworks around the world (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013).

Third, within the area of political roles, informational-instructive and critical-monitorial roles seem to have greater appeal to journalists than have other types of political roles. Developmental-educative and collaborative-facilitative roles, in particular, are somewhat marginal to journalism's normative framework, but their relevance largely depends on the political, cultural, and socio-economic contexts, as we will discuss further below.

Informational-instructive roles

The *informer* role, being emblematic of the informational-instructive function of journalism, was mentioned by roughly about one out of five journalists in the sample. This role refers to what presumably is one of the most basic roles of journalists, which is to provide information to the public. Journalists expressed that role through a relatively coherent canon of expressions, such as 'to inform', 'to bring news/facts/information', or 'to keep people informed'. The role bears many similarities to that of the *reporter* (ranks 4th), which however has a slightly different meaning. The informer role primarily relates to the communicative goals a journalist may want to achieve (to inform the audience), while the reporter role much more refers to *how* this should be done – that is, by reporting the facts from the ground. In this context, the *disseminator* role, which was also mentioned relatively frequently, stresses the aspect of information distribution by emphasizing transportation metaphors, such as to 'relay', 'convey', 'distribute', or 'spread' the news or by acting as a 'messenger'. Coming very close to this understanding but taking a slightly different slant, the *communicator* role refers to a journalist's aptitudes (e.g. of 'being a good communicator').

At the same time, the *mirror* role places emphasis on the epistemological aspect of representing the 'true' nature of reality without distortion and error. In this understanding, journalists should 'depict' or 'portray reality', 'hold a mirror', and provide a 'true

reflection' of things happening on the ground. What some may consider an instance of naïve realism does indeed feature prominently among journalists around the world. The *observer* role comes very close to this understanding but stresses the distance between the journalist as a witness, on the one hand, and external 'reality' covered by the journalist, on the other. While journalists would typically use variants of the root word 'observe' in the survey, they often stress their position as a 'witness' being the 'eyes and ears of the citizens'. The *chronicler* role, by way of contrast, emphasizes the journalistic ambition to provide a first draft of history by recording and documenting events as they unfold.

The classic *gatekeeper* role seems to have lost some of its appeal; this role accounts for only about 1 percent of the whole corpus of journalists' responses. On the one hand, this may have to do with the fact that although the gatekeeper metaphor has traveled around the world and is well known by journalists also outside the Anglo-Saxon world, the translation of this metaphor may not be equally appealing in all cultures. The relatively low relevance of this role may also indicate a shift in journalistic culture away from controlling the flow of information to other functions such as providing context and explanation. It is exactly these aspects that are emphasized by a considerable number of journalists who considered the *explainer* and *contextualizer* roles to be central to their normative compass. The explainer role is about helping people understand complex questions or issues without necessarily acting in the capacity of an educator (see below). In the journalists' own words, this role is about 'explaining' events, 'helping readers understand', or 'making the world/society comprehensible'. The contextualizer role, on the other hand, stresses the importance of providing background and contexts (e.g. by putting the news 'into perspective'). In between these two roles sits the *popularizer*. Journalists embracing this role aspire to making complex and difficult matters easier to understand (by 'popularizing', 'simplifying', or by 'being a translator of complex issues'). The *storyteller* role, finally, emphasizes the narrative dimension of journalism by placing unfolding events into a temporal context.

Critical-monitorial roles

The domain of critical-monitorial roles does also feature prominently in journalists' understandings of their normative roles. The *watchdog* role, which is the second most frequently mentioned role, covers a variety of journalists' expressions beyond the simple reference to the 'watchdog' concept, all of which allude to active surveillance of authorities. Journalists see their roles as acting as the 'Fourth Estate' or 'guardian of democracy' by 'holding powers to account', 'being a corrective force', and 'examining authorities'. The *monitor* role (ranks 6th), comes very close to this understanding, placing a strong emphasis on monitoring authorities and elites, but it does so in a slightly different, overall less active and more responsive fashion. A much more proactive stance is taken by journalists who emphasize the *critic* role. This role is not primarily about guarding democracy and providing a check on authorities, but it stresses a critical posture and attitude among journalists vis-à-vis social power centers.

A critical-monitorial function of journalism is often also associated with a certain type of newsgathering practice by which journalists proactively disclose inconvenient truths. A frequently mentioned role of this type is the *investigator*, which refers to the practice of relentless research and investigative reporting. This normative impetus is typically

indicated through a wide range of terms referring to proactive practices of researching and investigating facts, such as to 'chase', 'dig up', 'discover', 'ferret out', or 'delve into' the truth or even to act as 'whistle-blower'. The *detective* carries a similar connotation but places greater emphasis on the act of identifying critical issues rather than investigating them thoroughly, as would do the investigator. The *revealer* role, on the other hand, is more strictly focused on making the public aware of facts and matters that others – mostly governments and other powerful actors – would like to keep secret. Journalists associate this role with practices of 'disclosing', 'uncovering', or 'unveiling the truth'. The *verifier* role, finally, is primarily related to the validation of information. It should be noted that the data for this study were mostly collected before the recent appearance of 'fake news'. Today, the verifier role may actually assume greater centrality in journalistic discourse that it did at the time the interviews were conducted.

Analytical-deliberative roles

Another set of roles that was mentioned relatively often by the interviewed journalists can be subsumed under the analytical-deliberative function of journalism. Here, the role of the *analyst* was mentioned most frequently. Journalists associate this role with the idea of helping their audiences understand the causes and consequences of events. In the most straightforward way, journalists may bring a certain perspective to bear on events by acting in the capacity of a *commentator*. Journalists define these two roles, the analyst and the commentator, from within a content-related perspective according to which journalism should emphasize analysis and commentary in the news. A related role, which we identify as the *opinion guide*, is primarily concerned with the (potential and presumed) contribution of the news to the formation of public opinion. This role lays particular emphasis on how the public thinks about a given issue. The role of the *agenda setter*, by way of contrast, is primarily concerned with what the public thinks about. Journalists embracing this role thus aspire to 'form', 'set', 'create', or even 'dictate' the public agenda, or sometimes to 'promote an alternative agenda'.

Another relevant dimension of analytical-deliberative roles relates to journalism's ability to instigate political participation and mobilization. In a *debator* role, most importantly, journalists facilitate public conversation about key issues by enabling dialogue and by actively participating in political debates. The *access provider* role follows a similar impulse, but journalists acting in this capacity primarily conceive of themselves as those who provide the space in which all different voices can articulate themselves in public debate. On the other end of the spectrum, the *mobilizer* role underscores the media's power to call people to action and to get them actively involved in political and civic matters (e.g. through 'activating' and 'mobilizing the public' and through 'increasing' or 'stimulating participation').

Advocative-radical roles

A key feature of the advocative-radical function is the journalist's position toward loci of power in society. As in the other areas discussed above, journalists have mentioned a variety of normative roles. As *advocate*, they consider themselves spokespeople for specific groups

in society as well as their causes, or – more generally – for the socially disadvantaged. In such a capacity, they may act on behalf of their audience, generally 'stand with the socially vulnerable' or, more specifically, 'defend the interest of local communities' and 'support NGOs'. Journalists embracing the role of the *people's voice*, on the other hand, do not necessarily see themselves as activists but as a loudspeaker for those who may not have access to the media, including minorities, 'the weak', 'voiceless people', and, more generally, 'people who can't speak for themselves'. The main difference between the two roles is that advocates would actively promote a certain cause, while journalists embracing the people's voice role try to make sure that marginalized groups get heard. The role of the *missionary*, which was also mentioned relatively frequently, differs from this understanding in that journalists who prioritize this normative role would promote particular ideals, values, and ideologies out of personal motivation rather than acting on behalf of others.

Another, though less frequently mentioned, role in this domain is the *adversary*. In this understanding, journalists deliberately posture themselves as a countervailing force to political and state authority. In journalists' vernacular, this role entails elements of hostility to power centers in society, and it is associated with notions of 'contesting', 'resisting', and 'opposing those in power', or with 'plaguing the powerful' and 'being a thorn in power's side'. The *alerter* role, finally, refers to the need of the news media to draw attention to and raise awareness of potential threats to society. Journalists who embrace this role would act as 'an alarm system' pointing out imminent danger to the public.

Developmental-educative roles

Among the roles that belong to the developmental-educative function of journalism, the *educator* was the most popular role (ranks 3rd). Serving in a pedagogic capacity, journalists raise public awareness and knowledge of social issues. In the interviewed journalists' own words, the educator role is about 'teaching' or 'instructing' audiences, and about 'making people smarter' and 'wiser'. In a somewhat more paternalistic tone, this role is also associated with being 'the schoolmaster of the people'.

The two other roles that fall within the developmental-educative function of journalism were mentioned far less frequently. The *change agent*, on the one hand, broadly corresponds to the empowerment approach in development journalism, foregrounding quality of life, social equity, citizen participation in public life, and human development. Journalists have framed this role in terms of being an 'agent' or a 'catalyst for change'; 'participating in social reforms'; and in terms of 'supporting', 'promoting', or 'calling for change'. In a *mediator* role, on the other hand, journalists try to bridge social cleavages especially in heterogeneous societies by reinforcing social harmony and attachment to the community, by forging commonality of values, and by contributing to conflict resolution. This role is often expressed in ways such as 'building connections', 'being an intermediary', an 'interface', or a 'bridge builder'.

Collaborative-facilitative roles

The collaborative-facilitative function of journalism finds rather little support among journalists globally, at least in normative terms. The interviewed journalists mentioned two

roles in the context of this journalistic function. The *collaborator* role emphasizes the need to support or defend, in a loyal fashion, government and its policy, thus providing legitimacy to authorities, 'explaining' political decisions to the people. Based on the idea that, as public communicators, journalists are not distinct from but part of the state apparatus, journalists aim to act as 'propagandists', 'government mouthpiece', 'advocate of the government', and as 'the eyes and ears of the party' by 'providing a loyal service for the party'.

The *facilitator* role, by way of contrast, considers this service in a less straightforward and activist fashion. In this role, journalists may not explicitly support particular political actors but the general aims and goals they share with them. This approach typically emphasizes the advancement of social and economic development of the country as well as nation-building and the preservation of national unity. Journalists who embrace this role often voluntarily collaborate with authorities, which are seen as offering unity and stability. Journalists typically frame this role in terms of 'educating the people on government policies', 'bridging between government and people', and 'promoting national unity'.

Roles in the domain of everyday life

Roles that serve the public's needs in the domain of everyday life, finally, generally rank very low in the journalists' hierarchy of normative values around the world. The only role that was mentioned somewhat frequently was the *entertainer* (ranked 7th), which was mostly associated with providing pleasure and relaxation. In the interviewed journalists' own terms, this role was primarily about 'providing entertainment', 'distracting', and 'relaxing the audience'.

In addition to the entertainer, the interviewed journalists mentioned four more roles addressing journalism's contribution to everyday life. Through the *advisor* role, for instance, journalists offer guidance, counseling, and orientation to their audiences to help them navigating an increasingly multi-optional world. As *inspirators*, they seek to guide the public and enable audience members to make informed choices in everyday-life-related fields such as leisure, food, health, travel, and lifestyle. In this role, journalists provide inspiration for new lifestyles and products, and they tie them to a positive attitude toward life.

The *service provider* is another minor role dedicated to the commercial dimension of journalism. Like the inspiratory role, it caters to a hybrid sense of social identity – partly citizen, partly consumer and partly client – by offering practical information and advice on services and products. Journalists who embrace this role retain their independence to some extent, as they consider their reporting to be a service to the audience rather than it being a service to advertising clients. The *marketer* role, by way of contrast, is related to journalists acting in the interest of the economic viability of the media organization in which they are employed. Journalists typically frame this role in terms such as 'attracting consumers', 'serving advertisers', or 'being a brand ambassador'.

Looking beyond a Western framework

Space limitations do not allow for any exhaustive discussion of geographic and cultural differences in the importance of these roles. These differences are complex and multidimensional and thus go beyond the scope of this article. From a global point of view, however, it is

remarkable that, as we noted in the previous section, a rather small group of six roles (informer, watchdog, educator, reporter, investigator, and monitor) forms a normative core of journalism and, as one may argue, a professional ideology widely shared by journalists from around the world. These elements point to a broad normative consensus on journalism's place in the fabric of social institutions. Despite the manifold and, in some places dramatic, changes in the profession, journalism's normative mythology seems to be surprisingly intact.

Comparative analysis allows us to look beyond the seemingly uniform landscape charted by the six most important roles. The first notable differences relate to Western vis-à-vis non-Western visions of journalistic roles. While Western journalism cultures broadly coalesce around a quartet of roles including the *informer, watchdog, monitor*, and *entertainer*, the situation is slightly different in many non-Western countries. In these societies, journalists perceive the four roles mentioned above as somewhat less relevant, and they tend to blend them with other roles, such as the *opinion guide, change agent, people's voice*, and *missionary*. Although the critical-monitorial capacity of journalism as an institution to hold power to account is slightly more pronounced in democratic societies, it also resonates in less democratic contexts. About one third of journalists in China, for instance, mentioned the *collaborator* role, yet the same proportion also subscribed to the idea of journalists acting as *monitors*. This finding is not necessarily a contradiction. Party leaders have actively promoted a monitorial role to reassert control over a partly dysfunctional bureaucracy. By calling individual transgressors to account, monitorial journalism may even strengthen the Party's legitimacy for policing the political, economic, and social boundaries of an authoritarian market society (Yuezhi, 2000).

Journalists in many Asian and African countries, most notably in Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as in Botswana, Kenya, and Sierra Leone, strongly emphasized the *educator* role, through which journalists raise public awareness and knowledge about social issues (Statham, 2007). In these societies, this pedagogic role may be related to the fact that journalists tend to be much better educated than the majority of the population.

Journalists especially in non-Western countries articulated a normative duty to intervene in social processes and to demonstrate a more constructive attitude toward ruling powers. Emblematic of the social intervention role is the *change agent*, a role also found in other studies (Chan et al., 2004; Hanitzsch, 2011; Pintak, 2014). Journalists who emphasize this role do not only report on social grievances but they also actively promote measures to remedy social problems and thus drive political and social reform. This normative duty was reported particularly by journalists from Bangladesh, India, and Ethiopia. In these and several other countries, journalists also emphasized the importance of a *facilitator* role, which refers to a journalistic approach foregrounding the media's constructive support of the government's efforts to achieve commonly shared social goals, such as social and economic development (Romano, 2005; Wong, 2004).

Beyond the above distinction between Western and non-Western countries, we found the Anglo-Saxon countries included in this study (i.e. Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to form a somewhat exclusive group of nations that can be distinguished from other Western countries. In these countries, journalists specifically highlighted the relevance of the *watchdog* role. In terms of frequencies, the watchdog leads the hierarchy of roles in both the United States and the United Kingdom, and it ranks second in Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia. This role is clearly an identity

marker of an Anglo-Saxon journalism culture. At the same time, as the comparative analysis demonstrates, the watchdog role has been successfully exported to other world regions, in many cases as an attempt to 'Westernize' journalism in these societies. Furthermore, it is in the Anglophone countries where roles pertaining to journalism's contribution to people's everyday life have gained some foothold, although they seem to do so only very slowly. The *inspirator* and *marketer* roles, in particular, by addressing audience members as consumers in a multi-optional world of commercial products and services, are almost exclusively articulated by journalists from Anglo-Saxon countries.

Within Europe, our analysis also reveals several notable nuances across the continent. A segregation line in normative journalistic roles seems to separate Scandinavian societies (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), together with German-speaking ones (Austria and Germany), from Romance regions (France, Italy, Spain, and Francophone Belgium). In the Northern part of Europe, journalists strongly emphasize the critical-monitorial dimension of their work. Typically, the *detective, watchdog, investigator, monitor*, and *revealer* populated the top-five ranks of the national hierarchies of journalistic roles. In these countries, journalists obviously favor the normative function of journalism as Fourth Estate in society above any other journalistic norm. This part of Europe thus shares certain commonalities with Anglo-Saxon societies. In Southern Europe, however, our analysis points to a predominance of informational-instructive and analytical-deliberative roles, while references to critical-monitorial roles are relatively scarce. Considering the differential development of journalism cultures especially in Romance and Anglo-Saxon countries, as Chalaby (1996) has highlighted in his comparison of France, Britain, and the United States, these results point to a historical path dependency leading to substantive differences in journalistic culture in otherwise relatively similar societies.

Conclusion

In this article, we report results from an investigation of normative journalistic roles based on the responses of 20,638 journalists working in 67 countries from around the world. In many ways, our findings can be seen as a source of reassurance to scholars who have studied journalistic roles using closed survey questions and based mainly on roles related to political life. The results presented here clearly show that the roles typically discussed in journalism scholarship are also reflected in the journalists' own terms. With a few exceptions (e.g. people's voice, contextualizer, and chronicler), no influential role has fallen through the cracks of journalism research. In this sense, this study also lends welcome support to the extant literature, despite any shortcomings it might have.

This assessment of the way in which journalists describe the roles they consider most important puts into context the complexity of the professional dynamics in which they work. Often interpreted as traces of discursive maneuvers that journalists regularly carry out, for example, in an effort to legitimize their profession and (re-)establish authority (Carlson, 2016), our analysis also shows that journalists' visions of journalism still remain tied to its contribution to the democratic process. The dominance of the *informer, reporter*, and *disseminator* roles indicates the normative standing of detached information distribution in journalism's professional ideology combined with the *watchdog* and *monitor* roles reflecting a largely unquestioned *doxa* connecting journalism to democracy (Kreiss, 2016).

Many journalists interviewed for this study came from democratic countries, but this alone cannot explain the domination of informational-instructive and critical-monitorial roles around the world. This normative vision of journalism, which epitomizes a Western normative view, is written deeply also into journalistic cultures in other parts of the globe. This speaks volumes to how normative normality is constructed in professional discourse – a normality that is almost existentially tied to informational-instructive and critical-monitorial functions of journalism vis-à-vis the political realm. The relative absence of alternative roles connected to journalism's contribution to people's everyday lives is another powerful illustration of professional normality and the exercise of boundary work through which these forms of journalism are still rendered as the unworthy other that lies outside of established professional norms.

Finally, we would like to end with two suggestions for areas of future research. First, the analysis presented in this article provides an overview of results across a sample of journalists from 67 countries, using a fairly broad brush to outline the global pattern of journalistic roles. Such a global analysis inevitably hides a range of meaningful differences between journalists from various countries and cultures. Future research should pay more attention to some of the finer cross-national differences in the relevance of certain journalistic roles depending on the political, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. Second, future studies should pay greater attention to the way journalism researchers commonly classify roles into those related to political life and those pertaining to everyday life. Some of the roles that are often subsumed under the political domain, such as 'informer' or 'disseminator', may well also relate to the realm of everyday life. Here, the analysis of the semantic context in which a role is mentioned by the journalists may provide much-needed clarification.

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Notes

1. By Western countries, we refer to a group of liberal democracies in North America and Western Europe as well as Australia and New Zealand.
2. http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/research/2012-2016-study/methodological-documentation/

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