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ABSTRACT

Online journalists are often believed, not least in the industry itself, to follow different professional standards from their print and broadcast colleagues. There is, however, little empirical evidence to support or to refute this perception. This paper intends to help fill that gap by investigating whether offline and online journalists differ in their professional principles and practices. Drawing on previous conceptual research by Deuze, we operationalize the concept of journalism as an ideology comprising four ideal professional values: public service, objectivity, autonomy, and ethics. Using survey data from the Worlds of Journalism Study we compare professional principles and practices among online, offline, and multiplatform journalists in nine Western and Eastern European countries ($N =$ 6,089). We find, contrary to previous research, that principles and practices among online and offline journalists broadly conform. However, we also find that online journalists are more likely than their offline colleagues to find justification for publishing unverified information and less interested in holding politicians to account, despite reporting that they have more freedom to select and frame news stories. We also find important differences between our samples of Western and Eastern European journalists.

Introduction

Since the rise of online journalism in the 1990s, offline and online journalists have often regarded each other as competing professional species (Singer 2015a; Eldridge II 2018). Advocates for online journalism hailed the dawning of new possibilities (see, e.g., Jarvis 2014; Rusbridger 2018), whereas others perceived online journalists as a threat to traditional standards (see, e.g., Fichter 2014), considering them to be nothing but "internet experts" (Gehlen 2014) or just "those online people over there" (Usher 2014, 43).

Research comparing off- and online journalism has mostly focussed on differences in the quality and breadth of news content in off- and online media (see, e.g., Doudaki

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and Spyridou 2013; Ghersetti 2014; Burggraaff and Trilling 2020), on how internet technology has affected professional standards as journalism moves online (see, e.g., Arant and Anderson 2001; Witschge and Nygren 2009), or on differences between off- and online journalists in regard to their employment conditions (see, e.g., Thurman 2016a).

Although various scholars have observed that online journalists either consider themselves, or are seen by their offline colleagues, as inferior (see, e.g., Witschge and Nygren 2009; Usher 2014), research comparing the professional role conceptions of off- and online journalists has concentrated on a relatively narrow set of roles (see, e.g., Cassidy 2005). As a result, we have limited understanding of whether online journalists actually differ in their professional beliefs and practices from their offline colleagues. This study aims to help fill this gap.

Our article adopts Deuze's (2005) conceptualization of journalism as a "professional ideology", which he argues consists of five "ideal-typical traits or values": public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics (446 – 447). Deuze utilizes the concept of professional ideology to investigate how journalists legitimize their work as "real" journalism against the background of technological and socio-cultural change. Fourteen years on, he reasserted the persistence of a journalistic ideology despite radical changes in journalists' working conditions, with journalistic work becoming increasingly precarious and technology profoundly altering work routines (Deuze 2019). Deuze's framework for understanding how journalists define their professional identity in the context of change seems ideally suited for our study as we are interested in possible differences in journalists' professional values depending on the degree to which they work online. We assess the extent to which off- and online journalists' principles and practices adhere to four of the five values in Deuze's conceptualization of journalism as an ideology.

Deuze builds on international journalism research and surveys among journalists (e.g., Weaver 1998) to argue that "journalists in elective democracies share similar characteristics and speak of similar values in the context of their daily work" (2005, 445). He arrives at the five values by drawing on academic literature, surveys, and, in the case of ethics, on journalists' professional codes. Later studies have confirmed Deuze's five values to be essential components of journalists' professional ethos. Hanitzsch (2007) identified similar values to Deuze as constituents of what he called "journalism culture": "institutional roles" (which corresponds to the public service ideal), "epistemologies" (which corresponds to the objectivity value), and "ethical ideologies" (371). Hanitzsch subdivides the "institutional roles" into three dimensions: "interventionism" (how influential journalists strive to be), "power distance" (whether journalists aspire to the "watchdog" role), and "market orientation" (to what extent journalists see their audience as citizens or as consumers) (2007, 371). Each of these three dimensions relates to how journalists perceive their societal role. We will use these dimensions to assess the importance journalists attach to different aspects of the public service value. Consequently, we adapt Deuze's concept for our analysis as follows: Within the public service ideal, which addresses journalists' role in society (Deuze 2005, 447), we draw on Hanitzsch (2007) to distinguish between the importance of influencing politics and public opinion, of being an adversary to those in power, and of catering to audiences. Within the value of autonomy, we distinguish between journalists' creative freedom and to what degree they feel free from organizational and external pressures. We do not include Deuze's fifth value of immediacy, because our survey data did not allow us to address this dimension.

We compared online, offline, and multiplatform journalists' professional beliefs and practices across organizational and national borders to reflect the idea that journalism as an ideology transcends those boundaries (Deuze 2005, 444; Hanitzsch 2011, 480). Using data from the Worlds of Journalism Study[1] we analysed survey responses from journalists ($N = 6,089$) in nine countries in Western and Eastern Europe (Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Kosovo, Latvia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK).

In addition, we looked at whether off- and online journalists' "professional ideology" differed with different media systems. For this purpose, we considered how disparities between off- and online journalists altered depending on whether they came from the Eastern or Western European countries in our sample. The advent of online journalism coincided with the political transformation of Eastern Europe after 1989 (Salovaara 2015). Since this transformation, a number of studies have established that media systems in Central and Eastern Europe show clear differences from—and also similarities with—Western media systems (see, e.g., Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008; Dobek-Ostrowska 2012; Mancini 2015; Castro Herrero et al. 2017). While there are some indications that different media systems have different effects on how offline and online journalism diverge (Benson et al. 2012; Mellado et al. 2018, 14), we could find no research into whether the professional beliefs of Eastern European offline journalists differ from those of Eastern European online journalists, and, if so, whether they differ in ways distinct from those found with Western European off- and online journalists.

Literature Review

Research comparing off- and online journalism—and journalists—is inconclusive. One focus has been on the respective quality and quantity of reporting, with contradictory findings. Another area of research has compared working conditions, this time with more agreement. We have grouped our summary of the literature under four headings that correspond with the four values our study investigates.

Public Service

Research comparing off- and online journalism has shown considerable interest in whether producing for these different platforms affects how journalists espouse and enact the public service ideal. Just before the turn of the millennium, Rosen (1999) claimed that online journalists showed a keener interest in public service journalism than offline journalists. More recently, Jacobi, Königslöw, and Ruigrok (2016, 731) found that newspapers' online editions contained fewer, but longer, stories on politics than their print products. Maier (2010, 12–13), however, found the contrary, observing that print newspapers provided significantly longer news articles, including about politics, than did their online (non-newspaper) competitors. Maier concluded that "the daily newspaper remains the primary medium for in-depth news", positing that online news fulfils a different function to print news by providing brief information (2010, 16); indeed, more recent data show that readers spend far more time with newspapers' print editions than their online editions (Thurman 2018). In contrast, Jacobi, Kleinen-von Königslöw, and Ruigrok found that online newspapers provide better coverage of elections (2016, 735), and Ghersetti, in her analysis of how the 2010 Swedish election campaign was

reported in online and print newspapers, concluded that print and online readers were presented with "an identical image" of the election (2014, 383).

To investigate whether online media prioritize entertainment over political news, Burggraaff and Trilling (2020) analysed 762,095 Dutch news items in online and print outlets and found that a focus on people, a marker of the popular press (Örnebring and Jönsson 2004; Boukes and Vliegenthart 2020), was more prevalent in online news. On the other hand, and in contradiction to Maier (2010), Burggraaff and Trilling note that online news stories are not more likely to be about celebrities or entertainment (2020, 10–12). Deuze and Dimoudi (2002, 94) suggest that online journalists are "geared towards serving people in general" as well as "favouring entertainment and advertising roles above adversarial and investigative roles" (ibid., 95).

Some researchers have found online media adopting traditional news values, whereas print media appear to be venturing into new areas, possibly to counteract the decline in their markets. For example, Doudaki and Spyridou (2013) observe that the Greek printed press has shown a trend "towards lighter news (less culture, more entertainment and sports)", whereas online editions tend "to emphasize news on economy and politics to a greater extent compared to the past" (917). Similarly, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2015) find, when comparing the content of print and online media in Israel, that print newspapers tend to speculate about the future, "analyzing potential outcomes, raising concerns and hopes, and shaping agendas for future action" (1061), whereas online news fulfils the more traditional role of reporting the immediate past. More recent research, however, suggests that "thematic beat" and whether media are oriented towards a popular or elite audience have a greater effect on journalistic content than publication platform (Mellado et al. 2018).

Objectivity

There is very little research comparing off- and online journalists in regard to the objectivity value, and that which does exist is contradictory. Agarwal and Barthel (2015) observed a rebellious attitude towards journalists' traditional roles among 14 US online journalists, who "roundly rejected" the notions of objectivity and neutrality, even mocking them as old-fashioned (382). However, other studies have contended that online journalists have taken on the traditional disseminator role, which was previously fulfilled by offline journalists (Deuze and Dimoudi 2002; Doudaki and Spyridou 2013; Ghersetti 2014; Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2015) and which can be linked to the value of detached, objective reporting (Deuze 2005, 448).

Autonomy

Research on the value of autonomy as a journalistic trait mostly concentrates on journalists' creative autonomy, with most studies finding that online journalists lack in this regard in comparison to their offline colleagues. Online journalists are said to be more likely to lift material from secondary sources such as press releases or other media (Boczkowski 2010; Maier 2010) and to write more follow-up stories than their print colleagues, which are easier and quicker to produce (Burggraaff and Trilling 2020, 12). Boczkowski (2004, 98 – 99) observed that, in a US newsroom, the print desk was given precedence over the

online desk when it came to who would get a story first and who would write it. However, Boczkowski also noted that the asymmetry decreased over time (2004, 99). Online journalists are also, apparently, more desk-bound, having less time to leave the office for the purposes of story research (Witschge and Nygren 2009, 43; Boczkowski 2010). Thurman and Myllylahti report that journalists at the Finnish financial daily *Taloussanomat* claimed to do less original reporting after their paper went online-only (2009, 700). Online news stories have been found to be less likely to carry a byline, a characteristic that could indicate that they lack originality (Maier 2010, 15). Boczkowski (2004, 100) gives an example from his study of the *New York Times* and its online edition, CyberTimes, which shows the importance of bylines. The example illustrates how online journalists, over time, can acquire the same status as their print colleagues—in particular if, as in this case, an editor is familiar with both worlds. Boczkowski recounts that CyberTimes' contributors who wrote material for the printed paper started to get bylines after the CyberTimes founding editor moved back to the print room and fought for online journalists to be recognized by name in print. However, later work by Boczkowski (2010) has suggested that working conditions are not the same for all online journalists, with feature journalists working online experiencing conditions far more resembling those of traditional print journalists than do their online colleagues who produce news.

Ethics

Research comparing off- and online journalists' ethical values seems to mainly focus on the issue of verification. Journalists working online were found to file stories faster and more often than their colleagues working for print (Deuze 2004; Witschge and Nygren 2009; Thurman 2016b, 28), which may leave them less time to verify the facts they report (Arant and Anderson 2001; Witschge and Nygren 2009; Agarwal and Barthel 2015). Agarwal and Barthel (2015) found that the 14 American online journalists they interviewed upheld the professional standard of accuracy, but that those journalists also conceded that, in their experience, rigorous fact-checking was discouraged. Thurman and Walters (2013) found an ambiguous attitude towards verification among journalists involved with online live-blogging at *Guardian.co.uk*. Although live-blogging journalists stressed that they tried to favour reliable sources, they also admitted that time pressure and the need for fast updates led them to quote anonymous and unknown sources (2013, 93–94). On the other hand, they attempted to mitigate any resulting errors by making the process of correction transparent (ibid.; Thurman 2015). Karlsson (2011) also observes how transparency had become a new professional norm within online journalism. On a more general note, Singer contends that "in an open media environment that presents no limits on who can publish", online (and offline) journalists attempt to establish the boundaries of their profession through emphasizing "ethical practices such as verification […], principles such as independence […] and promises such as accountability for the consequences of their action" (Singer 2015b, 21).

Research Questions

Given the inconclusive research literature we decided on four open research questions which cover the four professional values under consideration. As explained before, we

addressed the public service value in three parts: the importance of influencing politics and public opinion, of being an adversary to those in power, and of catering to audiences. In regard to the autonomy value, we distinguished between creative autonomy and organizational and external influences. For our analysis, we divided journalists into four groups. Journalists working exclusively for offline media were our reference group. The other three groups were made up of journalists who work online to varying degrees. Consequently, we formulated the following research questions:

Is the degree to which journalists work online related to:

- how important they believe it is to influence politics and public opinion? (**RQ1a**)
- how important they believe it is to be an adversary to those in power? (**RQ1b**)
- how important they believe it is to cater to their audience, including by entertaining them or by providing information that helps them live their lives? (**RQ1c**)
- how important they believe it is to be a detached observer? (**RQ2**)
- how much freedom they feel they have to select news stories, to decide the emphasis of news stories, and to participate in newsroom decisions? (**RQ3a**)
- how independent they feel from organizational and external influences, such as editors, managers, or government officials and business people? (**RQ3b**)
- how readily they find justification for questionable ethical practices? (**RQ4**)

Eastern European differences. Over the last decade, a growing body of literature has established how media systems in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) differ from Hallin and Mancini's (2004) "Western" media systems (see, e.g., Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008; Dobek-Ostrowska 2012; Mihelj and Downey 2012; Peruško, Vozab, and Čuvalo 2013; Mancini 2015; Voltmer 2015) but are not homogeneous either (Peruško, Vozab, and Čuvalo 2013; Mancini 2015; Castro Herrero et al. 2017). Many scholars observe that CEE media have been through several transformations since the collapse of the communist states (see, e.g., Gross 2004; Jakubowicz and Sükösd 2008; Zielonka 2015; Urbániková and Volek 2017): the transition from communism to democracy, which led to media liberalization, was followed by investment from major Western publishers—such as Sweden's Bonnier, Britain's Mecom, Switzerland's Ringier, and Germany's WAZ media group—that resulted in "a transfer of Western technology and know-how to CEE, but also commercialisation of output" (Zielonka 2015, 6). Then, following the global financial crisis, some foreign investors withdrew and were replaced by local "oligarchs"—wealthy business people and politicians—triggering a de-Westernization and politicization of CEE media (Štětka 2015). In recent years, a number of scholars have analysed the "illiberal turn" in the CEE region following the rise of oligarchs and authoritarian politicians; however, as Surowiec and Štětka (2019) point out, any implications for the media landscape so far are under-researched. Hubenko and Wall (2018) are amongst the few that have looked at this area, examining how journalists use social media in an environment marked by illiberal politics and finding that online media might help to circumvent media outlets which are increasingly under "political or elite business control" (155).

Few studies have investigated how the professional beliefs of journalists in CEE countries compare to those in Western European countries. Mocek (2015) tried to gauge journalistic professionalization in a number of CEE countries. He concluded that, although "in CEE, the Anglo-Saxon liberal Westernizing model […] is postulated and

desired declarative, sometimes even codified" (2015, 114), in reality CEE journalists adhered more to the "Continental … committed" model. By contrast, in their study, Urbáníková and Volek (2017) concluded that Czech journalists do not differ from "foreign" journalists in their professional identity, which they attribute to their acceptance of the Western European and North American ideology of journalism (471). Possible differences between Eastern European off- and online journalists have not yet been investigated.

Our study is interested in whether differences in media systems between Western and Eastern European countries are reflected in how off- and online journalists in each region differ in their professional ideologies. Therefore, we ask the following additional research question:

> **RQ5**: Do Eastern European off- and online journalists diverge in their professional ideology in a different way than Western European off- and online journalists do?

Method

We analysed a subset of data from the second wave of the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS 2012a), specifically the surveys conducted with journalists in Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Kosovo, Latvia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK that were fielded between 2013 and 2017.

Based on the media they worked for ("daily newspapers", "weekly newspapers", "magazines", "television", "radio", "news agencies", "online outlets (stand-alone)", "online outlets (of offline outlet)"), we divided the journalists ($N = 6,089$) into four groups:

1. "Offline": working exclusively for offline media ($N = 4,058$);
2. "Mixed": working for both offline and online media ($N = 1,444$);
3. "Moderated online": working either exclusively for online outlets with offline parentage or for both online outlets with offline parentage and stand-alone online outlets ($N = 187$);
4. "Unmoderated online": working exclusively for stand-alone online outlets ($N = 400$).

We considered "daily newspapers", "weekly newspapers", "magazines", "television", "radio", and "news agencies" to be offline media. The online editions of newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters fall into the "online outlets (of offline outlet)" category, while "online outlets (stand-alone)" represents internet-native news brands such as the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed. Although what we considered to be offline media (like "newspapers" and "television") can have online editions, respondents working at those online editions could choose the "online outlets (of offline outlet)" category. For this reason we are confident that respondents who only chose "daily newspapers", "weekly newspapers", "magazines", "television", "radio", and "news agencies" worked exclusively offline. Although the second wave of the WJS included 67 countries, in only 13 of those was data collected on *all* the media types journalists worked in (rather than their *main* medium). We focused on nine of these in order to get two somewhat homogeneous groups comprising six Western European and three Eastern European countries. Although our sample of Eastern European countries is limited, it does include countries from the east, north, and centre, covering the different media systems of the CEE region (Castro Herrero et al. 2017).

We analysed 5-point Likert items (1 = "unimportant", 5 = "extremely important") about role conceptions from the WJS questionnaire (WJS 2012b).

"Influencing politics" (RQ1a) was calculated as the mean importance of "setting the political agenda", "influencing public opinion", "advocating for social change", "providing information people need to make political decisions", and "motivating people to participate in political activity" ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.86$, Cronbach's $α = .72$).

"Supporting government" (RQ1b) was calculated as the mean importance of "supporting government policy" and "conveying a positive image of political leadership" ($M = 1.39$, $SD = 0.65$, $α = .77$). Four related items, "being an adversary of the government" ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.33$), "supporting national development" ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.39$), "scrutinizing political leaders" ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.32$), and "scrutinizing business leaders" ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.28$) were also analysed, but turned out not to fit the scale.

"Audience focus" (RQ1c) was calculated as the mean importance of "providing entertainment and relaxation", "providing the kind of news that attracts the largest audience", and "providing advice, orientation, and direction for daily life" ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.94$, $α = .68$).

"Being a detached observer" ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.11$) was used to answer Research Question 2.

"Autonomy" (RQ3a) was calculated as the mean of how much freedom (1 = "no freedom at all", 5 = "complete freedom") journalists felt they had in 1) selecting news stories and 2) deciding which aspects of stories should be emphasized ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.73$, $α = .79$). To answer Research Question 3b we used two scores. The first, "organizational influences" ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 1.84$, $α = .74$), averaged how much influence journalists felt the following had on their work: "editorial supervisors and higher editors", "managers and owners of the news organization", "advertising considerations", "profit expectations", and "audience research and data" (1 = "not influential", 5 = "extremely influential"). The second, "external influences" ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 0.75$, $α = .81$), averaged the perceived influence on journalists' work of "censorship", "government officials", "politicians", "business people", and "public relations".

Research Question 4, on ethical practices, was answered using ten 3-level items (1 = "always justified", 2 = "justified on occasion", 3 = "not approve under any circumstances"), three of which were combined into a single score. Seven items in the ethical practices question battery were kept separate because they failed the Cronbach alpha test of internal consistency: "paying people for confidential information" ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.57$), "exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story" ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.58$), "using confidential business or government documents without authorization" ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.62$), "making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission" ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.53$), "publishing stories with unverified content" ("verification") ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.49$), "altering or fabricating quotes from sources" ("altering quotes") ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.41$), and "altering photographs" ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.47$). Our "Misrepresentation" score ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.41$, $α = .66$) combines the results of the questions which measured the extent to which journalists found justification for "claiming to be someone else", "getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information", and "using hidden microphones or cameras".

To answer Research Question 5, we created a dummy variable to distinguish Eastern European (1) from non-Eastern European (0) journalists. We then entered the interaction effect between this dummy variable and our variables of interest in our regression models.

The effect of the degree of journalists' "onlineness" on different professional values was modelled using a random-effects multi-level linear regression model with a random intercept. This means that we take into account how the general level of the dependent variables we are studying might vary between countries. Our model accounted for a number of covariates, including journalists' age, gender, education, and employment status (part time as compared to full time), and the reach of the medium (local, regional, national, or international) that journalists worked for.

Results

Public Service

Research Question 1a asks whether the degree to which journalists in our nine European countries work online is related to how important they believe it is to influence politics and public opinion. We found that journalists in the "moderated online" category find setting the agenda and influencing the public significantly less important than their colleagues working exclusively for offline media. We found no significant differences between offline journalists and journalists in our other online categories ("mixed" and "unmoderated online"). See Figure 1 and Table 1.

Research Question 1b asks whether the degree to which journalists work online is related to how important they believe it is to be an adversary to those in power. We find some significant differences between offline and online journalists. The data suggests that journalists working exclusively for stand-alone online media may consider supporting the government significantly more important than do their colleagues working for offline media ($p < 0.1$). These "unmoderated online" journalists also find it significantly less important than their offline colleagues to be an adversary of the government. Journalists in the "mixed" and "unmoderated online" categories deem
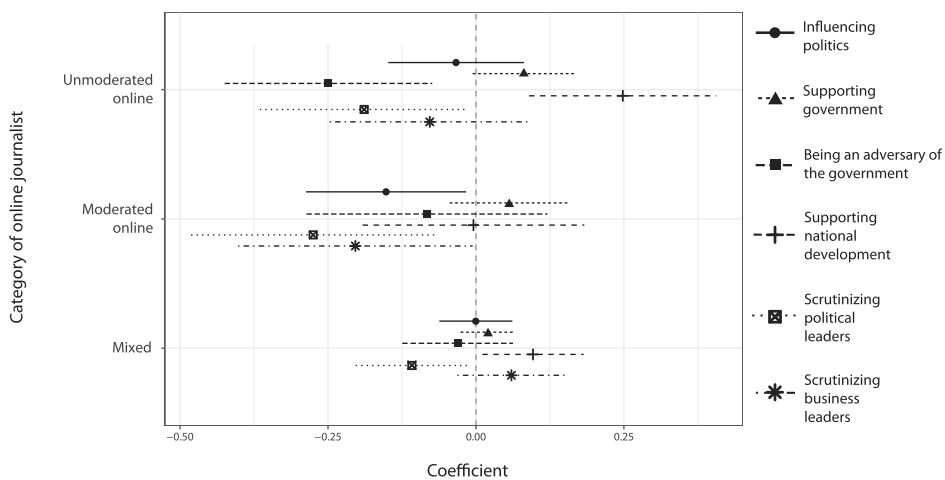
Figure 1. Estimated mean deviations (adjusted for confounding variables) between the political role conceptions of 'mixed' (online and offline) journalists, 'moderated online' journalists, and 'unmoderated online' journalists and the political role conceptions of fully offline journalists (reference category). The lines mark the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. The sample consists of journalists (N=6089) from nine Western and Eastern European countries.

Table 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients indicating changes in journalistic values between three categories of online journalists and fully offline journalists (reference category).

Journalistic values	Dependent variable	Mixed			Moderated online			Unmoderated online		
		Coeff		SE	Coeff		SE	Coeff		SE
Public service	Influencing politics	−0.0002		0.031	−0.152	**	0.069	−0.034		0.058
	Supporting government	0.020		0.024	0.056		0.051	0.081	*	0.044
	Being an adversary of government	−0.031		0.048	−0.083		0.104	−0.249	***	0.090
	Supporting national development	0.096	**	0.044	−0.004		0.096	0.248	***	0.081
	Scrutinizing political leaders	−0.108	**	0.048	−0.275	***	0.105	−0.189	**	0.090
	Scrutinizing business leaders	0.060		0.047	−0.204	**	0.101	−0.078		0.086
	Audience focus	0.002		0.032	0.240	***	0.070	0.016		0.059
Objectivity	Being a detached observer	−0.048		0.036	−0.074		0.078	0.016		0.067
Autonomy	Autonomy	0.021		0.026	−0.011		0.057	0.200	***	0.049
	Level of organizational influence felt	0.023		0.068	0.189		0.149	−0.136		0.127
	Level of external influence felt	0.094	***	0.027	−0.040		0.060	0.029		0.051
Ethics	Paying people for confidential information	−0.018		0.020	−0.087	*	0.045	−0.041		0.038
	Exerting pressure on unwilling informants	−0.016		0.019	0.014		0.043	−0.000		0.037
	Using business/govt. documents without authorization	−0.005		0.021	0.064		0.047	0.030		0.040
	Using personal documents without permission	−0.022		0.019	0.016		0.042	0.041		0.035
	Publish unverified content	−0.047	**	0.019	−0.035		0.041	−0.117	***	0.035
	Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	−0.001		0.019	−0.124	**	0.059	0.003		0.031
	Altering photographs	−0.033		0.028	−0.088		0.084	0.043		0.044
	Misrepresentation	−0.014		0.015	−0.018		0.034	−0.001		0.029

*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients with random intercepts on the country level. One model *per row*.
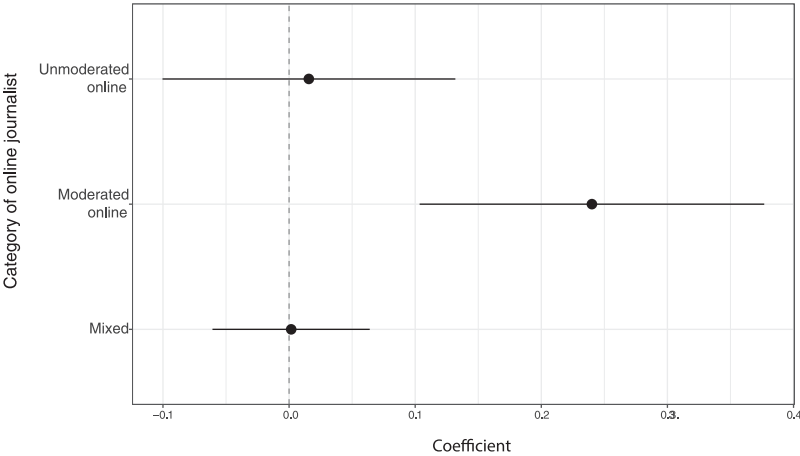

Figure 2. Estimated mean deviations (adjusted for confounding variables) between the audience-focussed role conceptions of 'mixed' (online and offline) journalists, 'moderated online' journalists, and 'unmoderated online' journalists and the audience-focussed role conceptions of fully offline journalists (reference category). The lines mark the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. The sample consists of journalists (N=6089) from nine Western and Eastern European countries.

supporting national development significantly more important than offline journalists do. Journalists in all three online categories consider scrutinizing political leaders significantly less important than their offline colleagues do, but only "moderated online" journalists differ from offline journalists in the importance they ascribe to scrutinizing business leaders. See Figure 1 and Table 1.

Research Question 1c considers whether the degree to which journalists work online is related to their level of audience focus, specifically the extent to which they agree it is important to provide entertainment and relaxation; the kind of news that attracts the largest audience; and advice, orientation, and direction for daily life. Only journalists in the "moderated online" category found it significantly more important than offline journalists to cater to their audiences in this way. See Figure 2 and Table 1.

Objectivity

Research Question 2 investigates whether the degree to which journalists work online is related to how important they believe it is to be a detached observer and thus how much they value the objectivity norm. Across our full sample of countries, no significant differences were found. See Figure 3 and Table 1.

Autonomy

Research Question 3a asks whether the degree to which journalists work online is related to how much freedom they report having to select news stories, to decide the emphasis in news stories, and to participate in newsroom decisions. One group of online journalists, the "unmoderated online" category, reported being significantly more autonomous than offline journalists did. See Figure 4 and Table 1.
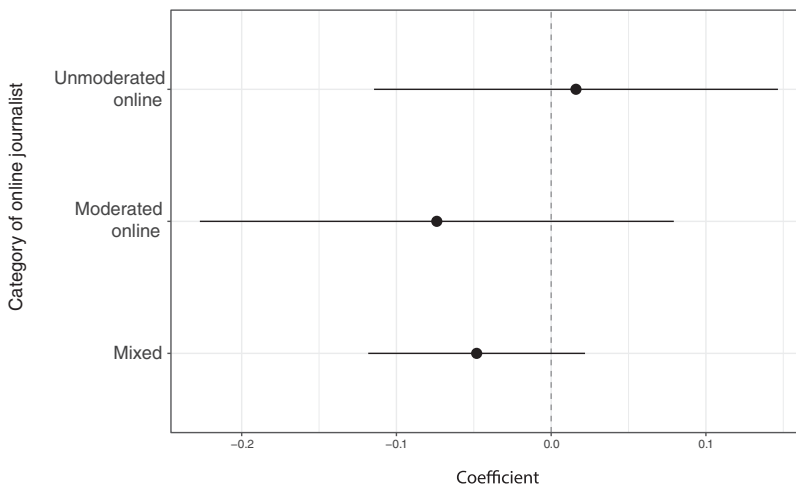
Figure 3. Estimated mean deviations (adjusted for confounding variables) between the importance ascribed to 'being a detached observer' by 'mixed' (online and offline) journalists, 'moderated online' journalists, and 'unmoderated online' journalists and the importance ascribed by fully offline journalists (reference category). The lines mark the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. The sample consists of journalists (N=6089) from nine Western and Eastern European countries.
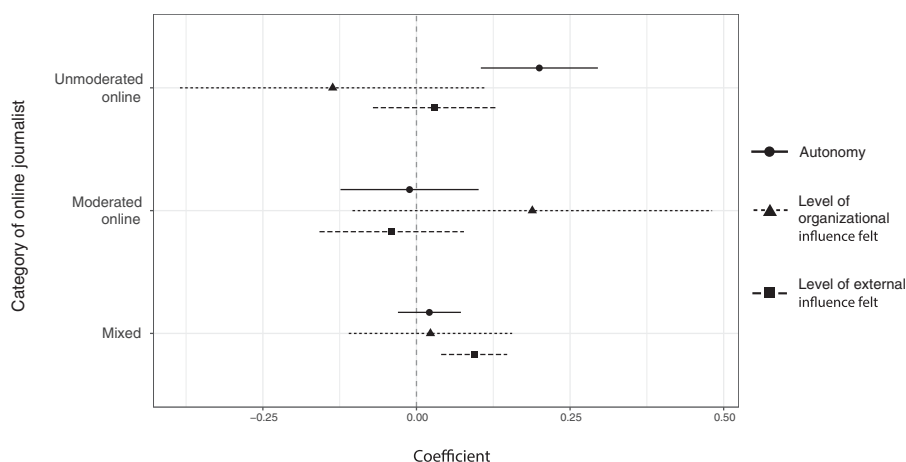
Figure 4. Estimated mean deviations (adjusted for confounding variables) between the autonomy reported by, and the organizational and external influences felt by, 'mixed' (online and offline) journalists, 'moderated online' journalists, and 'unmoderated online' journalists and by fully offline journalists (reference category). The lines mark the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. The sample consists of journalists (N=6089) from nine Western and Eastern European countries.

Research Question 3b asks whether the degree to which journalists work online is related to how independent they feel from organizational and external influences. No significant differences were found between offline and online journalists' assessments of their independence from organizational influences—such as editors, owners, and profit expectations. However, journalists in our "mixed" category (but not those in the "moderated online" and "unmoderated online" categories) feel significantly less independent from external influences, such as government officials or business people, than offline journalists do. See Figure 4 and Table 1.
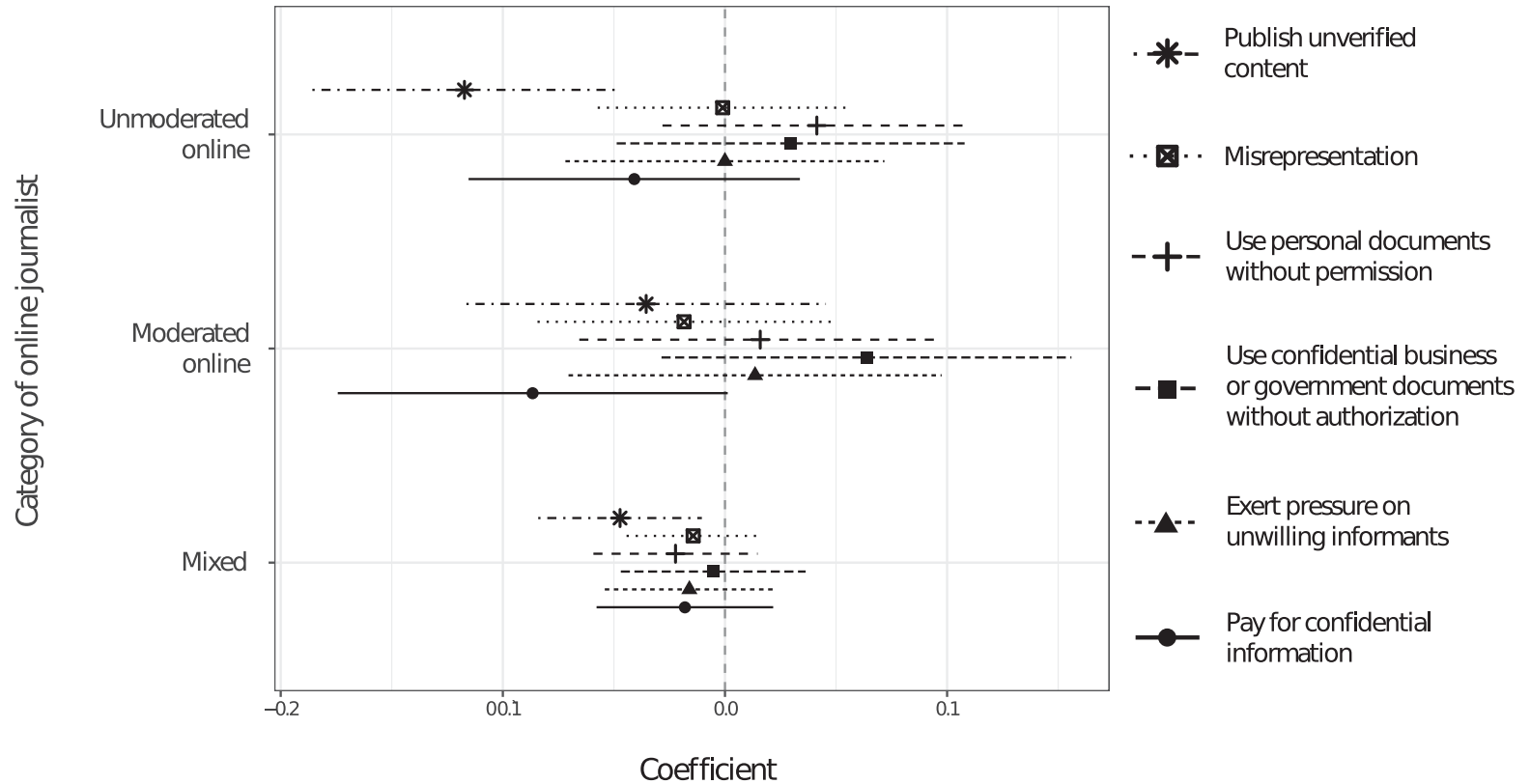
Ethics

Research Question 4 investigates whether the degree to which journalists work online is related to how readily they find justification for questionable ethical practices.

We find that online journalists consider three questionable ethical practices more justifiable than their offline colleagues do. Online journalists in our "moderated online" category are probably more likely to find justification for paying people for confidential information ($p < 0.1$) and for altering or fabricating quotes from sources ($p < 0.05$). Those in the "mixed" and "unmoderated online" categories are more likely to find justification for publishing stories with unverified content. No differences between offline and online journalists are found for any other ethical practices. See Figure 5 and Table 1.

Eastern European Online journalists

Research Question 5 asks whether differences in professional beliefs and practices between Eastern European off- and online journalists diverge from such differences between Western European off- and online journalists. We find that Eastern European online journalists in our

Figure 5. Estimated mean deviations (adjusted for confounding variables) between the justification found for questionable ethical practices by 'mixed' (online and offline) journalists, 'moderated online' journalists, and 'unmoderated online' journalists and by fully offline journalists (reference category). The lines mark the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. The sample consists of journalists (N=6089) from nine Western and Eastern European countries.

sample, like their Western European colleagues, differ from their offline colleagues in regard to the public service value but, unlike Western European online journalists, online journalists in our Eastern European sample put more rather than less emphasis on the public service value. Specifically, Eastern European journalists in the "mixed" and the "unmoderated online" categories found it significantly more important to influence politics and public opinion. Also in contrast to Western European online journalists, Eastern European journalists in the "unmoderated online" category found it significantly more important than their offline colleagues to be an adversary to those in power. This held mostly true for Eastern European journalists in the "mixed" and the "moderated online" categories, too (the only exceptions are in regard to the importance of supporting national development where we found no difference between offline journalists and journalists in the "mixed" and the "moderated" online groups, and in regard to the importance of being an adversary of the government where we found no difference between offline and "moderated online" journalists). When it comes to catering to their audiences, Eastern European online journalists in the "moderated" ($p < 0.1$) and "unmoderated" group believe it less important than their offline colleagues to serve the public by entertaining them or by providing information that helps them live their lives. This, again, sets them apart from their Western European counterparts, where the "moderated" online group found these values significantly more important (as reported above, we found no differences in how important Western European journalists in the "mixed" and "unmoderated online" groups believed catering to their audiences to be).

In regard to the objectivity value we found no differences between Eastern European off- and online journalists in our sample, repeating the result for Western European journalists.

Similar to our findings for Western European journalists, we also found very few differences between Eastern European off- and online journalists in regard to the autonomy value. Only Eastern European journalists in the "unmoderated online" category felt significantly less organizational pressure than their offline colleagues; Eastern European journalists working for offline and online media (our "mixed" group) felt more pressure from external sources such as government officials or business people.

When it comes to ethical practices, the Eastern European online journalists in our sample differ far more often from Eastern European offline journalists in how justifiable they find various practices than do Western European online journalists from their offline colleagues. Various categories of online journalists in our Eastern European sample consider the following practices more justifiable than their offline colleagues: paying for confidential information (the "moderated online" group), using personal documents without permission (the "mixed" group [$p < 0.1$]), publishing stories with unverified content (the "mixed" [$p < 0.1$] and "unmoderated online" groups), and altering quotes (the "moderated online" group). We also find that Eastern European online journalists in all three groups believe it more acceptable than their offline colleagues to use confidential documents without authorization. Eastern European online journalists in the "unmoderated" group are likely to find more justification ($p < 0.1$) for altering photographs than their offline colleagues.

Discussion

Journalists working for traditional print and broadcast media have suggested that their professional standards are being undermined by online journalists who are less concerned

with, or under greater pressure to violate, the rules and values of the profession (see, e.g., Kister 2013). However, our comparison of offline, online, and multiplatform journalists reveals a more nuanced picture.

We employed Deuze's (2005, 444) "journalism as an ideology" framework to assess journalists' professional beliefs and practices. We used four of his five normative values (public service, objectivity, autonomy, and ethics), discarding "immediacy" because our data did not include questions that addressed this value. The omission of the "immediacy" value can be seen as a limitation, given that journalists working online have been found to file stories faster and more often than their offline colleagues (Deuze 2004; Witschge and Nygren 2009; Thurman and Walters 2013, 93–94; Thurman 2016b, 28) suggesting that "immediacy" may be a value that distinguishes online journalists from offline journalists. However, as Deuze notes, "immediacy" is associated with news reporting (2005, 449) and of less relevance in other journalistic forms, such as feature writing. Indeed, other studies have shown that feature journalists working online are less concerned with speed (Boczkowski 2010). Incidentally, there is no equivalent to "immediacy" in Hanitzsch's (2007) concept of "journalism culture", which otherwise contains constituents corresponding to those in Deuze's concept.

We distinguished between "offline", "mixed", "moderated online", and "unmoderated online" journalists, a scale along which journalists in each group work progressively less in daily and weekly newspapers, radio, television, magazines, and news agencies—the long-established, traditional offline media. Those in the "mixed" group work not only for an online outlet, but also for offline media and so are influenced by "traditional" cultural norms in the newsroom. Journalists in the "moderated online" group work for an online medium with offline parentage (and may also work for a stand-alone online outlet) and thus are under some influence from offline journalistic standards. Only the group of "unmoderated online" journalists, who work exclusively for stand-alone online media, are not directly exposed to offline culture at their workplace.

Our study has two main findings. First, and contrary to some previous empirical studies, offline and online journalists appear, broadly, to subscribe to the same professional ideology. One explanation could be that, over time, the boundaries between online and offline journalists have become more permeable. Whereas our data were collected between 2013 and 2017, many of the studies that have found that online journalists' practices differ from those of their offline colleagues are older (e.g., Thurman and Myllylahti 2009; Witschge and Nygren 2009; Maier 2010). There is anecdotal evidence to support this explanation. For example, journalists seem increasingly happy to switch platforms to advance their careers, as was the case with award-winning investigative reporter Michael Gillard and assistant editor Heidi Blake who both moved from the *Sunday Times* to *BuzzFeed UK* (Jackson 2015), or former *Guardian* US editor-in-chief Janine Gibson, who became editor-in-chief of *BuzzFeed UK* in 2015 and then, four years later, joined the editorial team at the *Financial Times* (Tobitt 2019).

Furthermore, the significant differences we did find between off- and online journalists' professional principles and practices reveal two distinct patterns. First, journalists in the "moderated online" group differ more often from offline journalists than those in the "mixed" and the "unmoderated online" groups do (see Table 1). This suggests that journalists working for online outlets affiliated with an offline parent[2] fulfil a different role from online journalists who are either more closely connected to offline culture (by also

working for fully offline media), or are further removed (because they only work for digital native media). In particular, we find that journalists in the "moderated online" category believe it less important to influence politics and public opinion, and more important to cater to their audience, than do offline journalists or online journalists in our "mixed" and "unmoderated" groups. These differences could indicate that, within media organizations that run both offline and online operations, journalists working for the online branch fulfil a specific "online" function, perhaps taking on the more entertainment- and audience-focussed roles for the organization while leaving the more adversarial and investigative roles to the offline journalists, a division of labour in line with Deuze and Dimoudi's (2002, 95) characterization of online journalists.

Secondly, we observe that the most prominent differences between offline and online journalists are related to the public service value, and within this value to the adversarial "watchdog" role. In particular, journalists working exclusively for digital native news outlets find the adversarial role less important than offline journalists do. We found no differences between these journalists and their offline colleagues in regard to the importance of being politically influential or entertaining. Online journalists who also work for offline media, or those working for an online site with an offline parent, find some aspects of the watchdog role less important than offline journalists do (see Table 1). This suggests that online journalists do indeed conceive of their political role in society differently than their offline colleagues do. It appears to confirm previous studies that found online journalists are less interested in an interpretative or an investigative role and prefer instead the role of "disseminators" (Deuze and Dimoudi 2002; Cassidy 2005; Quandt et al. 2006).

At the same time, those journalists in our "unmoderated online" group who feel less inclined towards the "watchdog" role also feel freer than offline journalists to select and frame news stories. Flatter hierarchies in smaller and younger organizations could be an explanation, as well as the lesser importance editors may attach to individual online stories, which can be altered and replaced considerably more quickly and cheaply than is possible with offline articles or broadcast packages. All this seems to indicate that online journalists, particularly those working for digital native websites, are not encouraged by the autonomy they have to put a greater emphasis on, as Deuze puts it (2005, 447), their role "as some kind of representative watchdog … in the name of people".

Finally, we find that offline and online journalists appear to broadly adhere to the same ethical standards, with a notable exception being that online journalists are more inclined to publish stories with unverified content, confirming some previous research.

Eastern European Online journalists

Strikingly, in regard to the public service value, the professional ideology among online journalists in our Eastern European sample appears to be the reverse of that held by Western European online journalists. In contrast to their Western European colleagues, Eastern European online journalists in our sample consider the adversarial watchdog role more important than their offline counterparts do, most strongly so if they work for digital native news sites. Some Eastern European online journalists also consider it more important to influence politics and the public. On the other hand, they are less interested in their audiences as consumers. A possible explanation is that in recent years journalists in Eastern Europe moved online to escape political pressure after oligarchs took over many

media organizations and several countries experienced an "illiberal turn" (Hubenko and Wall 2018, 142). This interpretation seems to be confirmed by our finding that online journalists working for digital native news sites within our Eastern European sample believe themselves less influenced by editors or managers than their offline colleagues do. We also observed that Eastern European journalists working for offline as well as for online media believed themselves to be under more external pressure.

Again, in contrast to their Western European colleagues, Eastern European online journalists in our sample overall appear to more strictly adhere to ethical standards than their offline colleagues do, being less likely to find justification for many questionable ethical practices. The only exception is "using confidential documents without authorization". The relatively high levels of acceptance for this practice, often used in investigative journalism, may be reflective of the importance Eastern European online journalists (in our "mixed" and "moderated online" groups) give to holding power to account.

However, given our limited sample of Eastern European countries, our findings on how off- and online journalists in the CEE region differ from each other can only be preliminary.

Conclusion

Accusations that online journalists do not espouse the same values as their offline colleagues have not been subject to robust empirical testing. Our study has helped to do this, and reached two main conclusions.

Firstly, and contrary to some previous research, we find that offline and online journalists broadly share the same professional ideology. Contrary to Agarwal and Barthel's (2015) observations that online journalists mocked the notion of objectivity, we found no difference between offline and online journalists in regard to this value. As for ethical standards, we also found that offline and online journalists did not differ greatly, although with a notable exception regarding publishing unverified content.

Secondly, our data do show some consistent differences between offline and online journalists when it comes to the public service value. Online journalists, particularly those working for digital native media, show significantly less interest in the critical "watchdog" role than their offline colleagues do. This is not due to constraints online journalists might experience in the workplace or through external influences. On the contrary, we find that journalists working for digital native media report being freer to take editorial decisions than their offline colleagues do, and online journalists in our "mixed" group feel less influenced by external forces. We conclude that, as journalists move online, their interest in the critical democratic function of journalism to hold those in power to account weakens.

However, we also find an important qualification to our observations. In stark contrast to our overall findings, journalists working in the Eastern European countries in our sample appear to put greater importance on the critical "watchdog" role as they move online. A possible explanation for this finding is the "illiberal turn" in the CEE region, which some scholars suggest has led to the internet becoming a place where critical journalists can eschew the political control experienced at many offline media outlets. Although, as conceded before, our data are limited, these findings seem to indicate that the country-level media system and its political context have an influence on how important online

journalists believe their political role to be. Further research exploring these findings using different methods or country samples would be useful.

Notes

1. www.worldsofjournalism.org
2. Out of a total of 187 journalists in our "moderated online" group, 175 work for online media with offline parentage; only 12 work for both an online medium with offline parentage and a stand-alone online medium. We can therefore safely assume that the "culture" of working for an online medium with offline parentage dominates this category.

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