

The Contestation Over Objectivity Between Professional and Citizen Journalists:
Discourse, Practice and Content of the Coverage of Healthcare Reform and Gun Control Debate

by
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TO MY WIFE, YUELIN

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists, focusing on how the journalists were re-articulating objectivity to establish their epistemic authority. Taking the perspective of the journalistic field theory (Bourdieu, 1984; Benson, 2013), it understands the contestation as a power struggle between these journalistic actors who occupy different locations in the field and seek to reinforce their respective locations.

Using the comparative case study approach to examine the phenomenon, my empirical investigation looks into the contestation by comparing the journalistic discourse, practices and contents by journalists at four different media outlets (*the Washington Post* newspaper and blog, *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState*) in the context of their coverage on two policy issues: healthcare reform and gun control debate.

It reveals that the journalists were re-articulating objectivity in different ways to support their competing epistemic authority claims. Objectivity could be professional journalists' pursuit of shared factual knowledge for people with diverse opinions, relying on professional expertise and with undergirding democratic obligation. It could also be a citizen journalistic pursuit grounded in the political activism of advocating the liberal/conservative perspective of social reality that professional news media failed to represent. It could further be a joint pursuit by bloggers and professional journalists to attain objectivity in reasoned engagement of citizens as civic observers with a voice. The different approaches were accomplished in highly fluid practices that led to the creation of contrasting depictions of factual reality on the two policy issues. The accomplishment of objectivity was also related to the field mechanism involving locations, resources and external influences.

The findings contribute to the understanding of journalistic objectivity as a living system that maintains its relevance to journalism through constant re-articulations and remains rooted in factuality and public interest no matter how it is re-articulated. The contestation over objectivity is an important component of the meta-journalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016), through which the boundary of journalism and the basis of legitimacy of journalistic work gets constructed and re-constructed, thereby being able to remain viable in face of changes and challenges.

Chapter 1

Introduction

On the afternoon of May 6, 2016, journalism graduates at Temple University had a real-life hero from the movie *Spotlight* as their commencement speaker. It was Marty Baron, now the Executive Editor of *The Washington Post*. For these students, Baron's message was not celebratory, but sober in tone.

The veteran journalist's voice echoed in the 10,000-seat Liacouras Center. "Mainstream media" are now "objects of suspicion", and the overall landscape of "media" is "in a state of upheaval", said Baron (WashPost PR blog, 2016).

He also alerted the students to more than the state of news media, but the concerning reality of society and democracy overall. "Today, many feel entitled to their own facts when in actuality they are lies." "How can we have a functioning democracy when we cannot agree on the most basic facts?" (WashPost PR blog, 2016).

Baron's speech reflected the sense of urgency that many concerned members of this country shared about the so-called "post-truth" politics, when the truth-producing infrastructure of the society, including news media, meet severe challenges (Davies, 2016; Lepore, 2016; Suiter, 2016). Dishonesty in politics has been a perennial problem, but people are surprised by the extent to which lies now take precedence over facts. In a Rand Corporation report on this topic, Kavanagh and Rich (2018) described it as a tendency of "the shift away from facts and data in political debate and policy decisions", which "erodes civil discourse; weakens key institutions; and impose economic, diplomatic, and cultural costs" (p. ix). It includes some interrelated trends: the public's "declining trust in formerly respected sources of factual information" such as news media, government and science, as well as the "increasing relative

influence of opinions and personal experiences over facts”, the “blurring of the line between facts and opinions” and the “increasing disagreement about facts” in political and civil discourse.

The sobering state of news media that Baron spoke about is both an important reason for and a manifestation of the post-truth politics. Over the years, the shrinking and tabloidization of mainstream journalism have eroded the public’s trust in the press (Carey, 2002; Zelizer, 2009). Meanwhile, the rise of user-generated content in various online communities, such as blogs and social media websites, has made it easy for citizens to pay heed only to information that fits and reinforces their original worldviews, factual or not (Sunstein, 2009). People’s consumption of polarized content online further feeds into their distrust in mainstream media (Gunther, 2017; Kim & Hwang, 2019). In the election campaigns of the recent years, people have been astounded to see that even the fact-checking by prestigious news organizations could only exert limited effect to dispel rumors, and various kinds of false assertions persisted in demagogic rhetoric and public discourse (Montgomery, 2017). Comparing this reality to Samuel Beckett’s *Theatre of the Absurd* in her article for *The New Yorker*, historian Jill Lepore (2016) wrote, “The era of the fact is coming to an end.”

At the same time, however, there are also opinions that are less pessimistic about the fate of news media, stressing the needs for reflection, change, and efforts for dealing with the challenge and rebuilding public trust. In a conference on the role of news media in the post-truth era, organized by the Nieman Foundation of Journalism at Harvard University, Kathleen Kingsbury from *The Boston Globe* said, mainstream journalism should “reach far more than just inside-the-beltway”, voice more concerns of the voiceless, and play more active roles in connecting with the public and demanding policy changes (Kingsbury, 2017). Lydia Polgreen, the former news reporter and editor of *The New York Times* and now the editor-in-chief of *the*

Huffington Post that is simultaneously a platform of professional news production and ordinary citizens' collective blogging, said that journalism, which has become a highly elite profession, should return to its roots with the disenfranchised (Nieman Lab Staff, 2017). Brian Stelter, a CNN reporter, said that what we need now is to think what really makes great journalism, and seek out the future of great journalism through reinvention and creation (Stelter, 2017).

These journalists' calls for reflection and change actually echo the opinions that scholars of media and politics such as Carey (2007) and Habermas (1989) have emphasized for years regarding journalism in relation to the public. In these scholars' views, journalism and the modern public sphere developed in tandem with each other historically. Journalism originated in the practices of citizens gathering to exchange information, talk about issues of their interest, and keep a record of fact and events for the community, despite their different backgrounds or the control from aristocrats. Such practices were indispensable for the formation of communities, sustaining the modern public sphere up against powerful political and economic interests. In this sense, since its very origin, journalism has been endowed with an essential democratic function. News media should take the democratic function seriously, staying committed to the mission of informing the public and facilitating popular participation in politics. When news media cannot live up to the commitment, it is their task to revitalize the democratic function.

The democratic function of journalism also does not necessarily mean a natural control over journalism by professional news media and journalists as the only justified performers of the function. Rather, as Schudson (2008) pointed out, in this context of journalism' function for democracy, journalism can be multiform and multipurpose, whether offered by legacy media, government departments or bloggers. When journalism by respected media institutions cannot live up to this commitment, it is legitimate for citizens to become "journalists" themselves by

creating the content of their own. Defining journalism as the practices of collecting, processing and disseminating information on issues of public importance, Schudson (2008) emphasized that there should be “nothing refined or pure about it” (p. 14). Starting from this premise, ordinary citizens are as entitled as the media institutions that represent them to produce and exchange information on what matters to themselves, as long as they conduct journalistic practices and serve the function for democracy through such practices. However, public participation in journalism has not been without its problems, as we see in the reality of post-truth politics (Lepore, 2016; Suiter, 2016). While mainstream media lose credibility for their news offerings and even their fact-checking efforts, there still has not been a good mechanism to help establish order in the loose, fragmented network of online information (Friedland, Hove & Rojas, 2006). What is happening in post-truth politics, in this sense, is partly rooted in the unresolved tension between institutional journalism where trust is eroded and influence is weakened, and the rise of citizens’ journalistic attempts where an order is far from being established yet.

Thus, while it is great some professional journalists called for the efforts of reinventing journalism and rebuilding the public trust in news media as aforementioned, it takes more than just the professional players’ efforts to truly address the tension and revitalize the democratic function of journalism. We need to consider what are said and done by players from both sides including the citizens acting as “journalists”, where their voices interact and conflict, and where their practices converge and diverge so as to understand the future of journalism with its democratic function, responding to the challenge of the post-truth politics.

Against this backdrop, my dissertation hopes to be relevant to the debate on post-truth politics in America by exploring, broadly speaking, the dynamics of the struggle involving the highly institutionalized professional news media and individual citizens who engage in content

production on current affairs in their own ways. Their struggle, as outlined above, has been an integral part of the post-truth politics. My dissertation hopes to facilitate the understanding of the dynamics of struggle and shed light on its implications for journalism's function to sustain the public and democracy.

My Study

The field of journalism is in a state of flux. Profound changes have occurred in the means by which information is gathered, presented and disseminated. More importantly, the widespread adoption of Internet communication technologies allows the lay population to participate in journalism on an unprecedented scale. The “decentralization” of journalistic production poses a great challenge to the erstwhile monopoly of journalistic production by professional journalists and their cultural authority in defining social reality for the public. With the challenge, there could be multiple authorities in defining social reality depending on the sources of journalistic content different audiences consume, which erodes the power of professional news media as part of the truth-producing infrastructure of society.

A key crux of the challenge is around journalistic objectivity, the cornerstone of journalistic professionalism, which is disputed by citizen journalists and their practices of journalistic production. This dissertation focuses on this dispute around objectivity as a crucial part of the overall struggle between professional and citizen journalism. Throughout the history of journalism, the notion of objectivity has been long disputed by journalism scholars, educators, and journalists themselves (Deuze, 2005; Pressman, 2018). It has been accused for leading to the over-emphasis on the shallow event-focused reporting over in-depth explanation on public affairs (Cunningham, 2006). It has been criticized for making journalists adopt a non-committal approach to the public rather than that of meaningful involvement in revitalizing the community

(Meyer, 1995). It is considered a discursive construct so fashioned as to mask the news media organizations' pursuit of corporate interest, and to reinforce the existing power structure (Hackett & Zhao, 1998; McChesney, 2004). Many citizen journalists' accusations are along similar lines. Yet unlike the past challenges, citizen journalists' disputes of objectivity are going beyond intra-professional debates and the reconstruction of boundaries of journalism through the discourse in the professional community (Carlson, 2017; Zelizer, 1993). When technology affords them the freedom and convenience in content production and dissemination, they not only criticize the notion of objectivity as held by professional journalists and the practices of objective journalism, but also carry out the practices of journalism production in their own unique ways. Unbounded by professional norms, what citizen journalists produce are often personalized narratives, perspectival interpretation and pungent opinions, showing a sharp contrast to news reporting that seeks to be impartial and balanced, constructing alternative pictures of social reality different from and sometimes ignored by professional media. Their information and opinions circulate in and among online communities, and even spill over to shape media and public agenda. Such a challenge to objectivity spans across the dimensions of journalistic producers and practices, journalistic content, and the social reality defined therein, provoking extensive responses from professional journalists. Here, this all-encompassing process of disputes and responses is termed the "contestation" over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists.

This dissertation starts from the understanding that the meaning of journalistic objectivity lies not in a pre-established set of codes, but in the process of codification, that is, the enactment, interpretation and negotiation by the practitioners of journalism, including both professional and citizen journalists. In Dingwall's (1976) paper entitled "Accomplishing Profession", a profession, such as journalism or the activities of "health visiting" in his paper, cannot simply be

defined by a given set of criteria with fixed meanings (p. 331). It is performed, expressed and established by the profession's members and outsiders through activities and interpretations. When ordinary citizens' participation in journalistic practices has become prevalent and influential, the accomplishment of journalism has moved away from the control of the organizational newsmen to resemble a process of "becoming" (Xie, 2016), which is open, fluid, generative, and less characterized by the dualistic identities of and the power imbalance between journalistic producers and audience in the traditional sense. The contestation over objectivity between citizen and professional journalists is not an abstract debate about "what is journalistic objectivity", the answers of which are well available in journalism textbooks and ethical codes. Rather, it is about how objectivity should be accomplished. It is a struggle over who possess the legitimacy in the journalistic practices of gathering information and constructing meanings, how to represent and interpret social phenomena and issues accurately, and what can be done to maximize the transparency and justice of those social processes so as to whittle down the constraints imposed by political and economic forces. In Lichtenberg's (1992) apt terms, this dissertation considers the professional tenet of objectivity as the "operationalization" of the epistemic ideal of objectivity in journalistic production. The contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists, in this sense, offers a vantage point to understand the re-interpretation and even re-articulation of the epistemic ideal in a communication context that is complicated and enriched by citizen participation.

In this dissertation, I will examine the contestation involved in the coverage of two public issues, the Obama administration's healthcare reform during 2009-2010 and the gun control debate during 2012-2013 in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, by professional and citizen journalists at four media outlets: *The Washington Post* (both the

newspaper and journalistic blogging at its website), *The Huffington Post*, and two collective blogging websites: *Daily Kos*, and *RedState* as its conservative counterpart. I will examine the contestation as reflected in these media outlets' actual coverage of the issues, conducted discursively by reporters, bloggers and editors, performed in their practices of journalistic production, and situated in the policy making processes.

The selection of issues and media. The selection of issues and media outlets is, in a nutshell, intended to offer a broad stage for professional and citizen journalists to carry out their contestation, and maximize the leverage for evaluating the democratic implication of the contestation (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994).

Specifically, first, unlike other issues such as foreign policy that is not highly interesting for ordinary citizens, or election campaigns that contain a medley of issues, the issues of health care reform and gun control debate not only featured a thorough political deliberation amongst political elites as well as ordinary citizens, but also centered on a set of specific political and ideological issues, such as the federal government's role in health care and gun control, the economic impact of Obamacare, or the 2nd Amendment right. The selection of issues with these features would facilitate the observation of the contestation over objectivity involving both professional and citizen journalists. It also highlights the disputes in their understanding of facts and social reality that lies behind those specific political and ideological controversies.

Secondly, although health care reform achieved legislative success while the gun reform failed, both issues were actually a reflection of the deepening divides in politics and society during Obama's presidency. The health care bill had to be passed through the reconciliation procedure to avoid filibuster by the Republicans, and the gun control bill had all its main components rejected in the then Senate with Republican majority. Among politicians and

citizens alike, these policy debates were mixed with ideological argument, personal attacks, and blatant rumors. Such debates make it possible to contemplate the contestation over objectivity in relation to the broader context of post-truth politics.

Lastly, the selection of issues would also allow the between-issue contrast. Among the two issues, health care reform was more complicated, longer lasting, and concerned mainly with people's economic welfare, while the gun debate was relatively shorter and revolved around the cultural-war issue of gun right. This would permit the comparison of the dynamics of the contestation over objectivity and its implications for democratic politics as manifested in the two different types of public issues.

With regards to media selection, the intention is to form a sufficient specimen that contains a rich array of dynamics as involved in the contestation (Peräkylä, 2005). The media are mainly selected by their different positions on the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum, with all the platforms featuring a national coverage of readers. *The Washington Post* and journalistic blogging at Washingtonpost.com offer a chance to examine the approach to objectivity by journalists in a highly institutionalized, professionally exemplary news organization, both offline and online. *The Huffington Post* is known for its pro-amateurish journalism that combines professional news production with blogging by citizens from all walks of life (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 1012). *Daily Kos* and *RedState* are major online communities for citizens on the liberal or conservative side to blog on public issues. Hence the selection is primarily for purpose of observing the contestation between journalistic practitioners that occupy the different positions on the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum.

The selection of media would also show the dynamics of contestation in several other dimensions. First, with *RedState* being a conservative blog, *Daily Kos* and *The Huffington Post*

known for mainly liberal opinions and readership, and *The Washington Post* that seeks to be neutral, it is possible to examine how possessing an explicit ideological position or not, and the ideological position itself may feed into the contestation over objectivity. Secondly, the selection can help compare the discourse and practices of objective journalism at *The Washington Post* newspaper, a prototypical legacy media platform, vis-à-vis how actors approach objectivity at the other four platforms of new media technology. It would be of particular interest to look at journalistic blogging at *The Washington Post* website that shows professional journalists' take on objectivity when they operate on the same technological platform as citizen bloggers. Thirdly, *The Huffington Post* itself is a unique case where bloggers and professional journalistic staff jointly contribute to the coverage of the same issues, thus forming a stage where some contestation might play out on a shared organizational platform.

It should be noted that my selection of media still features some deficiencies for the observation of contestation. The conservative blog *RedState*, although it is a highly influential conservative political blogging platform, is of a smaller scale than the other media platforms. In terms of the sheer amount of coverage on health care reform and gun debate, it may not be able to show the approach to objectivity by conservative bloggers as thoroughly. The limited amount of coverage may not offer data with a similar degree of richness, as compared to the other platforms. Also, there is not a pro-amateurish platform on the conservative side as comparable to *The Huffington Post* to be selected for this study, while *The Huffington Post* does not oftentimes publish content by bloggers with conservative political opinions. This makes it hard to observe the contestation in the ideological dimension by journalistic practitioners on a pro-amateurish platform. Aware of such deficiencies, I have tried to complement the content data by treating

RedState coverage of the issues thoroughly via in-depth reading, and by paying particular attention to the conservative pieces and authors at *The Huffington Post* when there are any.

The field theory perspective. This dissertation draws on Bourdieu's theory on the "journalistic field" as an overarching analytical framework (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993, 1999, 2005). The next chapter will explicate the central concepts and the propositions on their interrelationships. Here, I will sketch the framework briefly as follows.

The journalistic field is a network of relations between different positions occupied by individuals, groups and organizations that all engage in the common game of journalistic production (Bourdieu, 1984). It is a space of capital distribution. Members of the field, whether they are commercial network TV, public television, national newspapers, or local community papers, possess different amounts and composition of economic, cultural and social capital, depending on their different positions. They use their capital for the incessant struggle to maintain and reinforce the positions they occupy (Benson, 2005; Bourdieu, 1999). Importantly, the journalistic field, similar to art, literature or social science, is considered part of the larger field of cultural production, since they all play the function of producing a certain understanding of society. Similar to the actors in those other fields of cultural production, journalists aim to create and enhance what Bourdieu (1993) calls the "belief", the recognition for the value of their cultural products by other journalistic practitioners and by the audience. Given journalism's role as the informant and interpreter of events of the world for the public, a crucial basis of the "belief" for journalists and their products is the so-called "epistemic authority", that is, the power to create a journalistic account of social reality as valid and credible for its audience (Carlson, 2017; Gieryn, 1999). The norm of objectivity has historically functioned as the cornerstone of epistemic authority for journalism, allowing journalists and news media to stake its claim of

legitimacy as an authoritative narrator for the public, maintaining the “belief” for the value of their products. The contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists is essentially a process of the two groups of actors struggling to (re)build their epistemic authority, justifying their field existence through this contestation.

For my research, Bourdieu’s field theory contains two particularly important insights. First, it provides a dialectical perspective that the field structures and is structured by field struggles. The struggles are for the maintenance of the players’ positions via-s-via each other, and in the struggles, they still need to follow the shared rule of game in the field. But meanwhile it is within the struggles that the journalistic field – its relationships, boundary and rule of the game – gets constructed and reconstructed (Martin, 2003). Secondly, the contradictory pressures from autonomous and heteronomous forces are inherent in field struggles. The journalistic field, on the one hand, has its own mechanism and enjoys relative autonomy, but on the other, its field struggles are susceptible to influences from political and economic power outside of the field. Due to the structural connections, the field struggles can have broader implication for society and democracy (Benson, 2006; Couldry, 2003).

From the perspective of field theory, the journalistic field, where professional and citizen journalists co-exist, can be conceived of as situated in between politics, economy and the civil society. It plays the role of an intermediary between the political and economic system and the civil society, distilling public opinion to inform the system while keeping citizens informed of politics and market (Habermas, 2006). Journalists in highly professionalized and institutionalized legacy media have been the dominant incumbents in the field. They have accumulated economic, cultural and social capital from years of operation in the news business, holding authority in their representation of social reality as well as their ways of doing journalistic work. But the large

total amount of capital also makes them susceptible to the heteronomous influences from political elites and market (Altheid, 1976; Cook, 1998; Tuchman, 1973), thus located toward the heteronomous pole of the field. Citizen journalists are challengers to their professional counterparts. Without as much economic and cultural capital, their key resource for journalistic production is the extensive networked social capital in the form of loose connections among all the citizen journalistic practitioners (Benkler, 2006). It places them in the lower, less powerful part of the field, but allows them to stay farther away from the system while closely connected to the civil society. This enables information in the civil society to flow into their news making procedures unmediated by professional journalism and less influenced from political elites and market (Atton, 2009). In this sense, they are located toward the autonomous pole of the field. Given their different field positions of incumbents vs. challengers, their dissimilar forms and amounts of capital involved in journalistic production, and the distinct structural relationships and influences for them, the main logic of their interplay in the field is differentiation, oftentimes through competition and conflict. An overlapping space between the two sides has been carved out through some cases of cooperation with citizen journalists by professional news media, or the hybrid pro-am model of journalism such as *The Huffington Post*, but the conflict between the two sides persists in this space as well (Ostertag & Tuchman, 2012; Sullivan, 2013).

“To exist in a field is to differentiate”, according to Bourdieu (2005). The differentiation between professional and citizen journalists is epitomized in their different ways of enacting the epistemic ideal of objectivity. For both sides, the ideal of objectivity gets enacted through a system of values and standards, forms of content, practices and expertise. For example, professional journalists are committed to their professional norm of objectivity, as predicated on the separation of facts and values through adopting the standards such as balance and neutrality,

and emphasizing the distinction between news vs. opinions (Schudson, 1978, 2001). By contrast, citizen journalists embrace the norms of open participation and engaged citizenship, proposing the standard of transparency about their ideological position, and producing content in various fluid forms as they consider fit for the purpose of expression (Lewis, 2012; Weinberger, 2009). Professional journalists resort to institutional routines of news production, the beat system and their professional knowledge for different routines or on different beats to represent social reality with accuracy and efficiency, but often end up placing too much emphasis on the information from legitimized institutions and official sources (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). By contrast, citizen journalism focuses on personal experiences, community-level narratives, and marginal players that are underrepresented in mainstream media, and relies on the collective intelligence in their network to facilitate journalistic production (Bock, 2015; Gillmor, 2004). For both sides, the different elements (values and standards, forms of content, practices and expertise) altogether function as their models of facticity, allowing them to define what fact is, gather and present information that is pertinent to issues under coverage, and construct their account of social reality (Tuchman, 1978). But, their different ways of enacting objectivity, as reflected in the above comparisons, are essentially in conflict with each other, and their contestation over objectivity is rooted in such conflicts.

The dynamics of their contestation over objectivity can be considered as made up of three dimensions: discourse, practice and text. In the dimension of discourse, the contestation occurs in the most manifest form. Through evaluating journalistic work by themselves and for each other, they engage in the debate about how objectivity should be enacted in journalism (Zelizer, 1992). In the dimension of activities, they perform their different approaches to objectivity that they try to defend in discourse. They collect and process information in accordance with the values,

standards and/or routines as they emphasize, and utilize different resources to facilitate the process. In the dimension of text, specific pieces of news, opinions and blogs are constructed according to the rules as demanded by their different approaches to objectivity (Carlson, 2017). Some key differences relating to specific elements in their enactment of objectivity can be reflected in the journalistic text, such as the differences in what topics to cover with regards to an issue, what factual information to write about, who to cite as sources, and whether or not to present a balance among sources of different viewpoints. In sum, it is on the dimensions of discourse, practice and text that the contestation over objectivity is played out between professional and citizen journalists, and would be analyzed in my research.

The contestation over objectivity is not merely a debate about the enactment of objectivity alone. It is a field struggle that serves to structure and restructure the relationships, boundary, and rules of game in the journalistic field. In the contestation, professional and citizen journalists seek to establish and maintain their epistemic authority by engaging in the “boundary-work”, which refers to the discursive attribution of certain qualities to journalistic practitioners, journalistic work, and the journalistic account of social reality for the purpose of drawing a rhetorical boundary for their different visions of journalism (Carlson, 2017; Gieryn, 1999). Their boundary-work involves the rhetorical explication and justification of one side’s own approach to objectivity and their position as the legitimate producer of truthful journalistic account about social reality, thereby reinforcing the epistemic authority for themselves. It also involves the evaluation of the other side’s different ways of enacting objectivity, highlighting how the other side transgresses what it should take to give a valid representation of social reality, and thereby disputing its authority claim. Through the boundary-work, they legitimate their own field existence, rhetorically constructing their mutual differences, uniqueness or even superiority vis-

à-vis each other, and thus drawing the boundary for and between professional and citizen journalism, with which these actors can settle their authority and allocate resources in the field.

Besides boundary-work, the contestation may also contain some conditions for reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), through which professional and citizen journalists reflect on their own approach to objectivity, and even seek to modify some elements involved therein and remake the authority relationship with the other side. It is possible that the contestation may necessitate some attempts of self-appraisal (Maras, 2013), create occasions for interaction with the other side (Benson, 2009), and turn into a long-term process that the actors would consider their performance and the ideal function of journalism in retrospect (Zelizer, 1993). These conditions may allow professional and citizen journalists to be able to identify the problems in their own ways of enacting objectivity, and in light of the problems, redefine their models of facticity and change their journalistic practices accordingly (Ahva, 2013). Such moments of reflexivity, when they occur, would have great implications for the re-articulation of the meaning of objectivity as needed for the field where both groups of actors reside, and the transformation of the authority relationship in the journalistic field – moving it toward the “reflexive competence” that emerges from the process of interaction and discovery that is shared by actors from both sides (Schon, 1983).

Furthermore, the above-mentioned sociological processes are also embedded in the social structural relationships of journalism with politics, market and the civil society. Citizen journalists’ accusation of mainstream media’s failures is often targeted at the underlying heteronomous influences from political elites and market on media. Professional journalists’ critique of citizen journalistic content also has to do with how the close connection that citizen journalism has with the civil society not only allows it to show more of the grassroots reality, but

also opens them up to unfiltered rumors, lies, and polarized opinions in ideological echo chambers (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). Considering these structural influences, the contestation between professional and citizen journalists is actually the embodiment of the broader struggle among political and economic system and the civil society in defining what is fact for the public and democracy. When we consider these structural influences lying behind the contestation, it would allow us to recognize the broader implication of the contestation for society and democracy. The contestation may further weaken the credibility of mainstream media and fragment the landscape of public communication further, making it more challenging to establish an equilibrium between system and society. But it may also point to a direction of hope where journalistic practitioners would come to cohere around and rearticulate the epistemic ideal of objectivity, bringing order back into the truth-making infrastructure, joining each other to counter the heteronomous influences and reinforce the connection of journalism with the public. With the examination of the contestation together with the structural influences that play into it, we can get at a better position to look into all the uncertainties and understand journalism's democratic function in the post-truth era.

In sum, using the analytical framework as sketched out above, this dissertation will look into the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists in the dimensions of discourse, practice and text, through analyzing the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by journalists at the selected media platforms, the interviews of key authors and editors, and secondary materials including these journalists' writings/statements, media organizations' documents and relevant articles published in media criticism journals. Through the analysis, it seeks to offer a detailed understanding of the contestation over objectivity by addressing the following questions.

First, what main differences in their approaches to objectivity were manifested in their coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate? Relating to the specific elements (values and standards, forms of content, practices, skills), what differences in their ways of enacting objectivity were shown in the text? How did they depict social reality concerning healthcare reform and gun control debate differently, as reflected in the journalistic account?

Secondly, how did they engage in the discursive struggle over epistemic authority? How did they evaluate their own work, and what did they enlist as the key elements that were expressive of objectivity? How did they evaluate the work by journalistic practitioners from the other platforms, and what did they mention as the key elements that showed the differentiation between each other, and the transgression of objectivity as they understood?

Thirdly, according to their description of the activities involved in the coverage, how did they collect and process facts through specific procedures to enact the approach to objectivity as they discursively claim? In these practices, what resources were available to facilitate the journalistic coverage of the two issues, and how did they utilize these resources to enable the pursuit of objectivity as they understood? What influences from outside the journalistic field (political elites, market and the civil society) came into play in these practices?

Lastly, the findings for these questions will be synthesized and discussed to summarize the dynamics of contestation in the three dimensions and consider its meaning for democracy. When we consider the overall contestation as reflected in content, played out in discourse, and performed in practice altogether, how does it contribute to the re-articulation of the meaning of objectivity? What are its implications for the theoretical understanding of the notion of journalistic objectivity, and for the understanding of journalism's role in the post-truth era?

In all, this research is intended for building an in-depth understanding of the contestation from the vantage point of the journalistic field theory as a mezzo-level framework, connecting micro-sociological discourse and practices to structural forces and implications (Benson, 2013).

An Overview of Dissertation

My dissertation includes seven chapters. After this chapter, I will lay out my theoretical framework on the dynamics of the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists and its journalistic field conditions in Chapter Two. I will explain the selection of media and issues and describe the methods for data collection and analysis in Chapter Three. In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I will present the results about the contestation over objectivity in its three interrelated dimensions: journalistic text, discourse and practice. Chapter Seven will be for summarizing all the findings and reflecting on the implications for journalistic objectivity and journalism's democratic function.

In Chapter Two, I will describe the contestation as an unfolding, tension-filled, contingent process where the two groups of actors seek to re-articulate the meanings of objectivity via journalistic discourse and practice. Then based on a review of the field theory and prior research on journalistic objectivity and the journalistic field, I will present a theoretical framework for understanding the process from the field perspective by following four steps. Firstly, I will delineate the realm of power relationships where the contestation occurs, explaining the actors' positions within the journalistic field and in relation to social structure, as well as their corresponding differentiations in capital possessed, production mode and attitude to professional ideology. Secondly, I will highlight the two groups of actors' conflicting ways of enacting the ideal of objectivity as the key crus of their field differentiation, demonstrating their conflicting ways of enactment by laying out specific elements (values and standards, forms of

content, routines and practices, and expertise) in their approaches to objectivity. Thirdly, I will explicate how the contestation constitutes an important component of the “meta-journalistic discourse” (Carlson, 2016, p. 349), where the journalists struggle to establish, maintain and remake their epistemic authority through the sociological processes of boundary-work and reflexivity. In such processes, they discursively ascribe meanings for and build connections among different elements in their approaches to objectivity, negotiating the boundary of journalism and staking their different authority claims. Then I will also talk about the different dimensions of the contestation and locations in the journalistic field where such processes take place or get manifested. Fourthly, using the theoretical framework and drawing on prior journalism research, I will develop a series of hypotheses for examining the textual manifestation of the contestation in the content coverage of issues by journalists differently positioned in the journalistic field. I will also formulate research questions to guide the examination of the contestation as played out in discourse, their different approaches to objectivity as performed in practice, as well as resources involved in their practice and heteronomous influences from outside of the journalistic field.

In Chapter Three, “Data and Methods”, I will start with the rationale for choosing the method of comparative case study for my research. This method option, combining in-depth contextual understanding of the case study approach with the consideration of systematic variation on key theoretical constructs (Ragin & Schneider, 2011), is a good fit for understanding a complicated notion such as journalistic objectivity in relation to the variation in field positions. Then I will explain why the four media outlets were selected, with their key variations in the aspects of professional status, political ideology and media technology. I will also explain why the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate, and how similarities and contrasts of two

issues are helpful for my purpose of research. Background information for each media outlet and issue will help further demonstrate their variations and similarities. Following all the explanation, I will go to details about data collection and analysis, focusing on explicating 1) the steps taken to sample and code articles from the issue coverage, 2) the procedure of selecting and interviewing reporters, bloggers, and editors, 3) selecting and interpretively reading the articles of particular importance for my research, and 4) collecting secondary materials to complement the understanding of contestation over objectivity from the previous three sources of data.

In Chapter Four, I will present results to show the varied manifestation of objectivity in the news coverage and opinion representation of the issues among the selected media outlets. In content analysis, I will examine the relationships between the outlets' professional status and the textual manifestation of objectivity in various aspects: the content forms of news vs. opinions, the standards of balance and transparency in news reporting, news sources of elected officials vs. ordinary citizens, the width of the range of news topics, types of information cited in support of opinions, and structural balance of opinion representations. I will also examine the relationships between their variation in political ideology and the favorability of their opinions, and between their variation in media technology and the proportion of content aggregation pieces in news.

The results confirm many of the hypothesized variations in the textual manifestation of objectivity by these outlets' professional status. The normative prescriptions of objectivity in journalistic professionalism, such as the predominance of news production, the compliance to the standards of balance and fairness, and the focus on using official sources and information channels, remained the tag of issue coverage by *the Washington Post* newspaper and blog. By comparison, those outlets located more toward the citizen journalistic end were more focused on opinion expression and more reliant on using personal observations and experiences for evidence

in their opinions. In news coverage, those outlets were less balanced and covered a narrower range of news topics. But meanwhile they were more transparent and paid more attention to such topics as public debate and advocacy around healthcare reform and gun violence. The results also show that the favorability of opinion representation was in line with the outlets' ideological leanings, and the proportion of content aggregation pieces in news coverage was higher for the digital media platforms than for the traditional media platform, *the Washington Post* newspaper.

Moreover, these results also contain some interesting nuances. The first one is the issue dependency of some hypothesized relationships. For example, in opinion articles on gun control debate, unlike those on healthcare reform, *the Washington Post's* proportion of opinion articles citing personal observation and anecdotes was not smaller than *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, and opinion polarization among the ideologically left and right media outlets was more pronounced. These suggest that in the context of gun control debate as a moral cultural war issue, both professional and citizen journalists could have stronger opinions rooted in cultural values and personal experiences. The second nuanced point lies in the surprise of how some relationships turn out to be different from the hypotheses. For example, although a main discursive challenge to professional news media by citizen journalists is the ignorance of grassroots reality, the proportion of news articles that cited ordinary citizen sources did not differ significantly by these media outlets' professional status. Results like this suggests that there can be much more to the contestation over objectivity that goes beyond the dimension of journalistic text and needs to be understood in the dimension of discourse.

While Chapter Four shows the varied manifestations of objectivity among media outlets in their content of issue coverage, Chapter Five gets to focus on the core discursive dimension of the contestation over objectivity, listening directly to the voices of professional and citizen

journalists from these media outlets. Interview data are front and center in this chapter. I will offer the narratives of how these journalists talked about their own approaches to objectivity and about those of the other journalists in the field. In the narratives, I will highlight how they ascribe meanings to different elements involved in their approaches and their peers' approaches so as to negotiate the boundary of journalism and stake their respective epistemic authority claims.

The results show the boundary of journalism as a realm of contestations. The journalists at the media outlets differently located in the journalistic field expressed different understandings about journalism and the pursuit of journalistic objectivity, establishing competing authority claims. For the citizen journalists of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, some aspects of social reality that mattered to them did not get enough attention from the public. Their pursuit of objectivity was grounded in the political activism of advocating for these aspects of social reality. They justified their blurring of the boundary between journalism and political activism through the critique of professional journalism's failures, and to the backdrop of the broader social political context.

For the professional journalists of *the Washington Post*, the pursuit of objectivity was grounded in providing shared factual knowledge for people with diverse opinions in political and civic debate. They made sense of their pursuit of factuality and fairness as a process that required professional expertise and served journalists' democratic obligation. They expected citizen journalists to follow the professional standards, improve expertise, and contribute more to the civic discourse.

For the bloggers, reporters and editors of *the Huffington Post*, objectivity was obtained in the reasoned engagement of citizens as civic observers with a voice. Through their narrative of "doing journalism in a new way", they appraised the problems in both professional journalism

and citizen journalism, seeking to carve out a semi-professional space where their ways of doing journalism were the amendment of those problems.

The results revealed some overall patterns in these journalists' discursive contestation over objectivity. First, no matter how they defined journalism, all of them tried to shore up their epistemic authority by emphasizing their following of a set of standards and practices in reporting/blogging, although with different focuses on the standards and practices. Secondly, for professional journalists of *the Washington Post*, their boundary-work was mainly focused on the question of what vision of journalism should prevail as the valid approach for making representation of social reality, rather than the question of what journalistic accounts of social reality on specific issues were more truthful. By comparison, citizen journalists' discourse was focused on the latter question. Thirdly, citizen journalists' challenge to professional journalists' approach to objectivity was deeply interwoven with their respective political ideological leanings, which led them to call different elements in the professional approach into question.

With Chapter Four that shows the varied manifestations of objectivity in the content of issue coverage and Chapter Five that presents the voices of journalists discursively contesting how objectivity should be accomplished, there is a further question to be answered: Were these journalists' different approaches of objectivity as they claimed actually accomplished in their journalistic practices involved in the coverage of the issues? Chapter Six takes on the task of answering this. By integrating interview data, secondary materials and interpretive reading of the content of issue coverage, I will describe how these journalists enacted their approaches to objectivity through different ways of conducting/organizing journalistic activities, and explain the resources they utilized as well as the heteronomous influences they were susceptible to in these practices.

The results show the fluidity of their journalistic practices for the accomplishment of objectivity. There was no single, solid way of doing journalism for news outlets differently located in the journalistic field, but a variegated, fluid picture of different ways of doing journalism by the practitioners who occupied different locations in the field and had different understandings of objectivity. Professional journalists of *the Washington Post* were, in Robinson's (2006) apt words, "careful to play the postmodern game" (p. 79). In the online enterprise of *the Washington Post* blog, its journalists were trying out some new way of information collection and new content to be taken as news, while at the same time abided by professional standards and routines in these experimental practices. The bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* were aggressive in remaking journalistic practice for the dualistic purpose of information and political activism. They made their journalism speak for their political ideology and serve the goal of activism by relying on partisan media information, using call-to-action messages and coordinating with online citizen groups. The journalistic practitioners of *the Huffington Post* hybridized the practices from professional and citizen journalistic approaches, relying on the combined efforts from professional journalists and bloggers in both their blogging platform and their news reporting operation.

Moreover, for all the journalists, journalistic practices were supported with the different types of resources they had access for in their specific field locations, but the locations also made them susceptible to different heteronomous influences. From the results, we will see that the bloggers at *Daily Kos* and *RedState* utilized the networked social capital to initiate various forms of group collaboration in journalistic production, but the conflicts between ideological groups within the social network of bloggers also dampened their journalistic engagement and led to self-censorship. For professional journalists of *the Washington Post*, their access to official

sources and the newspaper's financial resource were greatly useful for their journalistic production. But the market influence, especially in time of financial difficulty, led to the over-emphasis on horserace coverage. Political elites' control of information sometimes forced them to the overuse of autonomous sources. *The Huffington Post*'s commercially driven pursuit of website traffic made it a highly popular hub of information and attracted huge financial investment, which supported the practices for the accomplishment of objectivity as understood by their journalists. But the pursuit of website traffic also necessitated clickbait news that its journalists were not proud of, compromising their commitment to the best of traditional journalism as its founders claimed. The analysis of resources and influences showed us the tension from the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy for these journalists, which suggests further uncertainty in their already fluid practices for the accomplishment of objectivity.

Chapter Seven, the last chapter, will tie the threads of findings from the three results chapters. Through synthesizing the findings on the varied manifestations of objectivity in content between the different media outlets, their journalists' discursive contestation over objectivity, and the performance of objectivity in their practice, I will summarize the contestation over objectivity as a social process of these journalists "re-articulating" the meaning of objectivity. As Stuart Hall explained about the articulation of ideology as a process of "expressing" and "linking" (Grossberg, 1986; Slack, 1996), these journalists across the different field positions were engaged in expressing their different understandings of objectivity by connecting or disconnecting the elements of values, standards and practices related to objectivity in different ways. They joined their discursive claims together with their practices in the context of covering specific issues, and in their practices, the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy were also brought into play. I will highlight the less obvious aspect of critical reflection to the re-

articulation process. These journalists' critical evaluation of performance by other practitioners, and some self-critical appraisal of problems in their own performances were revolving around some shared questions about factuality and public interest. Although they answered these questions differently, this aspect of critical reflection made their contestation a continued reminder of the importance of these core objectivity elements.

Following the synthesis, I will interpret the theoretical and real-world implications of my research. My research contributes to the understanding of journalistic objectivity as an adaptive norm and its relevance to the increasingly decentralized realm of journalistic work. It shows objectivity as a living system that is rooted in the enlightenment traditions, and constantly re-articulated by journalists to remain relevant. The standards and practices for the pursuit of objectivity have been and will be constantly contested and negotiated, given the increasing decentralization of journalistic work, and the increasing complexity of the social reality. But meanwhile the respect for facts and the commitment to public interest, which harkens back to the enlightenment traditions, remain the core principles in objectivity. The core principles allow journalistic practitioners and scholars to find a normative anchor point in their contestation over journalistic objectivity, and to make meaningful reflections about problems in the existing approaches to objectivity and push for further changes. Based on this understanding of objectivity, and considering the challenges to journalism in the post-truth politics, I will propose a reflexive and pluralistic vision of journalism as a fact-seeking public undertaking, where journalists are always on the lookout for underrepresented facts that the public care about, and journalism is conducted as an open inquiry that professionals and non-professionals work together to thoroughly represent pluralistic perspectives.

Overall, by examining the contestation over objectivity, I hope to depict how journalism has become a realm of empirical fluidity and power struggle. But meanwhile, the contestation is also an agentic, reflexive meaning making process that points to some potential ways of confronting the challenge of post-truth politics. It is my humble hope that these potential ways as highlighted here would invite further thoughts and lead to better answers.

Chapter 2

Re-articulating Objectivity:

Epistemic Authority Struggle in the Journalistic Field

For about a century, objectivity has remained the cornerstone of journalism's professional ideology in America (Deuze, 2005). It has been codified into normative principles such as factuality, balance and neutrality (Westerstahl, 1983), and a corresponding set of routine news practices (Tuchman, 1972). It has served as a crucial basis on which news media and journalists can make the claim to epistemic authority of journalism, that is, the legitimate power to make a valid and credible representation of social reality concerning current affairs of public importance (Carlson, 2017; Gieryn, 1999; Schudson & Anderson, 2009).

Yet this tenet of journalism has not been a fixed doctrine, but rather an evolving set of ideas taking significance from journalists' practices and discourse in response to broader social historical trends (Maras, 2013). Or in Stuart Hall's term, it has been historically shaped in the processes of articulation and re-articulation by the actors in the space of journalism (Grossberg, 1986; Slack, 1996). The procedure has contained consensus as well as negotiations, oppositions and contestations (Schudson, 1978; Zelizer, 2004). What this dissertation examines is the on-going contestation over objectivity between professional journalists and citizen journalists. It is an unfolding, tension-filled, contingent process where these actors seek to re-articulate the meanings of objectivity via their journalistic discourse and practice as situated in and connected to changes and challenges in the structure of contemporary American society.

The dissertation draws on French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (2005) theory of the journalistic field as the framework to understand the process of "re-articulating" objectivity as a struggle for epistemic authority by professional and citizen journalists in their different positions

of the journalistic field, and under structural influences from outside the journalistic field. The field theory has been used in the research of American journalism concerning topics such as national media system characteristics (Benson, 2013), mainstream media opinions (Jacob & Townsley, 2011), mainstream vs. partisan media (Rohlinger, 2007), and online media (Vos, Craft & Ashley, 2012). It offers a good mezzo-level theoretical toolkit to examine the systematic variation and interaction between media players, and to make the structural explanation for micro-sociological journalistic discourse and practices (Benson, 2013; Robinson, 2017). For this dissertation in particular, this theory contains two points of great importance. First, there is a dialectic relationship between the actors' struggle in the field and the field mechanism, the former being structured by and also structuring the latter (Martin, 2003). Second, the actors' struggles involve contradictory pressures from autonomous and heteronomous forces, endowing the struggles with profound implications for the society (Couldry, 2003).

Using the field theoretical perspective (Benson, 2006, 2013; Bourdieu, 1984, 2005), I lay out my analytical framework as comprised of three aspects. First, the competition between professional and citizen journalists is a key dimension of dynamics of the journalistic field during the Internet Era. It is determined by the necessity of maintaining and reinforcing their respective positions in the field which, in turn, correspond to different relationships with politics, market and the civil society. Secondly, with regard to objectivity, their contestation boils down to their conflicting ways of understanding and enacting the epistemic ideal of objectivity. It is revealed in the contrast of specific elements of their journalistic work (i.e., values, forms, practices and skills), in their different representations of social reality, and in their discourses about journalistic objectivity and social reality. Thirdly, their contestation over objectivity is a struggle for epistemic authority, through which the actors adjudicate how journalism should be

accomplished to construct the representation of social reality as valid and credible, construct their jurisdictional boundary, and negotiate the allocation of legitimacy for them as the practitioners of journalism. The epistemic authority struggle may also involve the actors' engagement in reflexive discourse and practice, seeking to redefine the boundary of journalism and settle their authority claims accordingly. Taken together, it constitutes the dynamics involved in the process of these actors re-articulating the meanings of objectivity. Being situated in the broader social structure, it is enabled and/or constrained by influences from politics, market and the civil society, and thereby has profound implications for the democratic role of journalism in society. From this analytical framework, a set of hypotheses and research questions are derived to guide the study in this dissertation.

The Articulation of the Epistemic Ideal of Objectivity

During the past two decades, American journalism has seen the trend of increasingly wide participation by citizens from all walks of life. Journalism, according to Schudson (2003), refers to the periodical activities of collection, production and dissemination of information and opinions regarding current issues of public significance. It fulfills the social function of keeping the public record and animating public discussion (Carey, 2000, 2007). Here, the term "citizen journalism" is used for the performance of journalism activities and its social function by ordinary citizens who are not professional staff employed in the news industry. Citizen journalism had been sporadic before 1990s (Downing, Ford, Gil & Stein, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001), but it has become phenomenal in the recent two decades due to the development and popularization of Internet communication technologies. People no longer need to join a professional news media organization to conduct journalistic work. They are free to publicize their content through blogs, social media and other online platforms. Regarding current affairs

that matter to their class, gender, race, interest group or fans' club, they can produce information and opinions as frequently as professional journalists, and with no less influence in their online communities (Atton, 2009). The collective contribution of ordinary citizens gathering around a shared topic or issue can make a powerful voice that is often comparable to and sometimes even setting agenda for professional news media (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2012).

Most importantly, the rise of citizen journalism has posed a challenge to what Hackett and Zhao (1998) called “the regime of objectivity” of mainstream media. Objectivity, for professional journalists in America, is the cornerstone of their professional ideology (Deuze, 2005). They are committed to normative standards including factuality, balance, and neutrality (Schudson, 1978; Ward, 2010). They use news-reporting strategies such as presenting conflicting views and utilizing quotation marks so as to appear impersonal (Tuchman, 1972). They resort to routinized and bureaucratized news gathering procedures, capturing stories about social reality through the “news-net” as constituted of various bureaus, desks, beats and sources (Tuchman, 1978). Such standards, strategies and procedures allow professional journalists to make a claim to objectivity, giving journalism its unique focus of professional jurisdiction on the turf of journalistic work (Schudson & Anderson, 2009). This claim to objectivity also lends credibility to professional journalists' construction of social reality for the public, legitimizing the status quo of power in the society (Tuchman, 1978). In contrast, most citizen journalists, with neither resources nor interest for the professional practices of objective reporting, rely on personal perspectives, community experiences, and second-hand information to produce their content, and mingle information with direct expression of opinions and emotions (Lowrey, 2006; Reese et al., 2007; The Huffington Post, 2008). Their journalistic content, thus created, often show a picture of social reality different from and invisible in the mainstream media (Robinson, 2009), calling

into question the political and economic power that looms behind media institutions (Indymedia, 2020; Wall, 2005). It shakes public faith in the professional norm of objectivity and in the order of social reality as imposed by professional news media and journalists.

The contestation over objectivity between citizen journalists and professional journalists is the focus of this dissertation. Their contestation over objectivity contains citizen journalists' outcry of dissatisfaction with professional journalists' objective news reporting. For example, for famous blogger Glenn Greenwald, it is "a cowardly and unhelpful 'here's-what-both-sides-say-and-I-won't-resolve-the-conflicts' formulation", which constitutes a key problem of mainstream media that erodes the public trust for them (Keller, 2013). The contestation also contains professional journalists' responses to such challenges, sometimes criticisms of citizen journalism being not objective. Citizen journalism is "a lot of slander and personal anger", "but not news" (Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010, p. 170). For them, it remains crucial for a journalist to set personal opinions aside and work as an objective observer (Keller, 2013).

It would be interesting to note some nuances in the contestation, too. On one side, despite citizen journalists' unwillingness to use the standards of objective reporting in their own practice, they still criticize mainstream media for failing to live up to these standards (Vos et al., 2012). Some of them still emphasize the importance of accuracy and truthfulness for their own personalized narratives and opinionated writings (Robinson, 2009; Indymedia, 2020). On the other side, while professional journalists try to defend the norm of objectivity as well as the importance of routine news practices of objective reporting, some of them actually have started to reflect upon limitations of their ways of doing journalism and recognize the value of citizen journalistic practices. They have opened their own blogs to share personalized narratives in

addition to straight reporting (Robinson, 2006), and incorporated neighborhood bloggers into their news partnership (Associated Press Media Editors, 2010).

To understand what exactly goes on here, let us revisit Lichtenberg's (1991) philosophic unpacking of the notion of journalistic objectivity. She pointed out that journalistic objectivity contains not only a system of methods and specific working principles like factuality, balance and neutrality used by professional journalists, but also the epistemic ideal of objectivity. The methods and working principles are the operationalization of the ideal, while the ideal itself is the epistemic essence, standing for an interest in objective truth. She emphasized further that this ideal, the interest in objective truth, is indispensable not only for professional journalists' operationalization of objectivity, but also for all the criticisms of it. Here, likewise, in the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists, no matter what their positions are, they are not divorced from the epistemic ideal. Their challenge and criticism, or their persistence, defense and adaptation, all these different stances essentially revolve around how the epistemic ideal of objectivity should be accomplished in the contemporary space of journalism as shared by both sides. In their contestation, the meaning of objectivity no longer lies in a pre-established system of methods and principles, but in the process of operationalization by these actors through their different understandings and enactments and their debates.

Here I borrow the term, articulation, from Stuart Hall (Grossberg, 1986; Slack, 1996), understanding the contestation as a process of these professional and citizen journalists "re-articulating" the meanings of objectivity. In his interview with Grossberg (1986), Hall explained the dualistic implications of what he refers to as articulation, that is, articulation as expression and as linkage. According to Hall, a discourse is not simply the sum of social members' utterances. The unity of a discourse comes from social members' making linkages between

distinct elements of the discourse “which can be re-articulated in different ways, because they have no necessary belongingness” (p. 52). It is a sense-making process that is embedded in people’s daily practices, situated in specific social historical context, and connected to structural forces. From the perspective of articulation, ideology is not a given entity, but articulated through the process of interpretation, negotiation and opposition by people, where structural forces are also brought into play. Hall used this perspective to reveal the complexity of culture, ideology and hegemony in modern society, especially when it involves mass media and audiences (Sparks, 1996). Despite my different subject of research being journalistic objectivity as a professional ideology, I use the term, articulation, for its theoretical emphasis on the above-explained articulation procedure. The emphasis reveals social members’ potential for negotiating prevailing ideology via dynamic sense-making processes as embedded in their daily practices, and the expression of power relationships and structural forces in the processes. It makes an apt characterization for what is happening in the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists, which is an ongoing, tension-filled process of these actors’ re-articulating the meanings of objectivity through interpretations, debates and negotiations, which expresses the competition for epistemic authority among these actors and the changing configuration of the realm of journalism, and which also links to the larger forces of technology, politics and market.

This focus on the process of the articulation of objectivity is justified, because objectivity has been in essence “an adaptive norm” throughout journalism history (Maras, 2013, p. 139). In US journalism, objectivity was adopted as the organizational ethic used by reporters and editors in newsrooms starting from the late 1900s. It was then a disciplining principle mainly about staying with the facts and presenting facts with accuracy. Around 1920s and 1930s, it was fully recognized as the professional norm for journalism, when the society saw the increasing

influence of propaganda, advertisement and public relations, and meanwhile rising distrust in facts themselves (Schudson, 1978). Objectivity became a moral commitment for journalists and a set of established rules devised to separate facts and values. Later on, the norm of objectivity has been continually adapted to fit new needs or challenges for news work in society. For example, it has been adapted to the need of interpreting increasingly complicated society through doing interpretive journalism but in the ways that are “objective as it is humanly possible” (MacDougall & Reid, 1977). It has been adapted to the need of watchdogging government and business wrongdoings through doing investigative journalism that conveys a moral indignation (Ettema & Glasser, 1998). Photojournalists have developed the standards of objectivity as fit specifically for visual production (Schwartz, 1992). Oftentimes these adaptations have involved contestations. Regarding investigative journalism, the debates on the tension between objectivity and value-loaded expression of moral indignation, or that between the professional image of objective observers and the heroic celebrity-like role of whistleblowers, have continued for years (Carlson, 2011; Kornblut, 2005). Through such debates, investigative journalists recognized their problems of work and devised the methods for using “carefully documented web of facticity” to convey the highly charged “journalistic ironies” (Ettema & Glasser, 1998, p. 92). Similarly, photojournalists’ perennial debates around facts vs. arts have led them to develop different visual approaches to objectivity, from only visually “recording” news events in early times, to using naturalistic images to connote symbolic meanings and reflecting the macro-level truth using studio artistic shoots in recent years (Gleason, 1998; Liu, 2013; Schwartz, 1992). Given all the adaptations and contestations, it is fair to say that journalistic objectivity is never an invariant doctrine, but rather an encompassing epistemic ideal that has been constantly articulated and re-

articulated by journalists in their work. In Deuze's (2005) words, it is "the embrace, rejection as well as critical reappraisal of objectivity" that has helped to keep it alive (p. 448).

To focus on the process of articulation in our consideration of objectivity can also find support in the broader philosophical discussion of knowledge and knowing. According to late philosopher Hilary Whitehall Putnam (2002), the ideal of objectivity, the interest in objective truth, matters in the sense that reality, even the human-constructed social reality, is not anyone's invention, therefore constituting the objective reality independent of human perspective. But in people's attempts to understand the objective reality, facts and values are invariably interwoven. For example, it must involve human values to determine what object is worthy of being known, what framework should be used to examine it, and what structure is to be needed to present the findings (Weber, 1995). Empirical findings also often lead to the creation of theories with a normative core about what is good or right (Taylor, 1995). Given that facts and values are invariably interwoven in human inquiry, we can only obtain knowledge about the objective reality through a long-term endeavor involving collective inquiry that combines and compares multiple perspectives, and thorough reflections on the influence of values on the inquiry process.

Because understanding the objective reality is such a long-term endeavor via reflection and collective inquiry, Putnam emphasized that, first of all, it is important to stress the belief in the objective truth, because the ideal of objectivity serves as the epistemological anchor point, keeping us ultimately answerable to the world in our attempts for knowledge. Secondly, it is important to combine "fallibilism and anti-skepticism" (Putnam, 1999, p. 110). That is to say, we should understand that all pursuits of objective truth are essentially value-based and therefore should be open to contestation. But at the same time we should not be susceptible to unprincipled skepticism. The attitude of fallibilism does not justify the unprincipled skepticism about all

knowledge claims, or even the arbitrary negation of the ideal of objectivity itself. Using this epistemological insight to consider the subject of journalistic objectivity, we understand that every operationalization of objectivity in journalistic work, whether it is by professional journalists or citizen journalists, is inherently limited, but this does not mean or justify a dismissal of the ideal of objectivity itself for journalism. All the norms and methods of objectivity must and should be open to contestation. It is rightly through the contestation that journalistic practitioners can keep re-articulating the ideal of truth seeking.

Compared to the prior debates over objectivity, the contestation between professional and citizen journalists is different since it goes beyond intra-professional debates, or the disputes by outsiders who do not engage in journalistic production. The critics now come from the multitude of ordinary citizens whose content production makes them an integral part of the space of journalism that used to be dominated by professional journalists. Amidst the contestation, the actors struggle around not only how the epistemic ideal should be understood and enacted, but also who has the legitimacy to conduct journalism.

To dig deeper into the phenomenon, this dissertation draws on the journalistic field theory from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 2005). Having developed the field theory in his research of French society and media, Bourdieu shared Stuart Hall's interest in the connection between social structure and the micro-level process of the construction of meanings, offering a theoretical toolkit that is apt for understanding and analyzing the mezzo-level dynamics that serve to link structural forces and micro-level dynamics. The next section explicates the key concepts and insights from the field theory, especially concerning the journalistic field.

The Perspective of the Journalistic Field Theory

A field, in Bourdieu's (1984; 1993; 1999) definition, is a mezzo-level social universe, a realm where certain social activities (e.g., literature, law, or journalism) take place in accordance with its internal mechanism, and the actors enjoy some relative autonomy from, while still being more or less susceptible to, structural influences. Each field is a network of relations between the positions occupied by different agents (i.e., individuals, groups, and organizations). It is embedded in the overall social space of the distribution of different forms of capital, including economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Actors in the field engage in constant struggles for the valued capital in the field. Their accumulation of economic, social and cultural capital all lay the foundation for symbolic capital, a form of power or authority that legitimates their demand for recognition, obedience or service of others (Joas & Knobl, 2009). The total volume of capital and the composition of different forms of capital vary among fields and among different segments of the same field. Depending on the volume of capital, some fields are more dominant than others (e.g., the legal field vs. the journalistic field), and some field segments are more dominant than the others (e.g., supreme court vs. the "ambulance-chaser" lawyers). Depending on the contrast of cultural vs. economic capital, some fields or segments of a field are richer in cultural capital and thus more autonomous from the heteronomous structural influences from politics and market (e.g., the academic field vs. the journalistic field; the avant-garde art vs. the popular art). In other words, it is essentially the distribution of capital that constitutes the basis of classification and hierarchy in the social space of fields and field actors.

According to the definition of field, journalism can be considered the journalistic field with its unique mechanism. All actors in this field must play the shared game, doing journalistic tasks in accordance with a set of journalistic values and routines. It makes the journalistic field a

social space that is differentiated from and partially autonomous from the other fields. The journalistic field can be conceived as part of the larger field of cultural production. Art, literature, social science and journalism are all parts of the field of cultural production, since all of them produce a certain understanding of society, a cultural product that does not have its value determined by material components. These fields are all characterized by the shared emphasis on the creation and maintenance of what Bourdieu (1993) called “belief”, the symbolic capital that legitimates the recognition for the value of their cultural products from both other producers in the same field and users of their products. According to Bourdieu (1993), the field of cultural production is situated within the field of power, because of its possession of a large amount of cultural capital, such as academic credentials and cultural prestige. But compared to those dominant fields of politics and economy, the field of cultural production occupies a relatively subordinate position within the field of power, because of its lower amount of economic capital.

Within the field of cultural production, Bourdieu (1993) again draws the delineation between the pole of large-scale production, and the pole of restricted production. The former is guided by demands from the large market of users and its mechanism is more governed by the logic of market, whereas the latter is guided more by small groups of users and peer evaluation, rich in cultural capital and more autonomous from market. According to Benson (1999), journalism is mostly inside the field of large-scale production, compared to other fields such as art, literature and social science, which are closer to the pole of restricted production. Therefore, compared to those fields, journalism is more susceptible to the heteronomous influences from politics and market. In a Russian-doll fashion, inside the journalistic field, there is also a system of differentiations between serious papers vs. tabloids, privately owned vs. public media, national vs. local media, old vs. new media, and so on. Some media organizations, such as

tabloids, are positioned closer to the pole of large-scale production and thus more susceptible to heteronomous influences, compared to serious papers or public media that are more autonomous. When we consider the internal struggle of the journalistic field, Bourdieu (2005) explained, it is important to understand that to exist in a field is to differentiate oneself. This necessitates the incessant competition among media organizations and journalists to defend their positions in field and the valued capital for them to be able to occupy their positions with legitimacy.

Bourdieu's analysis of the journalistic field was grounded in the French reality during the 1970s-80s, where the differentiation between the dominant intellectual papers and the rising commercial TV was an important expression of the autonomy vs. heteronomy tension in journalism (Bourdieu, 1999). Old serious newspapers, such as *Le Monde*, thrived on the accumulated cultural resources, including the reputation as being credible mainstream papers. They are relatively placed at or near the autonomous pole of the journalistic field. Yet in the 1970s, large commercialized TV stations brought commercial pressure into “the heart of the journalistic field”, promoting ratings-oriented journalism and challenging the dominant status of intellectual papers (Benson, 1999). Seeing the mass influence of commercial TV, demagogic politicians used it to circumvent normal political process, and TV commentators used it to recycle received ideas. Therefore, commercialization not only increased the heteronomous influences of political and economic power on journalism, but also degraded the quality of political debate. Because journalism's role is to produce the understanding of social reality for the public, Bourdieu characterized the consequence as the symbolic violence that was exerted on the public by the system via the journalistic field. As Wacquant (2004) pointed out, Bourdieu's underlying concern in his field analysis is to highlight, warn the public against, and hope to negate the social negation of democracy.

Neveu (2007) stressed, in his article about how to use Bourdieu's theory in media study, that Bourdieu himself considers the field theory as something that "provides an engine to explore practical questions", rather than a theoretical mausoleum (p. 344). Since the journalistic field was not the focus of Bourdieu's research and his elaboration on the subject was based on the French case, it requires some adaptive reconsideration for us to apply the theory, especially in a non-French context. For instance, when Benson (2013) used it for the comparative study of American vs. French press, he pointed out that although Bourdieu emphasized the autonomy of a field, journalism researchers should recognize the nuanced roles of the so-called heteronomous forces in the journalistic field. The influences from politics or market can also be conducive to media's role of representing social reality for the public. Since journalism's "democratic *raison d'être* is to be open to all elements and aspects of society" (p. 24), he emphasizes the need to pay great attention to the balance of power from competing heteronomous forces and its contribution to journalistic autonomy. For example, In the American case, the autonomy of prestigious media such as *the New York Times* or *the Washington Post* is "in fact a delicate balancing act among civic, political and market demands" (p. 200).

This dissertation draws upon two central insights from the field theory, based upon the research of Bourdieu as well as that of other scholars who used and developed Bourdieu's theory (Benson, 2013; Couldry, 2003; Martin, 2003). First, a field analysis of journalism is primarily characterized by a perspective of dialecticism between the practices of actors and the field mechanism (Martin, 2003). On the one hand, actors in the journalistic field must play the shared game of journalism. They need to do it with the specific amounts and forms of capital that are available for their different positions in the field. They need to stick with their respective ways of doing journalism to reinforce their positions and maintain their differentiation. In other words,

their actions and the power struggles involved therein can be explained by recourse to the rule of the field game, and the positions, relationships and capital distribution in the field. On the other hand, within their struggles, “what is at stake ... is not simply which individual will be the winner, but what kind of game and hence, what kinds of players will dominate the field in the future” (Martin, 2003, p. 23). In other words, their power struggles also serve to shape the definition of how journalism should be conducted in the future, and which actors have the legitimacy to conduct journalism. To summarize, from this dialectic perspective, the field struggle is both constrained by the field mechanism and generative of the field mechanism.

Secondly, a field analysis of journalism, according to Couldry (2003), should pay great attention to the contradictory pressures from autonomous and heteronomous forces that are inherent in field struggles. It is a crucial crux for understanding journalism’s performance of its democratic function. For actors in the journalistic field, the autonomous forces can come from journalists’ dedication to news values and routines (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), prestige from professional prizes (Volz & Lee, 2013), and the cultural authority accumulated from long-time quality news work (Bourdieu, 2005). But to maintain these bases of journalistic autonomy, it oftentimes involves a symbiosis with, or sometimes even submission to heteronomous forces, such as the power of official sources over news production, or the influence of news ratings over media organizations that hope to maintain a revenue in support of high-quality news production. These influences are thus often normalized, or using Bourdieu’s term, “refracted”, in journalism’s internal mechanism relating to sources or ratings. Amidst the complicated interplay of autonomous and heteronomous forces, are the actors in the journalistic field able to maintain a delicate balance among competing heteronomous forces to win journalistic autonomy (Benson, 2013), or allow heteronomous forces to exert symbolic violence on the public via journalism

(Bourdieu, 1999)? Leading us to pay attention to questions like these, an analysis of the interplay of autonomous and heteronomous forces and how actors do journalistic work given these forces will enable us to recognize the conditions that weaken or reinforce journalism's democratic role.

In recent years, the field theory has gain increased attention in the research of journalism in America. Scholars have used it as an explanatory framework for the dynamics of competition and struggle between media or different journalistic practitioners, or the external influences of politics and economy. They revealed how bloggers used media criticism to challenge the status of mainstream media (Vos, Craft & Ashley, 2012), how political talk shows and newspapers maintained and reinforced their differentiation (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011), and that the party system and market competition had dampening effects on substantive and multi-perspectival news (Benson, 2009, 2013; Rohlinger, 2007). These studies have shown the value of the field theory for understanding the phenomena of journalism outside the French context. As explicated in the next section, this dissertation draws on the field perspective to understand the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists as the struggle for differentiation and distinction in how they understand and accomplish objectivity in their work, and the authority to demand recognition for their journalistic work and legitimate their field existence. The struggle is mounted from their respective field positions. It is also embedded in the relationships between journalism and external social structure.

Unpacking the Contestation Between Professional and Citizen Journalists

According to Carlson (2016), journalism is a practice with its social cultural meaning arising from what he calls "meta-journalistic discourse." The meta-journalistic discourse is the discourse about journalism, which is constituted of the expressions by journalistic practitioners or external social actors who evaluate "news texts, practices that produce them, or the conditions

of their reception” (p. 350). The producers of meta-journalistic discourse include journalistic practitioners, both professional journalists and non-professionals, and also include non-journalists, such as “government officials, historians, entertainment media and educators” (p. 356). The meta-journalistic discourse can occur within the textual universe of the news media, taking the forms of “coverage of news industry trends and journalists”, “meta-coverage stories about communication practices”, or “letters-to-the-editors” (p. 357). It also appears in the non-journalistic sites outside of news media, such as journalism reviews, memoirs and speeches at conventions. According to Carlson (2016), the meta-journalistic discourse serves three important functions: definition making, boundary setting and legitimization. That is to say, through the discourse, actors from within or without the journalistic field create, affirm or contest the meanings of journalistic norms, practices, products and practitioners. They engage in the rhetorical construction and reconstruction of the boundaries of what can be called journalism, thereby allocating the distribution of resources and authority. They establish, challenge, repair or transform the basis of the legitimacy of journalism as a valid and truthful provider of information and opinions about social reality that are worthy of shared belief by all actors.

In the decentralized realm of journalistic work, chief among the contributors of the meta-journalistic discourse are the two groups of journalistic practitioners in the journalistic field, professional and citizen journalists. Their contestation over objectivity is part of the process of constructing and reconstructing the meta-journalistic discourse. In the contestation, they try to reinforce or dispute the meanings of objectivity via their everyday news practices and talks. They try to defend or negotiate the boundary of journalism as a realm of work. The contestation also creates the possibilities for them to have dialogues, compare perspectives, and even reflect on the limitation of their respective models of the enactment of the epistemic ideal to inform new

practices. In this sense, the process of the two groups of actors re-articulating objectivity and settling the allocation of authority in the field through the contestation constitutes a significant component of the construction of the meta-journalistic process.

Professional vs. citizen journalists: field positions & structural relationships.

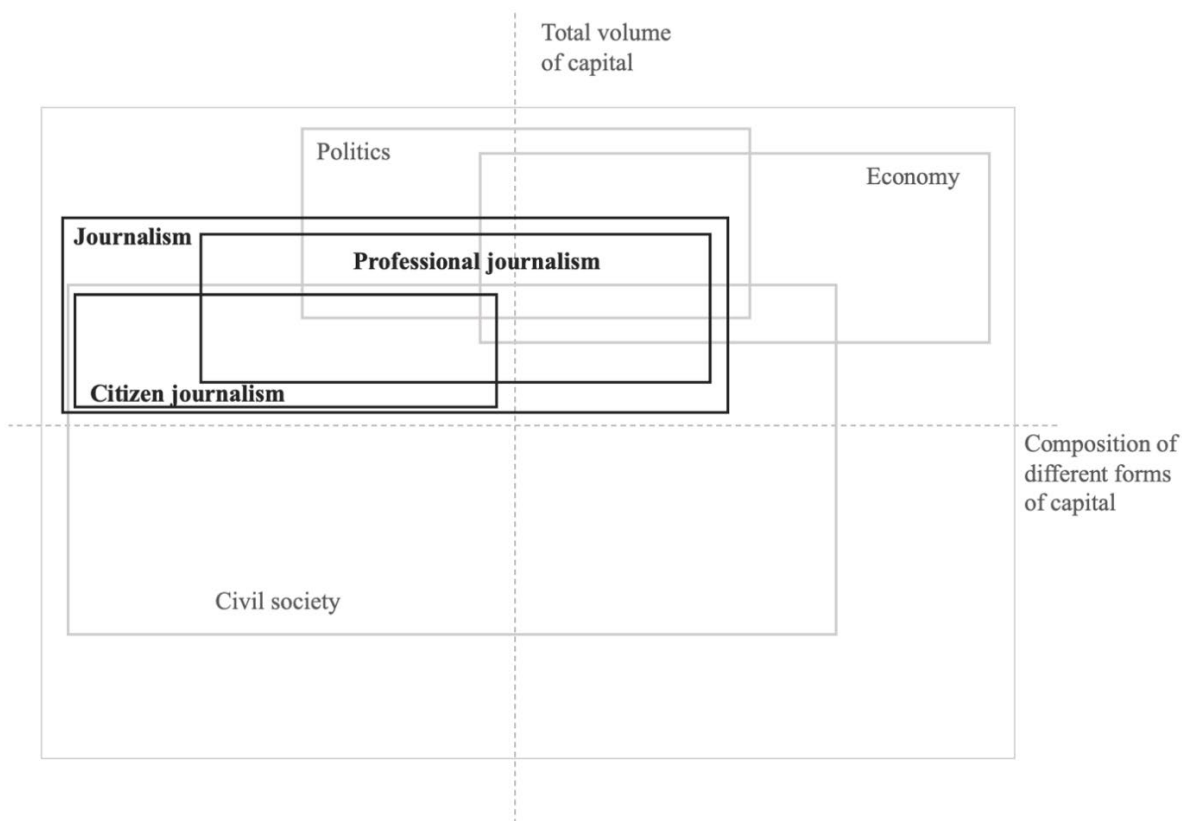
Borrowing Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) terms in their elaboration of the field theory, I consider the actors involved in the contestation, professional and citizen journalists, as occupying their respective positions of "the incumbent" vs. "the challenger" in the journalistic field, and featuring different structural relationships with politics, market and civil society. Specifically, in the following mapping of the journalistic field, I draw upon Bourdieu's (1984) two-dimensional structure of field as a space of capital distribution and highlight the connection of journalism and the civil society (Benson, 2013; Habermas, 2006) so as to facilitate the examination of citizen journalism and stress the importance for journalism to maintain the linkage between politics, market and the civil society.

As Figure 2.1 shows, the social space is structured, in the Bourdieusian fashion, by the two dimensions: the total volume of capital and the composition of different forms of capital. The civil society is an open network of spontaneously emergent associations, organizations and movements, which extends to scattered citizens in their lifeworld (Habermas, 1996). Its main part is comprised of the multitude of small-scale informal associations in offline and online communities, where citizens meet up to form mutual dependence and talk about publicly relevant matters. But it also includes opinion leaders, organizations and movements that can connect to, and help thematize and relay public opinions to influence news media, politics and market. Overall, the civil society owns less capital in total, thus being located only partly in the field of power and at a lower position than politics, economy and journalism. Its functioning relies more

on the social capital, which is maintained via citizens' interaction and further enabled by their utilization of Internet communication technologies. The journalistic field, in turn, is situated in between politics, economy and the civil society. Its functioning relies on not only economic and cultural capital that journalists and media organizations have, but also social capital in the form of these field agents' connections with various types of social members from political system, market, and the civil society. It plays the role of the intermediary between the political and economic system on one side and the civil society on the other, distilling considered public opinion to inform the political and economic system, while at the same time informing citizens about the politics and market (Habermas, 2006).

Figure 2.1

Professional journalism vs. citizen journalism: field positions and structural relationships



Within the journalistic field, despite the rising influence of citizen journalism, professional journalism still has the access to the rich store of economic capital that media organizations have accumulated from market operation, cultural capital that is derived from journalists' professional education, experience and awards, and the important social capital in their connections with authoritative sources. The large total amount of capital allows professional journalism to occupy the dominant position of "the incumbent" in the field, but meanwhile make it susceptible to the heteronomous influences from politics and market, thus being located toward the heteronomous pole of the field. This location close to the heteronomous forces, on the one hand, is helpful for journalists and media organizations to have the access to important information about the political and economic system. Yet on the other hand, it also comes at the cost of journalistic autonomy and news quality. In America, journalism is overall heavily commercialized, where the large majority of news media are owned by chain conglomerates or private families and rely on advertising revenue to support journalistic production (Schudson, 2003). The pressure of market competition has caused the tendencies of news tabloidization and trivialization (Carey, 2002; Ladd, 2012). Government and politicians have developed strategies to index and spin information for media, and the political influence over news media is further aggravated by the economic efficiency of using information provided by elected officials and government offices (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2008).

Unlike professional journalism, citizen journalism does not have as much economic and cultural capital. The key resource involved in citizen journalism is the extensive networked social capital in the form of loose connections among all the citizen journalistic practitioners. It places them in the lower, less powerful part of the field, but allows them to stay farther away from the heteronomous influences of political elites and market, therefore being located toward

the autonomous pole of the field. This does not mean a total autonomy for citizen journalism. On the one hand, it enables the information in the civil society to flow into news making procedures directly, no longer mediated by professional journalism, which helps introduce the authentic opinions from the civil society. Thus, citizen journalism can often offer the depiction of social reality in contrast to that by the mainstream media and without having to rely on the professional gatekeepers. This makes citizen journalism an important challenger to the authority of professional journalism. But on the other hand, its connection to the civil society also opens up the journalistic field to heteronomous influences from the civil society, such as demagogic rhetoric, inaccuracies, misinformation, or even total lies that are circulated in the talks among ordinary citizens. Also, because citizen journalism is positioned farther away from the political and economic system and it also lacks the institutional supports for collecting information about politics and market, it still relies heavily on professional journalism to receive news information about important political and economic matters in a top-down fashion.

The above explication shows the differentiation between professional journalism and citizen journalism as occupying different positions of the incumbent vs. the challenger in the journalistic field and featuring different structural relationships. More specifically, their differentiation is also manifested in sharp distinctions in their modes of production and their attitudes toward professional ideology.

Professional media organizations resort to highly bureaucratized, routinized mode of journalistic production (Tuchman, 1973, 1978). In these organizations, journalists are deployed to work at different desks, beats and hierarchical levels. They follow newsroom routines, adopting the agreed-upon news values, typifying events-as-news, and collecting information from routine channels (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1973). They share the

commitment to a set of professional ideological notions such as objectivity, independence and public service. The shared professional ideology binds them together as a professional unity, giving meaning to their work and reinforcing the legitimacy of their market control (Deuze, 2005). In many cases, professional ideology also allows them to counter the heteronomous influences, contributing to journalistic autonomy. Here, it is important to note that bureaucratized journalistic production both sustains and constrains professional journalists' commitment to professional ideology. On the one hand, through utilizing institutional support and coordinating as a system of desks, beats and hierarchical levels, professional journalists manage to attain a truthful and independent representation of social reality for the public. But on the other, routinized organization of news work also confines journalists to a predictable set of angles and sources in their construction of social reality, which prevents professional journalism from showing a complete picture of society, and also makes it likely for it to be affected by economic and political powers (Altheid, 1976; Cook, 1998; Tuchman, 1973).

Citizen journalists do not have enough resources to support highly bureaucratized and specialized organization of journalistic work. Their journalistic production relies instead on the commons-based peer production of information (Benkler, 2006). It is the vast online network of free information and content producers that enables their journalistic production in the absence of organizational support, allowing them to yield information and opinions on a regular basis and create substantial influences altogether. This mode of production is in essence an antithesis of the market dependency of professional news media, because it does not necessarily have to rely on a revenue from market operation to sustain journalistic production. Moreover, citizen journalists are often unwilling to be committed to professional ideological notions held by professional journalists. They place more emphasis on the values that they share with members of their offline

groups or online communities (Gillmor, 2006). In Atton's (2009) term, the core traits of citizen journalism are "de-capitalization" and "de-professionalization". This also determines that citizen journalism cannot be simply integrated into the game of journalism defined by professional journalists and media organizations, but rather poses a fundamental challenge to it.

Lastly, it should be noted that, despite all their distinctions, the two groups of actors are not neatly divided in the field. An overlapping space has been carved out, when highly successful citizen journalists were employed by professional media (Sullivan, 2013), or professional journalists migrated to online citizen media (Lowrey, 2012). Or in the case of *The Huffington Post*, an entire online enterprise was built upon a "pro-am" model that combines professional journalists' news reporting and ordinary citizens' blogging under editorial curation (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2012). Such cases constitute an ambiguous "semi-professional" section in the middle of the professional vs. citizen journalism line of differentiation. But even in this middle section, the two sides' differentiation and conflict still persist. For example, the partnership between renowned blogger Nate Silver and the New York Times was highly successful and impactful in their coverage of 2012 Presidential Election. But at the same time, there remains the conflict between Silver's way of doing journalism, and that of the Times reporters who believed Silver's political blogging, based on statistical analysis and prediction, violates the professional norm of fact-based reporting (Sullivan, 2013). Silver had to leave the New York Times in 2013 partly due to this fundamental conflict.

In sum, in the journalistic field, professional journalists, especially those at the major media organizations, occupy the position of the dominant incumbent, but it is challenged by citizen journalists who do not accept the game of professional journalism and conduct journalistic work in their own ways. Their distinctions across their field position, possession of

different forms of capital, mode of production and attitude to professional ideology determines that their main logic of interplay in the journalistic field is that of differentiation and conflict.

Conflicts in their ways of enacting objectivity. The field differentiation of professional and citizen journalists is epitomized in the different ways of how they enact the epistemic ideal of objectivity in journalistic work to represent and interpret social reality. For both sides, objectivity is enacted through a system of values, forms of content, practices and expertise, as shown in Table 2.1 on next page. These elements are put to work in these actors' coverage of issues and events, and are embedded in the relationships of the journalistic field with politics, economy and civil society. Most importantly, for both sides, these elements altogether function as their models of facticity, allowing them to define what fact is, gather and present information that is pertinent to issues and events under coverage, and construct their representation of social reality (Tuchman, 1978). Their different ways of enacting objectivity are in conflict with each other, and their contestation over objectivity is rooted in such conflicts, as explicated below.

Table 2.1

The enactment of objectivity by professional vs. citizen journalists through a system of journalistic elements: values and standards, forms of content, practices, and expertise

	Enactment of objectivity by professional journalists	Enactment of objectivity by Citizen journalists
Values & standards	Commit to the norm of objectivity as predicated on separation of facts & values; Use the standards of balance, neutrality & facticity	Commit to the norms of open participation & engaged citizenship; Use the standard of transparency; Oppose balance & neutrality
Forms of content	Draw the distinction between news vs. opinion pieces, with a relative emphasis on news reporting in US journalism	Produce content in various fluid forms, with citizen commentary being a main form of content in political blogging
Practices	Use routine sources & channels, often with official statuses; Coordinate hierarchically among desks, beats & bureaus	Use sources without official statuses; Focus on personal experiences & perspectives; quote mainstream media in support of opinions
Expertise	Rely on professional skills for handling sources, collecting information and writing news, and specialized knowledge in different domains of coverage	Rely on collective intelligence in their network, including technical skills, specialized knowledge & understanding of their audiences

The enactment of objectivity by professional journalists. The professional norm of objectivity was established and recognized by American press around the 1920s and 1930s, in response to the post-World War I cultural environment of suspicion, and the propagation of intellectual understanding about the socially constructed nature of reality in society. As Schudson (1978) points out, the norm arose from a distrust of the more or less value-loaded facts. It essentially denotes the commitment to fact-based news reporting as predicated on the importance of separating subjective values from facts. Over time, media organizations and journalists have developed a collection of standards, such as balance, neutrality and factuality, as the guidelines for their work for the purpose of separating values and facts (Ward, 2010). The implementation of the standards serves as a strategic ritual that is crucial for professional journalists to justify the claim to objectivity, and to avoid criticisms and labels (Tuchman, 1972). According to these standards, news reporting is supposed to represent the main viewpoints on both sides of an issue, adopt a neutral stance and a detached tone, emphasize the verification of facts, and attribute opinions to sources by quotation or careful paraphrasing.

Secondly, professional journalism's claim to objectivity is also based on the distinction of two forms of journalistic content, news articles vs. opinion pieces. While the afore-mentioned standards are strictly used in news articles to ensure the separation of values from facts, it is nonetheless allowed to foreground values and beliefs in opinion pieces, such as editorials and columns (Fowler, 1991). In order to make their claim to objectivity, media organizations partition news and opinions off each other, giving opinions their separate section or heading, and using institutional procedures to keep influences of editorial opinion out of news reporting (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008). Despite the existence of opinion journalism, the US media system, according to Hallin and Mancini (2004), is characterized by the dominance of the informational

style of journalism stressing fact-based news reporting. An anecdote in the history of journalism may help illustrate this point. In the 1970s, when the op-ed page of newspapers was first started in the U.S., it had to compete with obituaries for the space opposite the editorial page (Solocow, 2010).

The distinction of news articles vs. opinion pieces does not mean that objectivity is not relevant to opinion journalism. Opinion journalism is also emphatic on some objectivity-relevant guidelines, such as the usage of factual evidence in support of opinions, and the editorial arrangements for balance and fairness in the overall opinion offerings by a media outlet. For example, according to the standards used by opinion journalism awards and professional societies, good editorials and columns need to offer factual evidence fully and honestly, and demonstrate a command of context by presenting the relating events and options (National Conference of Editorial Writers, 1975; Sloan & Anderson, 2003). External columnists are invited for the purpose of balancing the possible slant of a media outlet's own editorial staff (Socolow, 2010). The opinion offerings by a media organization are expected to make a fair representation of diverse viewpoints from public debate on a continuing basis (Rosenfeld, 2000).

Thirdly, objectivity is accomplished through the highly routinized journalism practices. Deployed to gather news at particular desks, beats and bureaus, journalists have developed and followed routines that help them typify events into different news categories to report them differently, and collect quality information from sources and channels (Tuchman, 1973; Sigal, 1973). These routines are intended to capture diverse aspects of social reality with accuracy and efficiency. But as Gans (2004) pointed out, the routinized way of news collection means that information needs to be available to journalists to become news; but the extent of availability is "hierarchically and differentially distributed" in society (p. 81). The news net (Tuchman, 1978)

often serves to place more reporters for legitimated institutions and official sources, thereby legitimating the status quo of power in the society.

Fourthly, professional journalists cannot enact objectivity through the above-mentioned elements without the support of expertise. Professional expertise, according to Freidson (2001), is a body of skills and knowledge that are specialized and take time and efforts to acquire. Journalism, although it lacks highly sophisticated knowledge in a specific subject area, also requires expertise. For example, for professional journalists, it could take a lot of experience to acquire the working knowledge about how to get access to high-status sources or to interact with an ever-widening cadre of sources (Reich, 2012). Skills need to be learned about how to verify information around complex issues or do the observation on the unfolding of breaking news. Textual conventions for different genres of news articles and opinion pieces need to be commanded to organize information into writing (Carlson, 2017).

In sum, the enactment of objectivity in professional journalism is through a system of values and standards, forms of content, routinized practices and expertise, all developed around the core of their professional norm of objectivity. Based on the system, they get to define through their journalistic work what fact is and what are the pertinent information that should be presented to the public. For them, as Tuchman (1972) pointed out, facts need to be verified or at least imputed to documentable sources. Facts are located on both sides of a dispute, accessed through the news net, and valued by the degree of authority of channels and sources. Except in opinion journalism, journalists' own opinions are not considered relevant information, and should be stripped from the presentation of pure facts. The journalism-facticity linkage established like this allows professional journalists to make their claim to objectivity. But it has its problems. Politicians, with their source authority, obtain much influence on journalism, giving

rise to what Bennett, Lawrence and Livingstone (2008) called a symbiotic relationship between politics and journalism that can hinder the independent critical role of the Press. News media, embracing balance, avoid showing interest in those issues that some audience associate with liberal bias, such as inequality and global warming (Gans, 2014), but instead focus on the topics that have trivial public significance but fit the tastes of mass audience (Carey, 2002; Ladd, 2012). In other words, the model of facticity that is established in these ways of enacting objectivity allows professional journalists to represent social reality factually and efficiently on one hand, but also makes them susceptible to the heteronomous influences from politics and market. With the enactment of the ideal of objectivity like this, as Maras (2013) points out, professional journalists can be overemphatic on the pursuit of value neutrality as a strategic ritual in journalistic work, but forfeit the ethical commitment as implied in the epistemic ideal, such as the freedom of press in watchdogging the powerful and the obligation in calling out right or wrong on important public matters.

The enactment of objectivity by citizen journalists. The enactment of the epistemic ideal of objectivity by citizen journalists in their knowing process is built on normative basis unlike that of their professional counterparts. Their enactment of the epistemic ideal is guided by the norms of open participation and engaged citizenship. For them, the knowing of social reality should not be only assigned to a group of journalistic professionals. It should be open to every citizen who is willing to contribute to it (Lewis, 2012). The knowers cannot just position themselves as an impartial spectator. They use journalism as the site to express and forge their citizenship (McCauliff, 2011; Rodriguez, 2001). Correspondingly, they are not happy about the standards of balance and neutrality that professional journalist used to separate values from facts. They suggest “transparency as the new form of objectivity” (Weinberger, 2009). According to

this standard, citizen journalists' values and their information collection procedures are important facts that need to be made transparent, so that all the readers and the other citizen journalists can be allowed to make their own judgement and be incorporated in the process of knowing.

Secondly, citizen journalists are not enthusiastic about producing news articles that follow the conventions of professional journalism. There have been some cases of the production of purely factual and neutral news articles by citizen journalists, such as WikiNews, but the contributor base is not large (Ford, 2011; Thorsen, 2008). As Bruns (2006) explained, news articles, which presents facts as stripped from the author's opinions, cannot encourage people's passion for expression and the formation of a communal spirit, which are nonetheless crucial for the sustainment of online citizen journalistic networks. Citizen journalism occurs in many forms, such as publishing blogs, leaving comments on a news topic, sharing photos/videos (Lewis et al., 2010). There is not any fixed form that everyone follows. But at some of the most successful online communities of citizen journalism, many of them blogging sites, according to Bruns, Highfield and Lind (2012), the content often contains the element of citizen journalists' expression of opinions in response to political events. This "citizen commentary" makes a main form of citizen journalism at these political blogging websites. In citizen commentary, citizen journalists collate the published news and opinions from mainstream media, contextualize it with their own perspectives and experiences, offer new frames for interpretation, and make sense of social reality in the exchange of opinions with other members of the online communities. It is a knowing process that adds multiple perspectives on top of the representation of social reality by mainstream media and relies on an open network of citizen participants to do so (Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012).

Thirdly, in their journalistic practices, citizen journalists focus on collecting information about the grassroots level reality and use strategies to counter their limitations of time and resource. According to Bock (2015), many citizen journalists are motivated by the critique of mainstream media's reliance on official sources and government channels. They rely more on the sources who do not have official statuses, or the social reality as they see and experience by themselves. Such practices give recognition to marginal players who have been underrepresented in mainstream media, such as protesters in the anti-globalization movement (Groshek & Han, 2011), and make citizen journalists' lived experiences legitimate information that deserves attention (Bock, 2015). On the other hand, citizen journalistic practices are indeed limited by the lack of as much economic capital and time as professional journalists have. Examining the sourcing practices at a citizen news website, Reich (2008) found that citizen producers overall make very modest use of human sources. But limitations like this are complemented by citing mainstream media information. Lowrey and Latta (2008) found that political bloggers even developed their "routine" of quoting from mainstream media to support their opinions.

Fourthly, citizen journalism relies on a set of expertise as well. But it is unlike professional journalistic expertise that is owned by an exclusive group of journalists and serves the purpose of facilitating their professional control. Citizen journalistic expertise is the collective intelligence that exists in various forms within the extensive network of all citizen journalistic contributors who are often readers of citizen journalistic content themselves. For them, journalistic expertise can be the technical skills needed for conducting and organizing collective production on the digital platforms (Platon & Deuze, 2003). It can be the lay persons' command of knowledge on different specialized topics involved in citizen journalism (Anderson, 2008). It can be the knowledge that they have acquired about their audiences through sustained

socialization within their respective information communities (Ross, 2011). All these knowledge and skills emerge and get exchanged among them when they are collecting, processing and presenting information and opinions, and constitute a network of expertise that constantly contribute to their citizen journalistic production (Gillmor, 2004). It allows them to understand social reality relating to various topics, create an account of events in the ways their audiences like and trust, and do these tasks with technical proficiency.

In sum, the enactment of the epistemic ideal of objectivity by citizen journalists is through a collection of norms, standards, forms of content, practices and expertise that, in many places, show sharp conflict with professional journalism. The citizen journalistic approach does not shun facts. But unlike the professional journalistic approach, it takes citizen journalists' values and experiences as important and legitimate facts for audiences to know. It focuses more on the grassroots level reality and rely less on official sources. It appropriates the facts from mainstream media in support of citizens' opinion expression. Moreover, it holds that facts can be and should be presented with the authors' opinions, because the point is to invite discussion and engage all members of the open network in a collective inquiry of social reality. The enactment of objectivity like this both expresses and maintains the previously mentioned connection of citizen journalism and the civil society. On the one hand, it enhances the visibility of authentic narratives within grassroots communities and marginalized groups (Atton, 2009), constituting what Castells (2007) called the "counter-power" to challenge professional journalism and the power relations legitimated via professional journalistic work. But on the other, it also opens the gate to various forms of misinformation that are propagated among citizens due to the lack of effective verification mechanisms, and the anonymity of many citizen journalists that makes it hard to hold them accountable (Monroy-Hernández et al., 2013; Palser, 2009). Thus, while we

recognize the potential to counter the influences of political and market power in citizen journalism, we should also note that the civil society may still contain some influences to hinder the enactment of the epistemic ideal in their journalistic inquiry of social reality.

The contestation over objectivity. For professional and citizen journalists, the conflicts in their ways of enacting objectivity are manifested not only in how they practice their respective approach to objectivity, but also in how they talk about and legitimize what they do. As previously explained, the two groups of actors share the space of the journalistic field, but occupy distinct positions, featuring stark differentiations in their composition and volume of capital, their attitude to professional ideology and their structural relationships. Their contestation over objectivity is, on the deeper level, about the legitimacy of their respective field existence.

More specifically, since journalism is part of the field of cultural production and its operation relies on the creation and maintenance of what Bourdieu (1993) called “belief” for the cultural products, their contestation is a struggle about what ways of understanding and enacting objectivity are justified for the creation of the understanding of society as worthy of the belief, what vision of the society as constructed by the different enactment of objectivity deserves credibility, and most essentially who has the power to demand the belief from other journalistic practitioners and the audience. From the dialectic perspective of field theory, the struggle also serves to structure and restructure the journalistic field, making it possible for its mechanism and structure to be reproduced or even transformed (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993, 1999; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Here, I will first draw upon the literature on epistemic authority (Gieryn, 1999), especially that for journalism (Carlson, 2017), to further explicate what the contestation involves. I will also refer to the literature on reflexivity by professionals (Schon, 1983) and by

journalists in particular (Ahva, 2013; Zelizer, 1993) in addition to Bourdieu's treatment of the subject of reflexivity, for the purpose of understanding the meaning of the contestation for re-articulation of objectivity and remaking of journalism's epistemic authority. Lastly, based on prior research and cases, I will lay out the dimensions, locations and complexities of the contestation over objectivity.

Epistemic authority. The claim to objectivity matters for journalism because it is the basis of the mechanism that journalists and media organizations can establish, allocate and defend the epistemic authority for and among themselves. In a similar vein with Bourdieu's emphasis on "belief" for the field of cultural production and cultural producers, Gieryn (1999) stressed the importance of epistemic authority, defined as "the legitimate power to define, describe, and explain bounded domains of reality" (p. 1), for science and scientists. It determines "the probability that particular definitions of reality ... prevail as valid and true" (Starr, 1982, p. 12). With his social constructivist approach, Gieryn (1999) uses the metaphor of cartography, understanding epistemic authority for science as constructed via a process of cultural map making, the boundary-work. Scientists constantly engage in "the discursive attribution of selected quality to scientists, scientific methods and scientific claims for the purpose of drawing a rhetorical boundary" for science (pp. 4-5). There are three main occasions of boundary work: expulsion, expansion and autonomy. Translated into the term of field theory, they correspond to three aspects of field struggle. First, it defines the game of the field of science to include those who plays the game and exclude those who do not. One need to play the game as defined to attain the legitimacy of existence in the field, or if we talk about science as a domain of profession, to attain what Abbott (1988) called the "jurisdiction" over the area of professional tasks. Secondly, it settles on the differentiation between different actors at different positions or

hierarchical levels in the field, such as natural science vs. social science vs. pseudo-science. The settlement of authority also helps allocate resources among actors. Thirdly, it keeps the field of science from influences from outside of the field, especially those from political and economic power when it tries to exploit the actors' authority in the ways that compromise the game of the field.

Carlson (2017) put the discussion of epistemic authority in the context of journalism as a domain of knowledge producing activities. Based on Gieryn's research, he defined journalistic authority as "a contingent relationship in which certain actors come to possess a right to create legitimate discursive knowledge about events in the world for others" (p. 12). Two aspects of the definition deserve attention here. First, Carlson stresses the authority relationship for journalism as a fundamentally asymmetrical relationship between the actors with the authority and those who recognize the authority. Professionalism of the news industry, as constituted of the set of professional norms and professional practices, is an important basis of this asymmetrical authority relationship. It helps discipline and legitimize journalistic work. It "endows the occupation with an identity they can count as worthy" (Carlson, 2017, p. 39). It also allows journalists and media organizations to establish their exclusive jurisdictional claim to journalistic work and demarcate boundaries between different types of journalists and media organizations as well as between journalists and non-journalists (Schudson & Anderson, 2009; Carlson, 2016). Secondly, as hinted in the phrasing of "contingent" and "certain actors", Carlson pays great attention to the challenge of new forms of journalism, such as citizen journalism, to journalistic authority. He maintained that journalistic authority has been always a contingent power relationship open to contestation and change. At the same time, he noted that citizen journalism is built upon different normative basis. The norm of open participation in citizen journalism

makes a fundamental challenge to the asymmetrical communicator-audience relationship as implied by journalistic authority for professional journalism. The competition between the professional norms and practices and the alternative norms and practices “points to the remaking of the authority relationship ... not in unilateral ways” (Carlson, 2017, p. 20).

In light of research on epistemic authority, we can see the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists is more than a debate about the norm of objectivity itself. What is involved in the specific disputes about objectivity is the struggle over epistemic authority for journalism, the domain of work that the actors from both sides are engaged in. Professional journalists still maintain the professional norm of objectivity, the cornerstone of journalistic professionalism, and its corresponding values, standards and practices as the important footing of their claim to epistemic authority (Schudson & Anderson, 2009). It allows them to “promote themselves as authoritative and credible spokesperson of ‘real-life’ events” (Zelizer, 1992, p. 8), thus being able to establish their jurisdiction in the area of journalistic work and enjoy some autonomy from external influences. But citizen journalists, starting from their different understanding of the epistemic ideal, rely on their alternative ways of enacting objectivity to legitimize their existence as journalistic practitioners who can offer a picture of social reality that is based on ordinary citizens’ unique perspectives and hardly found in the stories told by mainstream media (Robinson, 2009). Citizen journalists’ epistemic stance and journalistic practices challenge the authority of professional journalists. Professional journalists, in turn, try to re-affirm their ways of enacting objectivity, in the attempt to defend against the authority challenge from citizen journalists and to sustain its legitimacy as the dominant incumbent in the field. In this sense, the contestation over objectivity involves the process that the actors from the two sides try to establish and allocate epistemic authority for and among

themselves. We can look at a set of examples from prior research on the contestation to get a better idea of the dynamics of the contestation.

In the highly publicized debate about objectivity between *the New York Times* editor Bill Keller and renowned lawyer-blogger Glenn Greenwald (Keller, 2013), Greenwald criticized professional journalists' commitment to the norm of objectivity understood as the separation of values from facts, chiding it as the adoption of "a voice-of-god, view-from-nowhere tone that falsely implies journalists reside above normal viewpoints." Keller, in defense of the validity of the professional norm, responded, "journalism that starts from a publicly declared predisposition is less likely to get to the truth (Exhibit A: Fox News)".

In another instance, Susan Gardner, the editor of progressive blogging site Daily Kos took issue with the standard of journalistic balance in an attempt to justify the legitimacy of blogging, saying "This tired endless quest to create false equivalences ... is far more damaging to our national discourse than what ordinary citizens are saying on a blog" (Kerbel, 2009, p. 104). But for an editor at *The Times*, the lack of balance is exactly what people should be concerned about citizen journalism. "If someone did try to put a reasonable balanced view, it was an exception" (Thurman, 2008, p. 144).

The contestation also occurred during the 2003 Iraq War, involving the debate about reportage practices as well as that about the social reality reported. In the war, mainstream media of America relied heavily on embedded journalism, predominantly using authoritative sources and channels within government, and failing to reflect the cruel reality of the war. It invited sharp criticisms from citizen journalists, who not only called the professional practices into question, but also used the means of blogging to record their own experiences in war zone, questioning the legitimacy of the war.

Similar cases of contestation abound in writings and talks by professional and citizen journalists with regard to the different elements involved in their enactment of objectivity. Tong (2015) found that professional journalists in China emphasized their professional skills and training needed for “making being objective possible” as the features that citizen journalists do not have (p. 607). Carlson (2007) found that reporters and editors stressed the verification practices in professional news gathering and used it to criticize citizen journalism for being unreliable.

On the side of citizen journalists, Weinberger (2009) explained the importance of transparency by saying “journalists are more credible when they acknowledge their bias”, while also mentioned that a Pulitzer-winning journalist prefers keeping bias unmentioned over the option of making it transparent. Ostertag and Tuchman (2012) found that a citizen journalist who cooperated with the local TV station had the conviction in the value of taking a more active role in telling local people’s personal stories, but complained that the editor disagreed with her.

From all the above examples, we can see that the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists indeed involves their struggle for epistemic authority. By talking about the set of values, standards, and practices they followed in their own work, both groups of journalists were trying to stake their claim to the legitimate power to depict and interpret the social reality for the public. By evaluating the values, standards and practices used by the other side, both groups were also challenging their competitor’s claim to the epistemic authority. When these actors were engaged in the “boundary-work” to establish and guard their epistemic authority, they were discursively attributing different qualities to some main aspects of journalism. Specifically, there are three kinds of “boundary” involved in the boundary-work: the

boundary of journalistic practitioners, the boundary of the vision of journalism, and the boundary of journalistic products as the representation of social reality.

With regard to the boundary of journalistic practitioners, they were negotiating what attributes journalistic practitioners ought to possess to make themselves the legitimate knower and constructor of social reality for the public. Professional journalists saw themselves as the observers who can remove values and biases from pure facts by using professional methods, whereas citizen journalists acknowledged their particular perspectives and considered it the basis of credibility for their citizen journalistic storytelling.

With regard to the boundary of the vision of journalism, they were debating on what vision of journalism, as rooted in different understandings of objectivity, should prevail as the valid approach for making truthful representation of social reality. Professional journalists were guided by the professional vision of journalism as reflected in getting to truth by suspending personal predispositions, offering a balance of voices, and utilizing routine practices learned from professional training. Citizen journalists were guided by the alternative vision of journalism predicated upon the acknowledgment of the inherent bias in one's perspective, depicting reality from their specific perspective, and stressing the need for making one's bias known to others.

With regard to the boundary of journalistic products as the representation of social reality, they were arguing over what qualities in the journalistic account of social reality, produced via different ways of enacting objectivity, make it truthful and credible. Professional journalists' construction of social reality was intended to cast a broad news net for all facts that matter to the public, placing particular focus on authoritative sources and channels, and their official narratives. Citizen journalists sought to capture the part of social reality that mainstream media cannot and sometime would not care to cover.

The examples also show that the boundary-work, via which professional and citizen journalists attributed selective qualities to journalists, journalism and journalistic account of social reality, play out on two levels of discursive construction. The first level is the rhetorical reinforcement of one side's own legitimacy to occupy their position in the field. They discursively enlist the elements involved in their enactment of objectivity to substantiate their own epistemic authority claim. The second is the discursive evaluation of the other side's ways of enacting objectivity, constructing their differentiation from each other and if possible, highlighting the other side's transgression from what it should take to give a valid and truthful account of social reality, and thereby disputing its authority claim. The two levels of boundary-work are interrelated. Some utterances in the contestation, such as professional journalists' defense of balance as something that can hardly be found in citizen journalism, or citizen journalists' complaint that their unique storytelling does not find support in mainstream media, are obviously boundary-work on both levels. It is through such boundary-work involved in the contestation over objectivity that journalistic practitioners from both sides establish epistemic authority to legitimate their own existence in the field, and if possible, also highlight their differentiation, uniqueness and even superiority vis-à-vis their competitors.

Reflexivity. Here comes the question: where does this epistemic authority struggle lead? More specifically, with the ongoing struggle between professional and citizen journalists, what will become of the journalistic field? How does the struggle serve to (re-)structure journalistic work and journalistic authority for its practitioners? The field theory suggests different possibilities. On the one hand, Bourdieu's original theory is emphatic about the logic of reproduction over that of transformation (Calhoun, 1993). He warned that field actors are constrained by the original game rule and power structure of the field. Actors in the journalistic

field may tend to stick to their different ways of enacting objectivity for the purpose of reinforcing their respective positions. Due to the inequality of capital distribution between citizen journalists and professional journalists, the struggle may further solidify the relationship between one side as the less powerful challenger and the other side as the dominant incumbent who will continue to have the power for defining what journalism should be. However, on the other hand, Bourdieu acknowledges field actors' potential for reflexivity and transformation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), which later has been further emphasized by other scholars interested in the field theory (Benson, 2009; McNay, 1999; Swartz, 2012). According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), the immediacy of the present imposes constraints for the actors to just react to the ongoing struggle, but it is possible for some to transcend the constraints through "the mobilization of the past" and "the anticipation of the future" (p. 138). Or in Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) words, field actors are not simply embroiled in their struggle for differentiation; they also have the capacity to fashion meaning and identity as the viable basis of the existence of their shared field altogether. Therefore, I argue that the contestation over objectivity by professional and citizen journalists contains not only the struggle to establish their authority vis-à-vis each other, but may also contain some attempts, rare as they perhaps are, to reflect on their respective model of facticity and transform their authority relationship. I will explicate this argument through considering the contestation in light of reflexivity literature in sociology of profession and journalism studies.

Reflexivity refers to the human potential to turn the gaze upon oneself, becoming aware of hidden assumptions in one's own actions as well as possibility of changes (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Platt, 1989). Schon (1983) examined reflexive practices and conversations by professionals such as architects, psychotherapists and engineers. Reflexivity, he found, is

actually an integral part of professional work, because it often needs to cope with uncertain or conflicted tasks. It is crucial for replenishing the system of knowledge. It can be enabled through reflexive conversations among the professionals and then follow a spiral of actions: finding problems, discovering features of problem situations, developing interventions, experimenting for implications, and back to new problems. Importantly, he stresses that professional reflexivity is characterized by the awareness and, sometimes, even inclusion of clients. When the professional functions as a reflective practitioner, “he recognizes that his actions may have different meanings for this client”, “he gives himself the task of discovering what these are”, and “he attributes to his clients ... a capacity to mean, know and plan” (p. 295). Here, authority is no longer a completely asymmetrical relationship between the professional with an authority and the client who recognizes it, as predicated on the appropriation of esoteric knowledge in the interest of social control. Rather, reflexivity moves it toward authority with an interactional basis. The client does not necessarily yield to the professional’s authority, but rather feels willing to “suspend disbelief” and “join the practitioner” for a shared inquiry (p. 296). The professional loses some unquestioned recognition, but he/she is willingly open to real connection with the client and their “reflective competence” will emerge in the discovery process (p. 301).

Ahva (2013) focused on the reflexivity of Finnish journalists who had the experience of participation in public journalism projects. She defined professional reflexivity for journalists as their ability to identify problems in their journalistic work, redefine professional self-image, and alter their course of action. Reflexivity, as shown here, does not occur without any tension. Some journalists held that the inclusion of citizens’ voices runs the risk of eroding the legitimacy of news in the representation of “official viewpoints” through hard news, while the “everyday” aspect is only the material for soft news (p. 798). However, there were other journalists who

found journalism's watchdog function and public service value could be reinforced by citizen participation. They redefined their professional self-image as collaborators who should help citizens to engage with policy makers and conduct political debate. Their reflexivity shows, the author stressed, that the professional ideology of journalism actually "provided a shared resource that has made the explication of broadened values possible" (p. 803).

It has not been the only case where reflexivity of professional journalists was noted. Zelizer's (1993) article pointed out, in a similar vein with Bourdieu and Wacquant's emphasis on social actors' potential for shaking off their field constraints via "mobilization of the past" and "anticipation of the future", that journalists engage in the "durational mode of interpretation" of their own reportage practices and news events being reported (p. 231). Through this mode of interpretation, they are capable of making the retrospective evaluation at the time of retelling, which allow them to be able to seek improvement of their work in light of larger problems about journalism and its democratic function. When we consider the history of journalism with regard to objectivity in this light, then it is not hard to see that lying behind the afore-mentioned re-appraisals and adaptations of the meaning of objectivity (Maras, 2013) were such efforts of reflexive self-accounting by journalistic practitioners based on the consideration of what was needed by audiences in different social circumstances. Reflexivity enabled them to readily confront the problems in journalistic work, and to re-construct practices, identity and meanings in the interpretative communities of journalism, thus being able to maintain their epistemic authority and jurisdiction on a continuing basis.

As for the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists, the journalistic field still contains conditions for reflexivity by the actors on both sides. First, the ideal of objectivity is practiced as an encompassing epistemic position. This is not only

embedded in the enactment by journalistic practitioners in their pursuit of truthful representation of social reality in different ways, but also revealed in the notion's practical affordance for self-appraisal and adaptation as we can see from prior research (Maras, 2013). Secondly, the contestation creates the chances for professional and citizen journalists to interact and have their dialogue. According to Benson (2009), such interaction will involve the comparison of journalistic practices as well as the representations of reality constructed, which may help the actors on both sides to recognize the problems in their work and the heteronomous influences from outside the field that hinders their journalistic work. Thirdly, the contestation is a continued social process. It includes discursive struggles at the time of their coverage of specific events/issues as well as the "durational mode of interpretation" at the time of retrospection and re-telling. Therefore, I argue that the contestation over objectivity will contain some moments of reflexivity for professional and citizen journalists to identify problems in their own ways of enacting objectivity and in light of the problems, even possibly redefine their models for locating important facts and relevant information for the public and change their journalistic practices accordingly. Reflexivity also helps to reinforce their respective claim to jurisdiction in the area of journalistic work. It does not obliterate but still maintain the uniqueness of two groups of actors in how they accomplish objectivity. But at the same time, it also remakes the epistemic authority in the journalistic field, moving it from the asymmetric journalist-audience relationship toward what Schon (1983) calls "reflective competence" that emerges from the process of interaction and discovery that is shared by actors from both sides. This argument does not negate what Lewis (2012) pointed out as the fundamental tension between the professional logic of control and exclusivity for professional journalism and the civic logic of participation and openness for citizen journalism. Rather, it is intended to highlight the possibility of interactive

and reflective meaning making, which may connect the actors at different positions of the field, pointing to the emergence of some shared understanding as the viable basis of the overall field. The field is, after all, a space of differentiation as well as integration (Swartz, 1997).

If we look into what is included in the utterances from professional and citizen journalists over topics relating to objectivity, the moments of reflexivity indeed exist. Visionary members of professional journalism such as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) also found the standard of transparency important. Resonating with Weinberger (2009), they agreed that explaining news production procedures more transparently can weaken source control and reinforce public accountability of news media, which brings journalism closer to the original meaning of objectivity. Zuniga et al. (2011) found that some bloggers are more motivated for informing and influencing the public, and unlike other bloggers, they will move from “merely seeing their blog as a form of journalism” to engaging in stricter journalistic practices in information collection and presentation, spending more time to quote correctly, verify facts and post corrections (p. 599). These examples, rare as they might be, are also an integral part of the contestation as the process of re-articulating objectivity and re-making journalistic authority by professional and citizen journalists, who are not just structured by, but also capable of reflectively (re-)structuring the mechanism of the journalistic field.

Dimensions, locations & complexities of the contestation. Given the above explication of the contestation over objectivity, another question arises: where should we look, if we hope to examine the contestation as an ongoing, tension-filled process of re-articulating objectivity that serve to allocate and re-make the epistemic authority for actors in the journalistic field? Here I will lay out the key dimensions and locations of the contestation as well as some complexities that deserve attention.

Firstly, the dynamics of contestation can be conceived as constituted of three interrelated dimensions: discourse, activity and text. In the dimension of discourse, the contestation occurs in its most manifest form. Professional and citizen journalists utter their evaluation of journalistic practices and the representation of social reality constructed for themselves and for each other. Through these evaluations, they criticize the other side's approach to objectivity, defend their own approach, or reflect on limitations in their own work and the possibilities of further changes, thereby engaging in the debate about how the ideal of objectivity should be enacted in the journalistic field now and today.

In the dimension of activities, their different approaches to objectivity are performed in how they collect and process information to construct the representation of social reality for the public. They conduct journalistic practices and routines in accordance with values and standards of objectivity as they conceive, or they improvise based on their different understanding of the norm. It puts into actions their conceptual understanding of what objectivity means and how it should be enacted.

In the dimension of text, journalists present different pictures of social reality in specific journalistic texts (i.e., news articles, opinion pieces, blogs, and etc.) that are constructed according to different values and narrative conventions as demanded by their different approaches to objectivity. A news text is "a constructed account beholden to long-standing rules for what such an account can and should look like" (Carlson, 2017, p. 31). A wide range of selections involved in the creation of texts, such as what topics to cover with regards to a news event, what factual information to write about, who to cite as sources, and whether or not to present a balance among sources with different viewpoints, are all expressive of how journalists think objectivity should be enacted.

The three dimensions are interrelated “ingredients” of the dynamics of the contestation over objectivity. As Stuart Hall talked about the articulation of prevailing ideology (Grossberg, 1986; Slack, 1996), in the contestation, the distinct elements of objective journalism have no natural belongingness. The elements can be connected and disconnected in various ways by professional and citizen journalists in the sense-making process as embedded in their everyday practices of journalist work. When they are engaged in the coverage of issue/events under specific social historical circumstances, they collect/process information and construct textual account according to certain rules. These practices and the output of practices also become the subject of discursive evaluations where they legitimize the rules they follow. In this way, the different meanings of objectivity are getting articulated in the discourse, which are also articulated to journalistic practices and the output of these practices in the context of news coverage. It is on all the three dimensions, discourse, activity and text, that the contestation over objectivity plays out, and the meaning of objectivity gets articulated and re-articulated. Thus, the dynamics of contestation should be considered on the three dimensions as a whole, so that the seemingly abstract discussion about objectivity and all the elements involved in its enactment can be examined as concretized in the coverage of news issues/events and related to the construction of social reality under specific social historical circumstances.

Secondly, the discourse of contestation can occur in various occasions. It can be included in conference speeches, published in trade journals, or featured in the content these practitioners produce in the form of column articles or citizen commentaries. It can also be informal chats among these practitioners in hallways, by watercoolers or during after-work socializing. It can be personal messages between unmet bloggers talking about their content production and themselves. In the contestation, utterances are not just made by the practitioners who work on

their respective platforms of professional or citizen journalism as divided from each other in the field space, but also by those within the aforementioned overlapping section where the two sides follow certain institutional arrangements to work together. For example, in Ostertag and Tuchman's (2012) study of the partnership of a TV station in New Orleans and local bloggers, when a blogger was asked by the editor to write in the third person to sound objective and unbiased, she complained about losing her unique voice that she enjoyed as an independent blogger. Cases like these – the disputes that emerged out of cooperation – are perhaps even more illustrative of the essential conflict between the different approaches to objectivity by professional and citizen journalists. This being said, the cases of cooperation may also become venues of interaction and reflexivity. For example, Robinson (2011) conducted a year-long ethnography on a newsroom in its transition to the online work model that involve journalists, bloggers and audiences. During this transition, professional journalists gave bloggers and audiences more control by incorporating them in open comments and news gathering process, while local bloggers were also willing to invest extra time and dig deeper in information collection. Thus, if an examination does not pay attention to these cases of cooperation between professional and citizen journalists, it may lead to a less thorough understanding of the contestation with regards to both their fundamental conflict and their potential for reflexivity.

Lastly, although this dissertation focuses on the contestation between professional and citizen journalists, to understand it fully would require paying attention to some other lines of differentiation, such as media technology (new vs. old media) and political ideology (having a political ideological position or not; left vs. right on the political ideological spectrum). The contestation contains some important complexities along these lines of differentiation.

For example, the use of Internet technology allows for journalistic production via the so-called content aggregation (Diehl, 2014; Martin, 2017). It means using third-party web content, often from news media websites, through interlinking, rewriting or bundling (Anderson, 2013). This practice is widely used in online citizen journalism, but some professional journalists view it as a “robbery” of and threat to their original reporting (The New Republic Editors, 2011). For them, original reporting through first-hand witnessing and interviewing is “the iron core” of objective news work (Jones, 2009, p. 189). It is crucial for getting close to facts. It distinguishes news production from mere dissemination (Pew Research Center, 2010; Zelizer, 2007). However, the influence of new media is not unique to citizen journalism. In recent years, content aggregation has been adopted in professional news media’s online journalism as well. Professional news aggregators consider it a legitimate part of today’s news routine (Anderson, 2013). Here, the contestation between professional and citizen journalists might be further complicated by an internal divergence within professional journalists using old vs. new media.

The contestation can also be complicated by political ideology. Many prominent citizen journalism projects specialize in political information and opinions, such as Indymedia, Daily Kos, the Drudge Report, to name just a few. Their content, link patterns and readership are found to show a divide along the left vs. right line on political ideological spectrum (Lawrence, Sides & Farrell, 2009; Reese et al., 2007). On the one hand, these projects are similar in their ways of doing journalism. Their contributors coordinate information and opinions to promote the shared political ideological position, and combine citizen journalism with activism, mobilizing or directly calling for political actions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Downing, 2015), which invite strong criticism from professional journalists who are committed to unbiased reporting (Hanke, 2005; Ip, 2011). Yet on the other hand, these projects’ challenge to professional journalism is not totally the

same. Contrasting along the partisan line, citizen journalists from the left and the right of the political spectrum criticize mainstream media for bias of opposite directions – both think that news reporting by professional journalists acts to the benefit of the other side (Atton, 2015; Anderson, 2008; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to cover all nooks and crannies in the dynamics of the contestation. But in order not to err on the side of simplicity, it seeks to not only examine it on various dimensions (activity, text and discourse) and locations (professional news media, citizen journalism platforms, and the overlapping part of professional and citizen journalism), but also capture some nuances as it is complicated by media technology and political ideology.

Democratic implication in post-truth America. The contestation over objectivity is embedded in the social structural relationships of the journalistic field with politics, market and the civil society. It therefore has a profound democratic implication, especially against the background of the ongoing debate over post-truth politics. Dishonesty in politics is a perennial problem, but the alarming extent to which lies now take precedence over facts in American politics has raised great concerns (Leonhardt, Philbrick & Thompson, 2017). Some politicians' demagogic rhetoric, ranging from deeply offensive to plain wrong, are accepted indiscriminately by their electoral base for its emotional appeal, while the fact-checking results by major news media are dismissed by them as mere assertions (Montgomery, 2017). Lepore (2016) warned in her article on the *New Yorker*, "The era of the fact is coming to an end".

The dangerous state of post-truth politics is a consequence of complicated problems involving political populism, economic instability, and global deregulation (Suiter, 2016). But journalism, with its issues, difficulty and challenge, plays an important role in it. According to Habermas (1987), journalism evolved out of spontaneous information exchange between

citizens, but has become uncoupled with the public in the social-historical procedure of professionalization and commercialization. In the U.S., professional news media often become the mega-phone of political elites and profit-driven manufacturer of content for ratings under the heteronomous influences of politics and market as explained previously. In recent twenty years, financial difficulty for the newspaper industry has delivered a heavy hit to quality news production at some of the best newsrooms in the country (Pew Research Center, 2014). All the problems have eroded into the public trust in journalism. Meanwhile, the growth of partisan media and the rise of online citizen journalism have moved public attention away from mainstream media. While we acknowledge the virtue of plural voices on these platforms, they also allow the audience to receive the information that matches their pre-established opinions, without the need to look beyond the echo chamber (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Sunstein, 2009). This fragmentation of public communication space has been further weakening the function of journalism as an important part of the society's truth-producing infrastructure (The Economist, 2017). The overall journalistic field can now hardly fulfill its Deweyan mission of creating factual claims about important public matters to be received by the general public and to form the basis of collective public inquiry (Dewey, 1927).

When journalism loses trust from the public and fails to fulfill its function of producing a sufficient understanding of factual reality as the basis of collective public inquiry, it adds fuel to the growth of post-truth. According to McIntyre (2018), post-truth is a tendency that facts become less influential in political and civic debate than emotion and personal belief. Due to the motivated reasoning in individual citizens, people's perception is inherently biased by their emotion and personal belief. In an environment of public communication where journalism cannot offer a sufficient and trust-worthy representation of factual reality, individual citizens

were even more susceptible to the different ways of selection, modification and packaging of facts mingled with misinformation. The post-truth tendency is further aggravated, when demagogic leaders resort to intentional lying to manipulate people “into believing something that we know to be untrue” (McIntyre, 2018, p. 8) and attack news media with ungrounded accusation of fake news (McNair, 2017). In consequence, what we observe in political and civic debate nowadays is a highly concerning extent of post-truth: “facts are subordinate to people’s political point of view” and “feelings sometimes matter more than facts” (McIntyre, 2018, p. 11).

So, is the era of the fact really coming to an end? We can see that, on the other hand, a commitment to the objective reality, to facts about the society, remain important in journalism and politics. Major news organizations persist in their factual reporting of demagogic politicians’ deeds and words, even when the politicians accuse them of being the creator of fake news. They do not flinch from the accusations, but instead take the initiative to identify for the public where these claims deviate from facts (Pan & Lu, 2017). Journalistic fact-checkers have developed their sophisticated procedure of fact coherence for adjudicating political claims strictly upon factual basis (Graves, 2017). Fact-checking, according to Wintersieck (2017), is found to be able to help the public with evaluating political candidates and make the public feel motivated to vote for those candidates who prove to be honest by news media’s fact-checking.

When we consider these phenomena, then maybe we cannot simply conclude that factuality and the epistemic authority established on such basis are illusory. Nor can we take a whole-sale rejection of objectivity – the answerability for the objective reality and the attempt to inquire into it based on facts – as a normatively ideal pursuit for journalism. Instead, it might be fair to say that the current state of post-truth politics is presenting new challenges for the actors in the journalistic field to address, for them to reconstruct the pursuit of objectivity as necessary

for the democracy. Against this background, the implication of the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists is beyond the journalistic field itself. It is not just the dispute about how objectivity should be accomplished in journalistic work. It is also about how journalism, which has perhaps gone too far from its origin in the public, rebuilds its connection with the public, along with all the tensions and hopes as involved in this process. It is about whether or not professional and citizen journalists, the actors in the journalistic field, may be able to cohere around the epistemic ideal of objectivity and re-articulate this core notion of journalistic work, thus bringing order back into this important sector of our truth-making infrastructure so as to sustain the public and the democracy.

My Study

The theoretical exposition sets up the empirical foci on how the differently positioned journalistic actors contest the central tenet of the profession, namely, objectivity. It has also identified the empirical dimensions along which the contestation takes place. To demonstrate how such contestation unfolds, I have conducted a comparative case study. In this study, I choose different media corresponding to their different positions on the professional-citizen journalism spectrum and look at how journalistic actors on these platforms carry out the contestation over objectivity in connection to their coverage of specific controversial issues.

With regards to media selection, the intention is to form a sufficient specimen that contains a rich array of dynamics as involved in the contestation (Peräkylä, 2005). The media are mainly selected by their positions on the professional-citizen journalism spectrum. The media platforms are: *the Washington Post* newspaper and its blog, which represent professional journalism and its online enterprise; *Daily Kos* and *Redstate*, two collective blogging websites that are hubs of news and opinions for online liberals and conservatives respectively, which are

the cases of citizen journalism; *the Huffington Post*, a liberal news and blogging platform known for its pro-am model combining professional journalism and collective blogging, where blogs are curated by blogging editors and reporters write to engage the world of bloggers (The Huffington Post, 2008). It represents the overlapping “semi-professional” section on the professional-citizen journalism spectrum. Except for the degree of professional establishment, the selection of these media platforms also allows for some comparison along two other dimensions, media technology (old vs. new media), and political ideology (having a political ideology vs. not; left vs. right on the spectrum of political ideology). The selection of media features some deficiencies for making comparison along these two dimensions though. The only case of the pro-am mode of journalism, *the Huffington Post*, carries mainly content from liberal bloggers. All the cases of citizen journalism are online platforms, not being able to provide a contrast of citizen journalism using traditional media technology vs. new media technology. Thus, with the selection of these media platforms, I cannot make thorough comparisons in the dimension of political ideology or media technology, controlling for case variation on the professional-citizen journalism spectrum. The limitation will be further explicated in the method chapter.

The two issues are: the healthcare reform during the Obama administration (February 2009-April 2010), and the gun control debate after Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (December 2012-April 2013). Both were heavily reported and debated issues on mainstream media as well as citizen journalism outlets. The healthcare reform issue mainly pertains to the distribution of economic welfare, while the gun control issue relates to gun culture and gun rights. It allows for the contrast of a relatively intellectual issue of which social reality is more about specific policy needs, components and implications, with a value-laden issue of which social reality is more intertwined with moral and cultural values.

I took a sample ($N=1146$) of the healthcare reform coverage by professional and citizen journalists at these media platforms during the critical discourse moments of the healthcare reform debate (Gamson, 1992), and a sample ($N=1013$) of their coverage of gun control debate in a similar way. Most of the coverage by professional journalists were in the forms of news and opinions (editorials or columns). Citizen journalists' blogs included mainly commentaries, along with some purely informational pieces formatted like news. In this study, news articles by professional journalists and the purely informational, newsy blog pieces by citizen journalists are considered together as the news coverage of the issues; opinion pieces by professional journalists and commentaries by citizen journalists, the opinion coverage of the issues. Using Schudson's (2003) definition of journalism as the practice of producing and disseminating information and commentary on contemporary affairs of public import, I treated these pieces as the journalistic text for content analysis and in-depth reading. Moreover, to understand their journalistic activities and their discourse involved in the contestation over objectivity, I conducted 27 interviews of key figures among reporters, editors, columnists and bloggers who produced these journalistic texts, and collected secondary materials from trade journals, conferences, blogs and other sources. The overall study, based on the analysis of text, interviews and secondary materials, seeks to understand their contestation over objectivity in the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control by addressing the following hypotheses and research questions.

The first task is to examine the contestation as manifested in the dimension of journalistic text (Chapter 4). The following hypotheses correspond to the varied manifestations of different objectivity elements (forms of content, standards, and practices), and the different depictions of social reality in the contents of news coverage and opinion representation on the two issues.

Regarding the forms of content, based on the consideration of the dominance of the informational style of journalism in the U.S. media system, which stresses news reporting (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), the importance of citizen commentary in political blogging (Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012), and the lack of enthusiasm for writing purely factual news articles with a neutral tone among citizen journalists (Bruns, 2006), I state the hypothesis:

H1: For the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate, the total issue coverage by the media outlets positioned more toward the professional side on the professional vs. citizen journalistic spectrum contains a larger proportion of news coverage (news articles or purely informational blog pieces), compared to the media outlets positioned more toward the citizen journalistic side.

Regarding the standards involved in their enactment of objectivity, I focus on the standards of balance and transparency. Balance is the one of the most important standards that professional journalists use in news writing, which requires the presentation of main viewpoints on both sides of an issue (Ward, 2010). But the pursuit of balance by professional journalists is heavily criticized by citizen journalists (Kerbel, 2015). Meanwhile, transparency is advocated by citizen journalists, who consider it important for journalistic practitioners to explain their bias and information collection/processing procedure (Weinberger, 2009). Thus, for the news coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate, I state the hypotheses:

H2a: The news coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by the outlets positioned more toward the professional side contains a larger proportion of the pieces that present people's viewpoints on both sides of the issues.

H2b: The news coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by the outlets positioned more toward the citizen journalistic side contains a larger proportion of the

pieces with the explanations of the author's political bias on the issues or information collection/processing procedure.

Regarding the practices involved in their enactment of objectivity, I focus on the sourcing practices in news coverage, and the citing of different types of information in opinion coverage. In news writing, both enabled and constrained by their news-net, professional journalists rely heavily on official sources such as government officials and policy makers (Tuchman, 1973; Sigal, 1973). Citizen journalists pay more attention to the voices of ordinary citizens on the grassroots level (Ostertag & Tuchman, 2012). In opinion writing, citizen journalists are free to use personal experiences of their own or from their acquaintances to support their opinions (Bock, 2015). Professional editorial writers and columnists emphasize that good opinion pieces are required to offer factual evidence fully (National Conference of Editorial Writers, 1975), which can lead them to use more information that can be attributed and verified, such as government reports, legal documents, academic findings and opinion polls, in addition to people's lived experience. Thus, I state the hypotheses:

H3a: The news coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by the outlets positioned more toward the professional side contains a larger proportion of the pieces that use elected official sources.

H3b: The news coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by the outlets positioned more toward the citizen journalistic side contains a larger proportion of the pieces that use ordinary citizen sources.

H3c: The opinion representation on healthcare reform and gun control debate by the media outlets positioned more toward the citizen journalistic side contains a larger proportion of the pieces that cite personal anecdotes/observations.

Regarding the depiction of social reality, I focus on 1) the width of news coverage in terms of the range of topics relating to the issues reported, and 2) the fairness of opinion representation in terms of whether or not the overall opinion offerings contain opposing opinions supporting or opposing healthcare reform and gun control. As for the news coverage, due to the heavy emphasis of American professional news media on news production and their news-net that is supported with organizational resources, it is reasonable to expect that professional journalists can offer a broader range of topics relating to the issues reported, compared to citizen journalists. Citizen journalists may only focus on a smaller range of topics that members in their respective online communities are concerned about. As for the opinion coverage, professional news media emphasize the importance of representing different viewpoints with fairness in their opinion offerings on a continuing basis (Rosenfeld, 2000). Whereas, citizen commentaries are often orchestrated around the shared values in their online communities (Bruns, 2006). Here, political ideology can also come into play. Citizen journalists' commentaries often feature the direction of opinions in line with their political ideological leaning, being liberal or conservative (Downing, 2015). Given the deep liberal vs. conservative divide in public debate on healthcare reform and gun control, it is reasonable to expect that commentaries by citizen journalists in a platform with an explicit liberal position should be pro-healthcare reform and pro-gun control; and those in a platform with an explicit conservative position, anti-healthcare reform and anti-gun control. Thus, I state the following hypotheses:

H4a: The news coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by the outlets positioned more toward the professional side features a wider range of topics relating to the issues reported.

H4b: The opinion representation on healthcare reform and gun control debate by the outlets positioned more toward the professional side is more balanced between opposing opinions on the issues (i.e., pro-healthcare reform vs. anti-healthcare reform, and pro-gun control vs. anti-gun control).

H4c: The outlets with a clear political ideological leaning, liberal or conservative, make an ideologically compatible opinion representation on healthcare reform and gun control debate, that is, containing more pro-healthcare reform/pro-gun control opinions or containing more anti-healthcare reform/anti-gun control opinions in correspondence with their ideological leaning.

In addition, I made a further comparison along the line of old vs. new media technology to understand the contestation in relation to media technology. Here, I focus on the practice of news aggregation. The use of Internet technology encourages content aggregation, the practice of using third-party content from other media sources by quoting, interlinking, bundling and rewriting (Anderson, 2013). But many professional journalists still oppose this practice as a robbery of original reporting that is the iron core of objective news work (The New Republic Editors, 2011; Jones, 2009). Thus, I state the following hypothesis:

H5: The news coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by digital media platforms (*Daily Kos*, *RedState*, *the Huffington Post*, and *the Washington Post* blog) contains a larger proportion of pieces using content aggregation, compared to the traditional media platform (*the Washington Post* newspaper).

The second task of the dissertation is to understand the contestation in the dimension of journalistic discourse (Chapter 5). Here I examine the journalists' evaluation of the ways of enacting objectivity for themselves and for each other. My examination focuses on their struggle

over epistemic authority involved in the objectivity contestation, especially the two interrelated levels of boundary-work. On one level, they try to explain their approaches to objectivity and establish the epistemic authority in doing journalism in their own ways. On the other level, they construct the differentiation from each other and highlight the other side's transgression from how objectivity should be enacted in their own understanding (Gieryn, 1999; Carlson, 2017). Interview data is front and center in this part of my dissertation. My analysis of interview data is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1a: How did the journalist interviewees evaluate their own coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate? In their evaluation, what did they enlist as the key elements that were expressive of objectivity? How did they explain these elements? According to their explanation, how did these elements help to make their coverage truthful and credible?

RQ1b: How did the journalist interviewees evaluate the coverage by journalistic practitioners from the other media organizations? What did they mention as the key elements that showed the differentiation between themselves and the other journalistic practitioners? What did they highlight in the other practitioners' coverage as the transgression of objectivity as they understood?

The third task of this dissertation is to further understand the contestation by looking at the journalists' different approaches to objectivity as performed in their journalistic practices, the resources that supported their practices, and the heteronomous influences that prevented them from doing journalism in the ways as they think should be (Chapter 6). In this part, I will analyze the journalists' account of their journalistic practices from the interview data, as complemented

with the analysis of secondary materials and my reading of their content of issue coverage. My analysis is guided by the following questions:

RQ2a: In their own account and according to secondary materials and the reading of their issue coverage, how did these journalists conduct and organize journalistic activities for the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate? How did these activities relate to their pursuit of objectivity as they understood?

RQ2b: What did the journalist interviewees regard and utilize as resources for their coverage? How did these resources support the pursuit of objectivity as they understood?

RQ2c: What heteronomous influences (from political elites, the market, and/or the civil society) did the journalist interviewees mention? How did these influences affect their coverage of the issues?

In Conclusion and Discussion (Chapter 7), I will synthesize findings for these hypotheses and research questions to talk about the contestation as a process of these professional and citizen journalists re-articulating objectivity. In particular, I will highlight the aspect of critical reflection to the contestation, where these journalists were not merely talking about specific journalistic standards and practices involved in their issue coverage, but also asking some shared questions about how to better pursue factuality and public interest in journalism. I will discuss the implications of my findings to the theoretical understanding of the notion of journalistic objectivity, and to the rethinking of journalism's role in the post-truth era.

Chapter 3

Data and Methods

To understand the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists from a field perspective, I conducted the research as a comparative case study, relying on a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. In sum, this research examined the contestation over objectivity among journalists at four media outlets selected for their contrasting positions in the journalistic field, investigating and comparing their journalistic discourse, activities and texts involved in the coverage of two selected issues to capture the key dynamics of differentiation, opposition and negotiation. The four media outlets are: *the Washington Post* newspaper and blog, *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, selected mainly for the variation of professional status on the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum. The selection of issues under coverage, healthcare reform (February 2009-April 2010) and gun control debate (December 2012-April 2013), grounded the examination in specific social-political context around the two issues during the first-term Obama administration, when the main tendencies of post-truth politics in the U.S. already set in. The issue coverage was sampled and coded for quantitative content analysis. Some main journalists who made the coverage were interviewed. These two parts of data are the main basis for my examination of the contestation. In-depth reading of some pieces in the coverage and the analysis of secondary materials were also carried out for nuances and triangulation.

The method option of comparative case study (Goodrick, 2014; Ragin & Schneider, 2011) is driven by the field theoretical perspective of my research. As explained in Chapter 2, the field theory is a mezzo-level framework that connects the actors' actions to their relative positions in their field and the structural forces applicable to these positions. A field analysis

needs to take into account not only the micro-level dynamics of field actors' practices and interactions, but also the mezzo-level variation of field positions with underlying structural forces. This makes the method of comparative case study a good fit, because the case study approach can allow the detailed examination of micro-level dynamics and meanwhile the comparison among cases can enable the consideration of variation in field positions. This method option is also needed for the treatment of journalistic objectivity as a complicated concept. Objectivity, as explained in Chapter 2, is an encompassing notion that contains the dialecticism of ideal and method, multiple elements, and constant adaptations. For a comparative study of objectivity in professional vs. citizen journalism, the case study approach is helpful for understanding how objectivity is accomplished by journalists in the selected cases, which would be more relevant to the conceptual nature of this notion and offer a thicker description, compared to the methods that utilize some pre-set measure of objectivity to examine large samples of cases (see Westerståhl, 1983).

The collection of the mixed type of data is for examining the contestation across the dimensions of discourse, activities and text. Some elements involved in the enactment of objectivity (e.g., the standard of balance, the form of content as news vs. opinion, and the practice of sourcing), and some characteristics of the representation of social reality about an issue (e.g., the range of topics and opinions) can be manifested in the dimension of journalistic text. The quantitative content analysis of issue coverage is for capturing the differences regarding these aspects. The interview data is focused on the dimensions of discourse and activities, where the journalists described their procedures of information gathering and processing, highlighted the qualities of their work as related to objectivity, and evaluated other field actors' performance as conducive to or deviant from objectivity. Ideally, the direct way to study the activities is

through ethnography carried out within these different media organizations (Cottle, 2000). Due to the lack of such access, I relied on the journalists' description to understand their activities, while at the same time utilized secondary materials to triangulate and deepen the understanding.

Selection of Media

The selection of media is intended to constitute a sufficient "specimen" for the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists (Peräkylä, 2005). As explained in the Chapter 1, along the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum, there are some main positions occupied by the actors in the journalistic field: professional journalists and news organizations as the dominant incumbents, citizen journalists and citizen media as the challengers, and the semi-professional position in between for the cooperation between the two sides. The differentiation of professional status is often further complicated by the differentiations along the lines of media technology and political ideology. Thus, the four media outlets included in this research were selected mainly for purpose of representing the variation in professional status, and also with the hope of capturing some dynamics regarding media technology and political ideology.

All the selected media outlets are media organizations with national readership, coverage and influence. Among them, *the Washington Post* newspaper and its blog stand for the quintessential professional model of journalism, with robust ethical requirement for the pursuit of objectivity, one of the country's biggest and most awarded teams of newspaper reporters and editors, and great authority and influence in political news coverage. *The Huffington Post* represents the semi-professional section of the field, with its unique pro-am model of journalism that combines a newsroom that follows professional routines and standards with collective blogging from its wide network of citizen authors. *Daily Kos* and *RedState* are influential citizen

journalistic platforms for collective blogging on political issues, both of which feature the same composition of content offered by a core team of frontpage writers and a wide network of ordinary bloggers. The selection of these four outlets allows for a thorough examination of how the contestation plays out along the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum.

The media selection also features some variation of media technology and political ideology. *The Washington Post* blog, *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState* are all the cases of digital media, as opposed to *the Washington Post* newspaper as the case of traditional media. *The Washington Post* blog and newspaper make a particularly meaningful contrast in that they follow the same professional model but differ in media technology. Meanwhile, *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState* are all characterized by their explicit political ideological leaning, with *the Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos* claiming a liberal stance, and *RedState*, a conservative stance. By contrast, *the Washington Post*, as a professional news organization, seeks to be neutral and without an explicit political ideological leaning. This enables the comparisons between having an ideological leaning vs. not having it, and between being liberal vs. conservative in the ideological leaning.

This being said, the media selection like this has some deficiencies for a thorough examination along the line of media technology or political ideology, which would require, ideally, the cases that match all the combinations of variations in professional status, media technology and political ideology. Here, I had to compromise the thoroughness of examination for media technology and political ideology due to two reasons: the need to keep the scope of research at a reasonable level for a dissertation project, and the availability of comparable cases. For example, although a partisan media outlet with professional status such as *Fox News Channel* or *MSNBC* makes a meaningful contrast with citizen journalism platforms with

corresponding ideological leanings, it would bring much more complexity of data collection, sampling and analysis to include the cases of TV networks. Or, although ideally *the Huffington Post* should be compared with a conservative media platform using the pro-am model of journalism, it is hard to find such a case with comparable influence and format. Given these limitations, my research aimed to concentrate on the contestation between actors along the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum, while utilize the selected cases to capture some dynamics of contestation relating to media technology and political ideology but not intending a full-scale investigation. I tried to pay extra attention to specific examples that could point to the variations I cannot capture, such as conservative authors who published at *the Huffington Post* or former professional journalists who became political bloggers, in my data analysis.

To further highlight the variations between the selected media outlets, I will offer some brief description for each, regarding their mission of journalism during the period of time under examination (2009-2013), and their situation of operation back then and currently. Table 3.1 on next page contains a list of the media outlets with their main slogans and their statements on normative principles or operation goals.

Table 3.1

Four media organizations' slogans and key statements on normative principles/goals

Media	Slogan	Quotes on mission
<i>The Washington Post</i>	“Being about Washington, for Washingtonians, and those affected by it”	“ <i>The Washington Post</i> is pledged to an aggressive, responsible and fair pursuit of the truth without fear of any special interest, and with favor to none. Washington Post reporters and editors are pledged to approach every assignment with the fairness of open minds and without prior judgment. The search for opposing views must be routine.” – <i>The Washington Post</i> Standards and Ethics
<i>The Huffington Post</i>	“Delivering News and Opinion Since May 9, 2005”	“a new kind of site that incorporated aggregated news and the powerful force of blogging ... Wouldn't it be fascinating ... to take the conversations, the ideas, the debate, and the excitement of one of Arianna's gatherings and put it online alongside a progressive version of what Matt Drudge was doing with news aggregation?” – <i>The Huffington Post</i> Complete Guide to Blogging
<i>Daily Kos</i>	“I am progressive. I am liberal. I make no apologies.”	“It is at once a news organization, community, and activist hub ... to shape a political world once the exclusive domain of the rich, connected, and powerful.” – About <i>Daily Kos</i> , DailyKos.com
<i>RedState</i>	“We yell ‘ready,’ ‘aim,’ and ‘fire’”	“We have three goals at RedState: 1) Educate conservatives; 2) Motivate conservatives to get involved in the political process; 3) Activate conservatives through RedState's support and tools.” – About us, RedState.com

The Washington Post newspaper and blog. Founded in 1877, *the Washington Post* is a world-renowned newspaper known for its strong coverage of national politics in the U.S., as exemplified in particular by its disclosure of the Watergate scandal in 1972 (The Washington Post, 2019). Its newspaper circulation has been primarily within the D.C. and the several states around it (The Washington Post, 2017). But we can still consider it a media outlet with national coverage, readership and influence. It used to run regional bureaus in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, and publish a National Weekly edition for a long time in its history up until the major downsizing in 2009 (BBC News, 2009). Despite that adjustment, in 2010, the number of visitors to its website content still ranked 2nd nationally among all newspapers, lower than *the New York Times*, but higher than *USA Today* (Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2011). In 2013, it was sold by the then owner the Graham family to Jeff Bezos the Internet mogul. The purchase allowed the newspaper to better support news coverage with a national focus (Bond, 2014). Recent Nelsen data shows that in 2016, its digital unique visitors per month exceeded 82 million across the U.S. (The Washington Post, 2017).

It is a prototypical legacy media organization that is committed to professional journalistic norms, including objectivity. *The Washington Post* Standards and Ethics, published in 1999, emphasizes the “fair pursuit of the truth without fear of any special interest and with favor to none”. According to the code of ethics, its reporters and editors are required to “approach every assignment with the fairness of open minds and without prior judgment”, and “the search for opposing views must be routine” (American Society of News Editors, 2019). Its emphasis on fairness and balance is also manifested in its opinion offerings, such as by hiring conservative columnists and inviting guest contributors to offer different opinions from its editorials and columns (Day & Golan, 2005; Gharib, 2010). Historically, the staff of *the Post*

have won a total of 47 Pulitzer Prizes (The Pulitzer Prizes, 2019), not to mention all the other journalism honors, which demonstrate both its long-term commitment to high standards, and the recognition of the quality of its journalistic work from other journalists and the public. The coverage of politics and federal government in the D.C. has traditionally been the focus of its journalistic work. During 2008-2013, the period when Katharine Weymouth was *the Post* publisher managing its declining news business, this focus was further highlighted, as indicated in the emphasis on “Being about Washington, for Washingtonians, and those affected by it” as the pillar of the newspaper’s long-term strategy (Politico, 2008).

The Washington Post website was launched in 1996. For 13 years, its online journalism had been operated in the Arlington office, 16 minutes’ drive away from its newspaper newsroom (Wemple, 2008; Nieman Lab, 2014). It was during the period of Katharine Weymouth as its publisher that the two newsrooms finally merged, and online journalism became more essential to *the Post* (Kramer, 2009). Its website was comprised of two parts of content, the content as published in print, and the online-only content, most of which has been categorized as blogs. Its team of journalistic blogging included professional online reporters and editors hired by *the Post*, as well as some external paid contributors. It demonstrated a similar focus on politics, featuring some popular political analysis blogs such as *WonkBlog* and *The Fix*, but it also ran blog pieces on other topics, such as business, sports, women, lifestyle, and travel. In 2015, following Bezos’s purchase, its website had a major redesign, showing a further integration of print and digital content, which downplayed the distinction between newspaper and blogs, organizing content mainly by topical hierarchy and importance (Poynter Institute, 2015).

The Huffington Post. *The Huffington Post* was started in 2005 by Arianna Huffington and several other founders, with the intention for it to become the liberal counterpart of the

conservative news aggregation website *Drudge Report* (The Huffington Post, 2008). It grew quickly into one of the most visited news websites in the U.S. In 2010, its traffic already exceeded many other mainstream media websites, including that of *the Washington Post* (Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2011). In 2019, it even exceeded the websites of *CNN* and the *New York Times*, boasting 110,000,000 unique monthly visitors, ranking only behind *Yahoo!News* and *Google News* among all news websites (www.ebizmba.com, 2019).

It adopted what media scholars call the pro-amateurish model of journalism, combining a team of professional journalists who do both original reporting and content aggregation, and a wide network of unpaid bloggers that include thousands of ordinary citizen contributors as well as some invited social elites (Downie & Schudson, 2009). The goal is to offer readers “the conversations, the ideas, the debate and the excitement” of blogging, and news content that mainly comes from aggregation (The Huffington Post, 2008).

A fast growth of presence and influence was seen in both its professional journalism component and its citizen generated content (The Huffington Post, 2008). In 2011, its reporter Sam Stein became one of the several journalists that Barack Obama called upon to ask questions in the then President’s first press conference (Berghold, 2011). In 2012, its veteran affairs coverage by David Wood won a Pulitzer award for national reporting (The Pulitzer Prizes, 2012). Meanwhile, it was not rare to see the blogs by celebrities such as Bernie Sanders or YoYo Ma in its frontpage, while ordinary citizen bloggers increasingly came to see it an accomplishment to get published here, partly for being associated with big-name writers (The Huffington Post, 2008). *OffTheBus*, the project that *the Huffington Post* and journalism professor Jay Rosen initiated to organize ordinary citizens for political campaign coverage, won praises from many journalists, media critics and scholars (Santo, 2012). Yet at the same time, some of its

practices remained controversial. Its aggregation of content from other news websites, content optimization based on Google search algorithm, and the policy of not paying bloggers for their content invited disputes and even lawsuits (Shapiro, 2012).

In 2011, it was purchased by American Online Inc. (AOL) and in 2015, it became part of the Verizon's digital media business after the acquisition of AOL by Verizon. Despite the high valuation of *the Huffington Post* in all these transactions, the website has not realized substantial profitability according to the report by *the New York Times* (Segal, 2015). In 2016, *the New York Times* international reporter, Lydia Polgreen, succeeded Ariana Huffington to become Editor-in-chief of *the Huffington Post*, who planned to weaken the public perception of the website as a liberal platform pitted against the conservative side, and to strengthen its coverage of the “have-nots” who have been left out of the conversation (Polgreen, 2017). In 2018, it also announced that it would start paying bloggers for their contribution (Hays, 2018).

Daily Kos. *Daily Kos* is a collective political blogging platform, where a community of online liberals publish their blogs on American politics from their liberal point of view, calling themselves “Kossacks” as a nickname that indicates their community membership. It was founded in 2002 by political blogger Markos Moulitsas Zúniga, as driven by his frustration with “the cultural and political aristocracy” in American society where the elitist gatekeepers in politics and media control the conversation, and by the hope that ordinary citizens with liberal beliefs can utilize the Internet technology to become players themselves. “Rather than rail against the media, we are becoming the media. Rather than bitch about the political establishment, we are taking it over” (Zúniga, 2008). *Daily Kos* has remained one of the most visited partisan media websites in the U.S. In 2014, after a particularly fast growth of readership since 2012, it boasted 6.4 million monthly unique visitors, according to a Quantcast research

(Daily Kos, 2014). In 2019, its number of monthly unique visitors hit 15 million (www.ebizmba.com, 2019).

Its content is produced by its broad online community of liberal bloggers. Some of them are appointed as frontpage writers who can publish their pieces to the website's main page. For other bloggers, their blog post can appear in the recommendation list when it is recommended by more *Daily Kos* members than other pieces. The website is managed by a small team of *Daily Kos* staff, many of whom are *Daily Kos* bloggers themselves. Its political ideological leaning is explicit. As Zúniga (2008) put it when he created the blog, "I am progressive. I am liberal. I make no apologies." The main goal of this website is not limited to the sharing of information and opinions. It is also an "activist hub" that aims to "shape a political world once the exclusive domain of the rich, connected, and powerful", according to its mission statement (Daily Kos, 2020). Its community members constantly use the platform to organize political campaign contributions and petitions. Every year, it also hosts the Netroots Nation convention, creating the occasion for *Daily Kos* writers and readers, grassroots activists and liberal politicians to meet and discuss. In this sense, it is also considered a website that serves the purpose of netroots activism (Kerbel, 2015).

Its maintenance is funded by donations from *Daily Kos* members and readers, as well as some advertising revenue. It runs Google ads, but at the same time emphasizes that "Running an ad doesn't imply endorsement" (Daily Kos, 2018). Starting from 2013, it also runs advertisement in the form of sponsored content campaign sometimes, that is, publishing a story that is identified as paid for by the client. This form of advertisement met with criticism from *Daily Kos* members who think that the space of stories should belong to them, rather than be "pay to play" (Daily Kos, 2018). There are few articles about the profitability of *Daily Kos*, but Markos

Moulitsas Zúniga once admitted to both *the New York Times* and the *Time Magazine* that although most of the ads revenue was used for the website maintenance, he still could earn more than \$80,000 a year, allowing him to live comfortably with his family (Cox, 2006; Solomon, 2006).

RedState. *RedState* is a collective political blogging platform similar with *Daily Kos*, but with the opposite political ideological leaning. It is an online community of information, opinion and activism for conservatives in the U.S. It was founded in 2004 by political bloggers Joshua Trevino, Ben Domenech and Mike Krempasky (Trevino, 2010). Erick Erickson joined RedState in 2005 and was its Editor-in-chief until 2014, who was succeeded later by Leon Wolf and then Coleb Howe as the website's editorial leader. But it was during Erick Erickson's tenure that RedState reached its peak of influence. It was not as a large-scale blogging platform as *Daily Kos*. In 2014, its number of monthly unique visitors was 870,396, less than 1/8 of that for *Daily Kos* according to the same Quantcast research (Daily Kos, 2014). The latest Alexa ranking data shows that in July 2019, it has had 803,000 monthly unique visitors, still much lower than *Daily Kos*. But despite the scale of the platform, it has had great influence on conservative politics, especially during Erick Erickson's tenure amidst the tea party wave (McLaughlin, 2018). An article in *the Atlantic* called Erickson the most powerful conservative in America, as conservative politicians needed to seek the endorsement of *RedState* in national and gubernatorial elections, and to consult Erickson himself on policy issues such as gun and immigration (Ball, 2015).

Its content production also relies on a small group of frontpage writers, some of whom are paid writers, and the broad community of online conservatives who do not get paid for their writing. It leans toward the tea-party, grassroots position of conservatism, claiming to "take back

America” from mass media and the Republican leaders in Washington who do not fight for the “actual conservatives” from its point of view (Erickson & Uhler, 2010, p. x). It attaches great importance to the goal of political activism as well. As it is put in its mission statement, “We yell ‘ready, ‘aim’ and ‘fire’”, and need to “educate conservatives” as well as “motivate” and “activate” conservatives to join the political process (RedState, 2020). It had been organized the annual *RedState* Gathering until 2017, where *RedState* community members and conservative politicians such as Rick Perry and Marco Rubio gathered to discuss conservative issues. Interestingly, the platform has featured a diversity of opinions toward President Trump, with some main editors and writers being critics of the President (Gray, 2018).

RedState was owned by Eagle Publishing, which was later acquired by Salem Media Group. Its maintenance is funded by corporate funding, along with donations from the *RedState* community members, and advertisement income from some banner ads that it runs in the interstitial space on the website. In 2018, the Salem Media Group announced a major round of firing of its paid contributors, including then Editor-in-chief Coleb Howe. According to a *CNN* report, the “mass firing” was for both the purpose of cost reduction and that of getting rid of anti-Trump writers (Stelter, 2018).

Selection of Issues

While the selection of media is intended to constitute a sufficient “specimen” for the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists as explained above (Peräkylä, 2005), the selection of issues is for providing a sufficiently wide “stage” for the contestation to play out, demonstrating its dynamics as well as its implication to democracy in the context of post-truth politics (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994).

The two issues that I selected, healthcare reform (February 2009-April 2010) and gun control debate (December 2012-April 2013), both occurred during the first term of Obama's Presidency, when some main tendencies of post-truth politics already set in. The dynamics in media and technology that drives the emergence of post-truth politics, such as the 24/7 news cycle, the growth of partisan media and the proliferation of Internet usage, actually dates back to 1980s and 1990s (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018). Scholars have long been sounding alarms around the declining trust in media and the rising influences of opinions over facts (Carey, 2002; Tugend, 2003). Shortly before and throughout Obama's Presidency, these tendencies already reached a concerning level. During the 2008 presidential election campaign, multiple conspiracy theories about Obama being a Kenyan or Indonesian citizen were circulated among anti-Obama Americans. Even after the White House showed the authentic birth certificate in 2010 and the media made efforts for fact-checking, 25% of American adult citizens still doubted Obama's citizenship, allowing the birthers' claims to persist (Travis, 2010). During the 2012 presidential election campaign, candidate Mitt Romney fabricated many claims to attack Obama's positions in healthcare, economy and diplomacy. These phenomena already made some observers worry about the onset of the post-truth politics (Krugman, 2011; Parma, 2012). Against this backdrop, it is meaningful to examine the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists to contemplate their different understandings of objectivity and divergent accounts of social reality in relation to the broader mechanism of post-truth politics.

Both issues were also characterized by 1) the disputes around a set of policy proposals in political and civic discussion, 2) the heavy engagement of political elites and ordinary citizens, and 3) a coherent political process as constituted of a series of key moments which necessitated large volumes of writings from professional and citizen journalists and thus allowed the full

display of the dynamics of their contestation over objectivity. First, different from the issue of election campaigns that often involves a medley of issues, the healthcare reform and gun control debate both featured some specific policy proposals where politicians and citizens carried out their debate, such as the public option and the individual mandate in the Obamacare drafts, or the universal background check and the assault weapon ban in the gun control bills. This is helpful for the observation of the journalistic practitioners' contestation over objectivity to be grounded in the disputes over these specific policy proposals and their underlying differences in the understanding of social reality. Secondly, some other issues, such as the foreign affairs in Lybia and Egypt that made hot media topics in 2011, could receive far more attention from professional news media than citizen media outlets due to the latter's lack of resources for overseas coverage and lack of interest in foreign affairs. By comparison, the healthcare reform and the gun control debate were the two issues of domestic politics during Obama administration that invited heated debates among political elites, media pundits and columnists as well as the general public online and offline. This offers the vantage point for capturing the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists. Thirdly, the two issues demonstrated a coherent process of political deliberation and policy making that can be conceived of as constituted of a series "critical discourse moments" (Gamson, 1992), which correspond to the different phases of policy making from initiation and agenda-setting to debate and decision making (Downs, 1972; Kingdon, 2001; Saward, 2003). During these key moments, public attention to and political discussion regarding the issues were more intense than the other times. Within political elites' discussion as well as public debate, a great variety of voices emerged for professional and citizen journalists to select, process and present. This would further facilitate the observation of the full display of their contestation over objectivity.

The selection of the two issues would allow for some between-issue comparison as well. Different from the health care reform that is highly relevant to citizens' economic welfare, the gun control debate may be fairly described as a moral cultural war between gun advocates claiming their second amendment right and the rest of citizens concerned about security and life. According to Guttman and Thompson (2009), the latter issue is less likely to be subject to reasoned political deliberation. In this sense, it may instigate more intense contestation over objectivity between different actors in journalism, especially between the liberal and conservative camps in citizen journalism.

Here, I will make a brief description of the political processes for both issues, highlight the key moments involved in the processes, which correspond to the four phases of policy making: initiation, agenda-setting, debate and discussion, and decision making (Downs, 1972; Kingdon, 2001; Saward, 2003). For the determination of the time span for most of the moments, I refer to the key events in the debates and choose the frame of time starting from the events and ending on Sundays of the corresponding weeks. If the events occurred close to or on weekends, the frame of time ends on Sundays of the next weeks. This is intended to allow journalists, especially citizen journalists, to have sufficient time to write and publish in response to the events. Appendices A and B at the end of the dissertation show the detailed timeline of main events and the list of critical discourse moments for the healthcare reform, based on prior news reports and research (Jacobs & Skocpol, 2012; Public Broadcasting Service, 2012; The New York Times, 2010). Appendices C and D show those for gun control debate, based on prior news reports and research (Krouse, 2015; Owings, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2013).

The healthcare reform (February 2009-April 2010). The goal of the healthcare reform during Obama's presidency is, in the former President's words, "to fix what's broken about

healthcare in America” (Obama, 2009). Specifically, it was intended to make healthcare affordable and available to more people, and lower the cost of healthcare for the U.S. for the long run (www.healthcare.gov, 2019). Nicknamed “Obamacare”, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was one of the most important policy outputs from the Obama administration. It was considered “the most far-reaching healthcare reform act since the passage of Medicare in 1965” in the U.S. (Levy, 2020).

The first critical discourse moment in the 14-month process of healthcare reform was identified to be February 26-March 8, 2009. It started with President Obama’s proposal of health care overhaul reserve fund, and the White House summit on the reform also occurred during this moment. Throughout his presidential campaign, Senator Barack Obama had made promises for a sweeping change to the US health care system. After being elected the President, he reiterated the importance of the reform, despite some top advisers’ opposition (Public Broadcasting Service, 2012). On February 26, 2009, he proposed a \$634 billion reserve fund in 2010 budget proposals, to cover part of the reform cost over 10 years. Six days later, he tried to rally up support from a broad group of constituencies by convening a White House summit, which included prominent congressmen and officials as well as the representatives for insurance companies, doctors, hospitals, patients and the pharmaceutical industry. It was around this time that the health care reform gathered “full speed ahead”, and “different ideas and solutions” for the reform got on board (Jacobs & Skocpol, 2012). Therefore, this period is considered the moment of initiation for the healthcare reform.

The second critical discourse moment was July 14-19, 2009. On July 14, the House democratic leaders released the Tri-Committee “America’s Affordable Health Choices Act”. Although it was later superseded by other House and Senate bills, it was the first bill of

“Obamacare” being drafted, which introduced the main elements of reform such as individual mandate, the prohibition of pre-existing condition exclusion, employer mandate, and public health insurance option. All these elements stayed at the center of political discussion during the rest of health care debate. In this sense, it is fair to consider the period as the moment of agenda-setting in the health care reform debate.

The third to ninth critical discourse moments were a series of periods that saw the intense public attention to and political discussion around health care. Despite the White House push to speed work on the reform, the voting on health legislation was delayed until after the summer recess, which however, allowed for the strong outbursts of public expression in town hall meetings in August 2009. This period offered an ideal chance to observe citizen journalists’ contribution as well as their potential contestation over objectivity, therefore being identified as a key moment of debate and discussion. In the eight months following the summer recess, there were a series of milestone events of key legislative breakthroughs or presidential address that stimulated further outbursts of debate and discussion. On September 9, President Obama presented “his most forceful case” for health care overhaul to a “rare joint session of Congress, in order to regain momentum for the reform (The New York Times, 2010). On October 13, the Senate Finance Committee, one of the most important panels for achieving bi-partisan support for health legislation, approved their version of health care reform bill, the America’s Health Future Act. On November 7, the House approved their health care plan, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, which was a major and “hard-fought victory” for President Obama (Hulse & Pear, 2009). On December 24, the Senate passed their health care bill, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, but the votes still fell along party lines. On February 22 next year, President Obama released the White House’s detailed legislative proposal for health reform to

challenge the congress Republicans to propose their alternative ideas on health reform, if they would not support his. On March 3, as the final push to health reform legislation, the President addressed the congress calling for setting aside political gamesmanship and scheduling the vote in the next few weeks. All the above events corresponded to the times when the legislative breakthroughs or presidential addresses stimulated discussion on the media and in the general public. So the about-week-long periods of time following these events were also identified as the moments of debate and discussion.

The last critical discourse moment was March 21-April 4, 2010, the period of political decision making. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the Senate health bill, passed through the House on March 21, and was signed into law by the President on March 23. Yet some House revisions of the Senate Bill, which did not pass the Senate voting until March 25, was enacted by President Obama on March 30. Therefore, the moment of March 21-April 4 was identified so as to cover the whole procedure of final decision making, and also include some extra time during March 31-April 4 for the observation of the media's response to the victory of "Obamacare".

The gun control debate (December 2012-April 2013). Here the issue of gun control debate refers to the debate around gun violence and gun control legislation that followed the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. The tragedy stunned the nation, triggering the legislative efforts for curbing gun violence, and a thorough public debate around the topic of gun control. Although other tragedies of gun violence occurred later, such as the Las Vegas shooting in 2017 and the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida in 2018, those events did not have similar political influences on the federal level. Different from healthcare reform, the gun control law proposal was defeated in Congress, but the political process that it

involved still demonstrated the four phases of initiation, agenda-setting, debate and discussion, and decision-making.

The first critical discourse moment in the gun control debate was identified to be December 14-December 22, 2012. Different from the health care reform debate, in this case, it was the sudden tragedy of Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting on December 14, 2012 that made the American public and political system confront the issue again. Gun control already gathered high-profiled coverage during the 2011 shooting of Gabrielle Giffords, but the scale of the Newtown tragedy, the loss of 26 lives including 20 students, made the gun control legislation more urgent than ever (Owings, 2014). The first moment also covered the key events such as President Obama's memorial address at Newtown and his establishment of a task force on gun violence under the leadership of Vice President Biden. All these events represented the initiation of thorough gun control debate in American society. This critical discourse moment was considered to end on December 22, when the last funeral of Newtown victim was held, and the media attention temporarily moved to Christmas festivity.

The second critical discourse moment was January 16-20, 2013. President Obama released his plan for gun control legislation on January 16. His legislative proposals included four parts, the requirement of "universal background checks", the increased penalties for gun trafficking, the reinstatement and reinforcement of the ban on military-style firearms and large-capacity magazines, and increased funding in improving school security. These proposals would become the centerpiece of later Senate bills, and also the main controversies between gun control supporters and gun rights advocates. Thus, this moment was considered the period of agenda setting in the gun control debate (Pew Research Center, 2013).

The third to fifth critical discourse moments were the around-week-long periods following key events prior to the political decision-making moment. On February 12, 2013, President Obama called for action on gun control in State of the Union address. On March 7, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary approved four gun control bills, in line with the four main parts of legislative proposals from the President. On March 21, Senator Harry Reid introduced the Safe Communities, Safe School Act, which nonetheless did not include the language of the Assault Weapons Ban that had been long championed by Senator Dianne Feinstein and stressed in the President's proposals (Krouse, 2015). All the events, the presidential address and congressional legislation efforts, served to stimulate media attention from professional and citizen journalists.

The last critical discourse moment was identified to be the around-week-long period following Senate voting on gun control bills that started on April 16. Although Senator Dianne Feinstein finally managed to add the language of the Assault Weapons Ban as an amendment of the bills, most of the main parts of gun legislation from President Obama's plan was rejected, and the Senate also failed to take a final vote on the whole act. In response to the result, President Obama called it a "shameful" day in Washington, and he called for continued fight for gun control. Here, the moment of political decision-making (or more precisely, the failed political decision-making) also covered the rest of the week, so as to capture sufficient media responses to the voting result.

Types of Data, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

As mentioned before, this research utilized a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. To understand the contestation over objectivity among journalists in the different media platforms and as reflected in their coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate, I resorted to

content analysis of their issue coverage and in-depth interviews of main authors/editors, with the supplement of in-depth reading of some journalistic texts and triangulation with secondary materials.

The content analysis of a sample of news, opinion and blog pieces from the media outlets' healthcare reform coverage ($N=1146$) and that of their gun control debate coverage ($N=1013$) serves the purpose of describing these outlets' differences regarding the manifestation of objectivity elements (standards, forms of content, and practices) and the depiction of social reality in the content of their issue coverage. The in-depth interviews are for digging deeper into the contestation by the journalists, understanding their discursive boundary-work and epistemic authority claims, their journalistic practices, their resources involved and the heteronomous influences they are subject to. In-depth reading of some journalistic texts is to further understand the nuances around the elements of objectivity that the quantitative coding of content analysis and the interviews fail to capture. The triangulation with secondary materials is for confirming what the interviewees explained to me and deepening the understanding for some subject matters where I could not manage to elicit rich responses through interviews. Next I will explain the data collection and analysis procedures for each of the four parts, focusing on content analysis and in-depth interviews.

Content analysis.

Sampling. Here, the content under analysis is the issue coverage during the critical discourse moments corresponding to different phases in the political processes of healthcare reform and gun control debate, as illustrated in the previous part. Before sampling, a preliminary search and inspection of the numbers of content pieces that the journalists produced during all the periods were conducted. It showed that in most cases, the around-a-week time following a

key event was the period when journalists produced a substantial volume of coverage related to it, making it a valid option for the duration of a critical discourse moment. But for citizen journalists who write blogs part-time, especially those at *RedState* which is a smaller-scale media platform compared to others, some key events for the moments of the debate and discussion stage of healthcare reform were not immediately followed with related blog pieces, but with a lag of more than a week. Taking this into consideration, I grouped these moments into longer periods of time to make sure that the relevant writings by bloggers at *RedState* can be captured. The tables on next page (Table 3.2; Table 3.3) present the lists of critical discourse moments for healthcare reform and that for gun control debate after the grouping, together with the corresponding stages of political process, and the key events during these moments.

Table 3.2

The list of critical discourse moments for content analysis of healthcare reform coverage

Stage of healthcare reform	Critical discourse moment	Key event(s)
Initiation	2009/02/26-2009/03/08	President Obama proposed \$634 billion fund for healthcare reform.
Agenda setting	2009/07/14-2009/07/26	Three House committees reached a healthcare bill and planned to vote.
Debate & discussion	2009/08/01-2009/08/31	Members of congress met with constituents at town halls.
	2009/10/13-2009/11/15	Senate Finance committee approved their bill. The House passed theirs.
	2009/12/24-2010/01/24	Senate passed their bill, the Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act.
Decision making	2010/02/22-2010/03/07	President Obama made a reform proposal and called for Congress to vote.
	2010/03/21-2010/04/04	The bill were passed in House and Senate, and was signed into law.

Table 3.3

The list of critical discourse moments for content analysis of gun control debate coverage

Stage of gun control debate	Critical discourse moment	Key event(s)
Initiation	2012/12/14-2012/12/22	Shooting occurred in Sandy Hook elementary school.
Agenda setting	2013/01/16-2013/01/20	The White House released gun control legislative proposals.
Debate & discussion	2013/02/12-2013/02/17	President Obama calls for action on gun control in his SOTU address.
	2013/03/07-2013/03/17	Senate Judiciary Committee approved four gun control bills.
	2013/03/21-2013/03/31	Senator Harry Reid introduced the bill for vote in the Senate.
Decision making	2013/04/16-2013/04/21	Main gun control amendments were all rejected in the Senate.

Next, for both issues, the sampling frames were created through the keyword search using multiple search tools. Specifically, firstly, I determined the search terms based upon the consideration of important policy components in healthcare reform or gun control debate, and that of the search terms used in prior media content analysis on the same topics (Pew Research Center, 2010, 2012). Appendix E presents the search terms for both issues.

Secondly, multiple search tools, including NexisLexis's media database, the media outlets' online archives, and Google search within the domain of the media websites, were compared for purpose of selecting the most effective search tool for each media platform that could return search results possibly close to the platform's complete coverage of the issues. Appendix F presents the search tool selected for each media platform.

Thirdly, using the selected search tool, the keyword search was conducted for each media platform during each of the critical discourse moments, followed by a result-by-result scan to screen the search results by removing irrelevant ones. The screening used 3 main standards to determine the irrelevant ones. 1) The result needs to have at least 1 paragraph that talks about any policy components in healthcare reform or gun control debate in a substantive and focused fashion. The pieces that contain a mere mention of the topic are considered irrelevant. 2) The result needs to be authored by professional or citizen journalists on these media platforms, given the interest of the research in the enactment of objectivity by journalistic practitioners in the different media platforms. The pieces from external news services such as *Associated Press* or *Reuters* are considered irrelevant. For the results of *the Washington Post* newspaper, the pieces from ordinary readers in the form of letters to the editor, or from those authors who are not hired by the newspaper, which can be reflected in their bylines and contact information, are considered irrelevant. 3) The result needs to be in the textual form. Those that contain only video clips,

cartoons or news photos are considered irrelevant. Although this excludes some interesting visual materials from my analysis, this makes it possible to devise a consistent content coding scheme and keep the content analysis within a reasonable scope of research. The screening by these standards narrowed down the search results and formulated the lists of relevant results for content analysis for healthcare reform (*total N=3645*) and gun control debate (*total N=2813*).

As explained in Chapter 2, the ways that objectivity is enacted and understood by journalists are related mainly to the variation of media platforms along the lines of professional status, political ideology and technology. Besides, different moments in the political process (e.g., the moment of initiation vs. that of decision making) may also have to do with the intensity of controversy among the different journalistic practitioners, thus affecting their contestation over objectivity. Thus, I categorized all the relevant results for healthcare reform and gun control debate by two variables, media platforms and critical discourse moments, for purpose of conducting sampling to make a good representation of all the strata of each media platform by each key moment (Groves et al., 2009). On the next two pages, Table 3.4 and Table 3.6 present the number of news, opinion and blog pieces in each stratum of the total coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate. For all the strata with more than 50 pieces, I conducted the simple random sampling, assigning consecutive numbers to all results in the particular strata as ranked by the time of publication, and using a random number generator to draw a sample of 50 pieces for each stratum. Table 3.5 and Table 3.7 present the number of pieces in each stratum (for all media platforms during all the key moments) as included in the sample of healthcare reform coverage (*N=1146*), and the sample of gun control debate coverage (*N=1013*).

Table 3.4

Number of articles in healthcare reform coverage by each media platform at each critical discourse moment

		RedState	Daily Kos	Huffington Post	Washington Post blog	Washington Post newspaper
Initiation	2009/02/26-2009/03/08	0	5	24	1	41
Agenda setting	2009/07/14-2009/07/26	6	36	56	2	156
Debate & discussion	2009/08/01-2009/08/31	12	207	233	5	452
	2009/10/13-2009/11/15	7	147	227	69	492
	2009/12/24-2010/01/24	4	89	62	37	385
	2010/02/22-2010/03/07	7	18	71	33	198
Decision making	2010/03/21-2010/04/04	13	46	179	77	248
Total coverage for each platform		49	548	852	224	1972
Total coverage for all platforms combined		N=3645				

Table 3.5

Number of articles in the sample of healthcare reform coverage by each media platform at each critical discourse moment

		RedState	Daily Kos	Huffington Post	Washington Post blog	Washington Post newspaper
Initiation	2009/02/26-2009/03/08	0	4	24	1	41
Agenda setting	2009/07/14-2009/07/26	6	36	50	2	50
Debate & discussion	2009/08/01-2009/08/31	12	50	50	5	50
	2009/10/13-2009/11/15	7	50	50	50	50
	2009/12/24-2010/01/24	4	50	50	37	50
	2010/02/22-2010/03/07	7	18	50	33	50
Decision making	2010/03/21-2010/04/04	13	46	50	50	50
Sample of coverage for each platform		49	254	324	178	341
Sample of coverage for all platforms combined		N=1146				

Table 3.6

Number of articles in gun control debate coverage by each media platform at each critical discourse moment

		RedState	Daily Kos	Huffington Post	Washington Post blog	Washington Post newspaper
Initiation	2009/02/26-2009/03/08	15	255	826	87	159
Agenda setting	2009/07/14-2009/07/26	9	91	164	36	42
Debate & discussion	2009/08/01-2009/08/31	6	28	196	31	22
	2009/10/13-2009/11/15	5	46	170	17	28
	2009/12/24-2010/01/24	8	47	132	22	33
Decision making	2010/03/21-2010/04/04	8	44	220	34	32
Total coverage for each platform		51	511	1708	227	316
Total coverage for all platforms combined		N=2813				

Table 3.7

Number of articles in the sample of gun control debate coverage by each media platform at each critical discourse moment

		RedState	Daily Kos	Huffington Post	Washington Post blog	Washington Post newspaper
Initiation	2012/12/14-2012/12/22	15	50	50	50	50
Agenda setting	2013/01/16-2013/01/20	9	50	50	36	42
Debate & discussion	2013/02/12-2013/02/17	6	28	50	31	22
	2013/03/07-2013/03/17	5	46	50	17	28
	2013/03/21-2013/03/31	8	47	50	22	33
Decision making	2013/04/16-2013/04/21	8	44	50	34	32
Sample of coverage for each platform		51	265	300	190	207
Sample of coverage for all platforms combined		N=1013				

Coding. The coding scheme was first developed according to how the concepts I examined were defined and operationalized in prior research, and then refined in the process of reading about 1/3 of the sampled pieces. Appendices G and H at the end of the dissertation contain the coding sheets for healthcare reform coverage and gun control debate coverage.

The pieces in the issue coverage samples were coded by the same coder who has earned a master's degree in journalism from one of the best journalism programs in the U.S. and had three years' experience of working as a news reporter in an English-language newspaper. The coder was rewarded \$1000 for the coding of each sample. A random subsample (n=150) was drawn from the sample of healthcare reform coverage and that of gun control debate coverage respectively. Using the same coding schemes, I coded the subsamples. Inter-coder reliability was calculated on the subsamples between the two coders, with the Krippendorff's *alpha* scores computed by using the SPSS Macro "KALPHA" (Krippendorff, 2004, 2011; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The Krippendorff's *alpha* scores for all the items were greater than .75, with most of them greater than .80.

1) *Forms of content.* First of all, all the pieces in the samples were coded for the forms of content. Similar as the coverage by professional journalists can be in the form of news articles or opinion articles, citizen journalists' blog coverage can be in the form of citizen commentaries or purely informational "newsy" blogs. In order to understand the different proportions of news (including purely informational "newsy" blogs) vs. opinions in the overall content of issue coverage by different media platforms, I adopted three categories for the forms of content: "news" (including purely informational blogs), "opinion", and "others".

To adapt to the style of blog writing that does not necessarily abide by the rules of conventional news writing or editorial/column writing, I used the broad definitions of "news" vs.

“opinion” that are focused on the differentiation of whether the content of a piece is purely informational, or contains the author’s own opinion. Therefore, “news” is broadly defined as a piece in which the title states only information and its body of content contains information and/or some inferences made by the author when quoting sources (Hickman & Trapp, 1998). “Opinion” is broadly defined as a piece which contains direct statement(s) of the author’s own opinion supporting or opposing healthcare reform, gun control, and/or any specific policy components in it. “Others” is for the pieces that cannot be categorized as “news” or “opinion”, such as some pieces where authors only express emotional feelings (e.g., sadness), pay tribute to values (e.g., religious belief), or mobilize people to join certain activities without including specific information or opinions about the issues.

2) *Balance*. All the pieces coded as “news” were coded for whether or not it follows the standard of balance. The standard of balance, in general, requires the presentation of conflicting views on both sides of an issue in news reporting (Tuchman, 1972). Thus the concept of balance is operationalized here by the sources’ contrasting issue favorability, based on prior research on news balance and political bias (Hopmann, Van Aelst & Legnante, 2011). It is defined as the inclusion of both sources who favor healthcare reform, gun control or specific policy components involved therein, and of sources who oppose them. Based on the understanding of their issue favorability as reflected in what they said and the author’s description, a news article is coded as following the standard of balance or not.

3) *Transparency*. All the pieces coded as “news” were also coded for whether or not it follows the standard of transparency. The standard of transparency, which was first proposed by bloggers but advocated by some professional journalists as well, requires that journalists explain their information collection and processing procedures, or make their own potential biases

toward the issue under coverage known to readers (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014; Weinberger, 2009). Here, it is defined as the inclusion of some explanations regarding the author's rationale for collecting some information or for not collecting some other information (e.g., the importance of information to readers, or the pressure of deadline), the author's process of obtaining and analyzing the information (e.g., how to get access to a source, or how to treat data), and the author's political ideological position that does not involve specific opinions on the issues but can indicate a potential bias in the coverage (e.g., the author's left or right leaning). Depending on whether or not a news article contains such explanations, it is coded as following the standard of transparency or not.

4) *Sources*. All the pieces coded as "news" were coded for whether or not it includes official source(s), and whether or not it includes ordinary citizen source(s). Sigal's (1973) research on sourcing differentiated sources by official or unofficial status into five categories: "U.S. government officials", "foreign government officials, including those of international agencies", "officials of state and local government in the United States", "private citizens of the United States", and "foreigners not in any government" (p. 121). In this research, the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate mostly involves the sources in the United States. Therefore, official sources are defined as the elected officials of United States on various levels of the government, who are quoted directly or indirectly by the author. A list of different types of elected officials compiled by the U.S. government was used as the reference for coding (www.usa.gov, 2019). In the rare cases where the coverage involved the officials of foreign government and international agencies, they were treated as official sources as well. Ordinary citizen sources are defined as the directly or indirectly quoted sources of U.S. citizens who are not elected officials. In the rare cases where the coverage involved foreign citizens who are not

affiliated with government or international agencies, it was treated as ordinary citizen sources as well.

5) *News topics*. All the pieces coded as “news” were also coded for the main topics, for purpose of comparing the width of range of topics across the different media platforms.

The coding scheme for news topics was developed through the reading of around 1/3 of all news articles from all the platforms so as to make the scheme applicable for them. Based on the reading, I classified the topics of healthcare reform (HCR) coverage into seven categories: HCR legislation procedures, political fight & response around the legislation procedures, HCR policies and implications, key individual players in HCR, public debate and advocacy, the influence of HCR on industry, and media coverage of HCR. Depending on the main topic that a news article is focused upon, its topic is coded as one of the seven options. For some particular pieces that are relevant to more than 1 topics, its main topic is determined based on the main topic as highlighted in the headline and the lead. For some rare pieces that do not fit into any of the seven options, its main topic was coded as “others”.

Similarly, I classified the topics of gun control debate coverage into six categories: gun politics which includes gun legislature, lobbying as well as political and public debate on gun policies, the Newtown tragedy and grieving, gun violence that happened in other places than Newtown, gun business, mental illness, and school safety. The determination of the main topic in a news article, and the treatment of the topics in some rare pieces as “others” followed the same steps as for healthcare reform coverage.

For the comparison of the width of range of news topics across the media outlets, I drew on the ecology research on the diversity of species (McDonald & Dimmick, 2003; Simpson,

1949). In ecology research, diversity of species is understood as comprised of two dimensions, richness and relative abundance. Richness refers to the number of species. Relative abundance refers to the evenness of distribution across different species. The Simpson's diversity index (Simpson's D) can be calculated as $1 - \sum(n/N)^2$, where n =total number of units of a particular species, and N =total number of units of all species. It takes both richness and relative abundance into account. We can examine the richness of species by simply looking at the number of species. We can also examine the relative abundance of species by looking at the Simpson's D in the way that if we hold the richness of species constant, then a higher value of Simpson's D indicates a great level of relative abundance.

This way to conceptualize and measure the diversity of species in ecology research has been utilized in prior journalism research on the diversity of topics in newspapers and citizen journalism websites (Carpenter, 2010). In this research, similarly, I understand the width of the range of topics as comprised of two dimensions: the richness of topics, and the relative abundance across topics. Thus, for each media platform, based on the coding results, I calculated the number of topics and the Simpson's D value for purpose of comparing the width of range of news topics on both dimensions.

6) *Content aggregation*. Moreover, all the pieces coded as "news" were coded for whether or not it used content aggregation as the means of reporting. Here, content aggregation is understood as the utilization of third-party content from other media sources through direct or indirect quotation, interlinking or rewriting (Anderson, 2013). The coding is based on whether a news article contains the direct or indirect quotation of other media sources, offer hyperlinks to other media sources, or is in itself the rewriting of a news story from other media sources. Here, other media sources refer to a wide range of options including mainstream media, partisan

media, news aggregator websites, and blogs outside of the media platform itself. To facilitate the coding, a list of main categories of media, accompanied with some examples, was used to train the coders. For example, for partisan media, the list included partisan cable news channels, talk radio shows, news websites and opinion magazines, as illustrated with several corresponding examples. For mainstream media, the list included national newspapers, news magazines, TV and radio stations, main news outlets in each metropolitan market, international media organizations, news agencies, and their websites, as illustrated with several corresponding examples. The coders were asked to read whether or not the author attributed some content of direct/indirect quotations to other media sources, included the links to other media sources, or created the article as the rewriting of content from other media sources. In the absence of explicit attribution information, the coders were asked to check the hyperlinks in the article until they could determine whether or not it links to other media sources.

7) *Types of information cited in opinions.* All the pieces coded as “opinion” were coded for the types of information cited in opinion pieces. First, based on the reading of around 1/3 of all opinion pieces from all the media platforms, I classified the information cited in the opinion pieces into seven categories: the direct or indirect quotations from elected officials, the direct or indirect quotations from ordinary citizens, documents or reports issued by different levels of local/federal government, the U.S. law and legal documents (e.g., the Constitution, federal law, state law, court decisions, justices’ opinions and annotations, etc.), public opinion polls, scholarly research, and personal facts. Based on whether or not an opinion piece contains these types of information, they were coded as “yes” or “no” for each type of information.

Here, personal facts are defined as personal anecdotes/observations, that is, the anecdotes that happened to the authors themselves or somebody they knew personally, or things they

observed while attending an event. Besides personal facts, the other types of information are considered as non-personal facts. Scholarly research is understood as information from a published academic research in books, academic journals or conference procedures, or the findings of research quoted from researchers affiliated with colleges, research institutes or thinktanks. The definitions of elected officials and ordinary citizens remain the same as the definitions used for the coding of elected official vs. ordinary citizen sources in news articles as mentioned above. To avoid duplicative coding, the authors themselves or researchers, even though many of them are not affiliated with government, are not considered ordinary citizens here. Thus, the pieces with the authors' own personal facts or those that quoted academic findings from researchers were coded for the category of personal facts or that of scholarly research, rather than quotations from ordinary citizens.

8) *Opinion direction*. Lastly, all the pieces coded as "opinion" were coded for the direction of opinions as favoring/opposing healthcare reform or gun control. The initial reading of around 1/3 of all opinion pieces from different media platforms was conducted to develop the coding scheme for opinion direction. As the reading revealed, healthcare reform and gun control are both comprehensive issues that contain several dimensions of opinion divisions among the authors. The direction of opinions regarding healthcare reform or gun control can be manifested on these different dimensions.

For example, in the opinion coverage of healthcare reform (HCR), the author could directly express the opinion opposing or supporting HCR in general. But the author could also express an anti-HCR or pro-HCR stance by speaking on the role of government in HCR, the economic implication of HCR, the attitude toward public option, and which side is to blame in the mutual attacks between conservatives and liberals in the HCR debate. Similarly, in the

opinion coverage of gun control debate, the author could directly express the opinion opposing or supporting gun control in general. But the author could also express an anti-gun control or pro-gun control stance by speaking on what kind of issue the Newtown tragedy is about, whether gun right is sacred and inviolable, what role the National Rifles Associations (NRA) and other gun lobby groups played in gun politics, and which side is to blame in the mutual attacks between conservatives and liberals in their gun control debate.

Based upon this consideration, the opinion direction in an opinion piece was coded as supporting/opposing healthcare reform or gun control on one or more of these different dimensions when applicable.

Specifically, for each opinion article from the healthcare reform coverage, the opinion direction was coded as “favor HCR” or “criticize HCR” on one or more of the following five dimensions, when applicable. 1) HCR in general: The author’s main attitude toward healthcare reform in general was pro-HCR or anti-HCR. 2) Government role in HCR: The author’s opinion is that it is necessary for the government to help the uninsured and improve healthcare system, or that more government intervention in healthcare endangers free market and individual choice. 3) HCR’s impacts on economy: The author’s opinion is that the economic repercussions of HCR are necessary and even reasonable, or that HCR causes economic pressure and it is not well addressed in the bill. 4) Public option in HCR: The author’s opinion is that the public option in HCR should be supported, or that the public option should be opposed. 5) Partisan bias in healthcare reform debate: The author’s opinion is that conservatives are to blame for their unjust roles in HCR, or that liberals are to blame for their unjust roles in HCR.

For each opinion article from the gun control debate coverage, the opinion direction was coded as “favor gun control” or “favor gun right” on one or more of the following five

dimensions, when applicable. 1) Gun control: The author's opinion is that gun control legislature is a necessary government measure to curb gun violence, or that gun control legislature is government infringement on gun owners' fundamental freedom. 2) Newtown tragedy: The author's opinion is that the Newtown tragedy is primarily an issue of gun violence, or that the Newtown tragedy is primarily about school safety, mental illness or other issues, rather than gun violence. 3) Gun right: The author's opinion is that gun right should be rightly subject to moral/social/legal control, or that gun right is a sacred right that cannot be violated. 4) NRA and other gun lobby groups: The author's opinion is that NRA and other gun lobby groups are bad and irresponsible in using money or spreading fear to manipulate policy outcomes, or that they are the guardians of gun right. 5) Partisan bias in gun control debate: The author's opinion is that conservatives are irrational in gun control debate, or that liberals are irrational in gun control debate.

With the coding of opinion direction on these different dimensions for all opinion articles as mentioned above, the overall fairness of opinion offerings on the issue of healthcare reform or gun control debate by each media platform can be calculated as the structural balance score, which is borrowed from Fico, Zeldes & Diddi's (2004) study on partisan balance in election news. First, for each dimension, based upon the coding of opinion directions, a balance score can be calculated as $(n1-n2)/(n1+n2)$, where $n1$ =number of articles favoring the issue, and $n2$ =number of articles opposing the issue. Then, five separate balance scores from all the dimensions are added up to get the structural balance score for a particular media platform in its overall opinion coverage of the issue.

Analysis. As most of the variables created from the content coding were categorical variables, the Chi-square tests of independence were performed to test the hypotheses about the

relationships between these variables and the media platforms' variations in professional status, ideological leaning and media technology. When the examination involves the comparison of three levels, such as professional vs. semi-professional vs. citizen journalism outlets, the post-hoc Bonferroni tests were also performed for pair-wide comparisons.

With regard to the width of range of news topics and the fairness of opinion offerings, these two content characteristics of issue coverage were measured by the aggregate-level indicators such as Simpson's *D* scores for news coverage and the structural balance score for overall opinion offerings, as mentioned above. Therefore, I relied on the simple comparison of numeric values for the testing of hypotheses relating to these two characteristics.

In-depth interview.

Selection of interviewees. The interviews were intended for the goal of empirically connecting news content with the action and discourse of its journalistic producers. Through the interviews, I hoped to understand how the content characteristics were related to the journalists' different understandings of objectivity as well as the practices of coverage by themselves and others at their media platform. Therefore, interviewee candidates were selected based on the consideration of their content characteristics and their roles/positions at their media outlet. Specifically, this consideration led me to select three categories of interview candidates. First, I picked most candidates whose content characteristics were typical of the overall issue coverage by their outlet so that the interviews can help with my understanding of the journalists' approach to objectivity and their related practices lying behind the issue coverage. For example, for *the Washington Post* newspaper and blog, I picked the journalists who showed the attempt for balance, interviewed elected official sources and covered legislative procedures in their news reporting, or who utilized non-personal factual evidence in their opinion writing. For *Daily Kos*

and *RedState*, I picked bloggers who expressed opinions in alignment with their left/right leaning and used personal anecdotes/observations as evidence. For *the Huffington Post*, I picked both some professional news reporters/columnists who followed the standard of balance in news reporting or fairness in opinion writing. I also picked some bloggers who expressed liberal leaning opinions.

Secondly, I also selected some candidates whose roles/positions at their media outlet allowed them to not only speak for themselves, but also explain other journalists' practices and internal operation in the outlet. For example, for *the Washington Post*, I picked some authors working as the editor or news ombudsman. For *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, I picked some website editors and frontpage writers.

Thirdly, I selected several candidates whose content characteristic were unique compared to the overall issue coverage by their outlet so as to avoid ignoring the possible diversity in the journalists' approach to objectivity and their related practices at a certain outlet. For example, for *the Washington Post*, I picked some journalists whose writings took ordinary citizens' perspective in reporting on the issues. For *the Huffington Post*, I picked some bloggers who wrote conservative leaning opinions to criticize gun control and healthcare reform.

Following this procedure, I kept selecting interviewee candidates in the three categories and added them to the list until the list contained around 25-30 candidates for each media platform, before starting to contact them.

The final list of interviewees was also determined depending on their accessibility. First, for most bloggers at *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, their bylines used online pseudonyms, making it difficult to find out their real names and contacts. At the time of research,

some of them were already inactive in the websites, making it unlikely to even contact them using the in-site communication tool. Secondly, for professional journalists at *the Washington Post* newspaper, the response rates for interview requests were very low. To deal with the challenges, I adopted two strategies for getting interview access. For bloggers, I combined my list with some snow-balling strategy, asking my interviewees to mention some other bloggers who write on the same topics and can be contacted. For professional journalists, I resorted to my personal contacts to find out some professional insider(s) who do not work at *the Washington Post*, but are familiar with journalistic production in this type of media organizations.

Table 3.8 on next page presents the list of all interviewees in this research and their roles in their media platforms. For each platform, despite the above-mentioned constraint of accessibility, I tried to maximize the diversity of interviewees' roles in the platform so as to get a more complete picture of how objectivity is understood and enacted by actors in these media, reducing the possible bias in self-reported idiosyncratic patterns. As could be seen in this table, in *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, the interviewees include the editor, frontpage writers, and regular bloggers. In *the Huffington Post*, they include the professional reporter and columnist that it employed, as well as bloggers. In *the Washington Post* newspaper and blog, they include reporters, editors as well as the former newspaper ombudsman.

Table 3.8

27 interviewees with their pseudonyms as used in this research, their media platforms and their roles in these platforms

Interviewee	Media platform	Role in the platform (& other jobs)
Luke	<i>The Washington Post</i> newspaper	Ombudsman
Ed	<i>The Washington Post</i> newspaper	Pulitzer-awarded reporter
Dean	<i>The New York Times</i> newspaper	Pulitzer-awarded reporter
Mike	<i>The Washington Post</i> newspaper	Business reporter
Greg	<i>The Washington Post</i> blog	Executive editor of the website
Jared	<i>The Washington Post</i> blog	Managing Editor of the Fix
Emily	<i>The Washington Post</i> blog	General assignment reporter
Jennifer	<i>The Washington Post</i> blog	Blogger (college professor)
Nathan	<i>The Washington Post</i> blog	Blogger (college professor)
Henry	<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Political reporter
Mia	<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Columnist
Matthew	<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Blogger (college professor)
Vincent	<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Blogger (public theology writer)
Keith	<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Blogger (medical doctor)
Jacob	<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Blogger (advertising professional)
Brian	<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Blogger (medical doctor)
Rowan	<i>Daily Kos</i>	Frontpage writer (web designer)
Ron	<i>Daily Kos</i>	Frontpage writer (college professor)
Harper	<i>Daily Kos</i>	Blogger (banker)
Taylor	<i>Daily Kos</i>	Blogger (college researcher)
Robert	<i>Daily Kos</i>	Blogger (website developer)
Ethan	<i>RedState</i>	Editor-in-chief
Todd	<i>RedState</i>	Frontpage writer (tech writer)
Zack	<i>RedState</i>	Blogger (conservative writer)
Gavin	<i>RedState</i>	Blogger (former journalist)
Scott	<i>RedState</i>	Blogger (advertising professional)
Paul	<i>RedState</i>	Blogger (college professor)

Interview procedure & questions. Most interviews were phone interviews, based on the consideration of my limited funding and the convenience for interviewees. The length of interviews ranged between 30 minutes to one hour. Two interviews, one with the former newspaper ombudsman of *the Washington Post* and the other with a *Daily Kos* blogger who is known as the Obamacare “Guru” for his readers, were conducted face-to-face in their office or home, because both of them gave consent to two hours of time for interview, which made the face-to-face interview a better method option to facilitate in-depth discussion.

The interviews were semi-structured. The interview process normally started with a brief chat about the interviewee’s background and his/her experience of working/blogging in the media platform. Depending on the response, I would guide the interviewee through the following three parts of discussion in different sequences. The three parts of discussion correspond to the topics of 1) the journalists’ boundary-work involved in the contestation of objectivity and their epistemic authority claims, 2) their journalistic activities of issue coverage and the resources needed for the coverage, and 3) the heteronomous influences they were susceptible to. For each part, the main topics were specified into a series of discussion points, which were then further specified into detailed interview questions, as shown in the moderation guide (see Appendix I). The purpose is to allow for enough flexibility in conducting interviews. With the moderation guide as constituted of main topics, discussion points and interview questions, I could go with the flow of the interviewee, changing the sequence of questions according to their narrative while still making sure to cover all the important points. When the interviewee did not have enough time, I could also customize the guide to focus on the most important points.

Specifically, for the first part, I focused on the interrelated topics of the journalists’ boundary-work involved in the contestation over objectivity and their epistemic authority claims.

According to Chapter 2, the boundary-work is constituted of two levels, the explanations of one's own approach to objectivity, which allow the journalists to reinforce their epistemic authority in their journalistic work, and the evaluations of the approach to objectivity by the journalists at the other media outlets, which serve to dispute the other side's authority claim. Thus, to elicit responses that could help me understand the two levels of boundary-work, I specified them into five sets of discussion points. I would start with 1) the general discussion about their news articles or opinion writings on the issues of healthcare reform or gun control debate. Then I would guide them to talk about 2) what they did in the issue coverage to make it credible and truthful, and then elaborate on the standards they used, and the corresponding values and practices. Following that, I would lead them to 3) the topic of objectivity, discussing their understanding of objectivity and its relevancy to their issue coverage. As the fourth step, I would divert the discussion to talk about 4) their past experiences of reading the work by the journalists at other media outlets. After that, I would ask them to evaluate the other journalists' work, leading them to talk about 5) the credibility and truthfulness in the other journalists' issue coverage, focusing on those journalists' transgressions from their own understanding of objectivity.

For the second part, I focused on the activities involved in the issue coverage and the key resources needed for the activities. Here, the journalistic activities refer to both one's own individual efforts as well as the collaborative procedures at one's outlet. Resources refer to the various types of economic support, social connections and cultural prestige or capacities needed for the activities. These main topics were specified into a series of discussion points. I would start with 1) a general discussion around the efforts going into their issue coverage. Then I would lead them to talk about 2) their specific individual activities in relation to topic selection,

information gathering and analysis, sourcing, finding information channels, and the development of writing, and to explain the collaboration with other journalists or bloggers. Following that, I would divert to another general discussion about 3) how they or their organization managed to support their efforts. Then I would lead them to talk about 4) the different types of resources needed for their issue coverage, and the specific beneficial impacts of the resources on their work.

In the third part, I focused on the heteronomous influences that these journalists were susceptible to. Based on the review of literature in Chapter 2, such heteronomous influences could be come from political elites, market or civil society, depending on the different field locations of these journalists. But most interviewees were hesitant to talk about such sensitive influences. Therefore, in order to elicit effective responses in this part, I specified the main topic into three sets of discussion points to guide the interviewees to develop trust in me and open up gradually. I would start with 1) the general discussion to test the waters and avoid putting words in their mouth by asking them to talk about the most pleasant and the less pleasant aspects of working/blogging on their platform. Then, I would share with them 2) the concerns of some journalists/bloggers that I have read from scholarly research, such as powerful sources, the pressure of profitability, misinformation, and group pressure, asking them for comments and prompting them to tell me whether they have similar concerns. Lastly, I would bring up 3) the specific challenges for their outlets according to what I have learned from secondary materials, such as the financial difficulty for *the Washington Post*, or trolling for *Daily Kos*, prompting them to explain the impacts they felt. The three steps of discussion guide turned out to be effective for some interviewees. But many interviewees, especially those employed by *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*, would still refuse to comment or only give tangential

remarks off the record. The utilization of secondary materials was used to address this constraint, as will be explained later in this chapter.

With the moderation guide that was formulated as explained above, I conducted the interviews in different ways depending on the lengths of time. For those interviewees who allowed one to two hours' time for discussion, I had the luxury of using most of these questions and digging deep into their understanding of objectivity, their practices, the resources involved in it, and the heteronomous influences they were susceptible to. But for several interviewees who gave consent to only 30-minutes' time of interview, I had to either read the key questions in each of the three parts to elicit responses, or chose to focus on one or two of these topics when their writings demonstrated some potential relevancy with these topics. The audio of all interviews was recorded with the interviewees' consent. The recordings were then transcribed via *Rev.com*, a paid human transcription service, for analysis.

Interview data analysis. My analysis of qualitative data from the interviews was a process of iterations and connection making, following the empirical steps that were devised based upon the analytical logic as contained in Stuart Hall's concept of articulation.

According to the concept of articulation explicated in Grossberg (1986) and Slack (1996), the distinct elements in an ideology do not have natural belongingness. They are expressed by social actors in a sense-making process by making connections/disconnections between the elements. The cases of "correspondence, non-correspondence and contradictions" (Slack, 1996, p.113) in the actors' sense-making process deserve much attention. The process is also embedded in everyday practices, where the discourse is joined together with activities. Social forces are also brought into play in the process, enabling/constraining the expression of certain ideological stances. The concept as such contains an analytical logic that, in the context of my

research, guides the attention of analysis to three points: 1) the expression of objectivity-relating elements by the journalists; 2) the ways that the journalists made connections between the elements, particularly the patterns of correspondence, non-correspondence and contradictions; 3) the ways that the journalists joined their discursive claims on their understanding of objectivity with their practices of issue coverage, and that the practices were enabled/constrained by some resources or heteronomous influences.

Informed by the analytical logic, I devised five empirical steps of interview data analysis to distill my understanding of the journalists' contestation over objectivity and the social forces involved in the process.

In step one, I read interview transcriptions and listened to audio recordings for multiple times, treating each sentence or each statement of experience/opinion/explanation as constituted of more than one sentences as a unit of analysis, and jotting down running notes on all the units that relate to: 1) the elements (values, standards, practices, and the other elements such as expertise) that one enlisted in talking about their understanding and enactment of objectivity, especially the explanations of why these elements helped make their reporting/writing credible and truthful; 2) the elements (values, standards, practices, and the other elements such as expertise) that the actors mentioned in evaluating other actors' enactment of objectivity, especially the explanations of why the elements showed the transgression from their own understanding of objectivity and/or made other actors' reporting/writing not credible and truthful; 3) the activities conducted for the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by the actors individually or through collaboration with others in their platform, 4) the resources involved in their issue coverage, including economic capital, social connections, and cultural

prestige or capacities, and 5) the influences that constrained their attempts of covering the issues in the ways that they thought should be.

In step two, I sorted all the relevant units in my notes into a set of themes in five categories: objectivity elements enlisted in self-evaluation, objectivity elements enlisted in the evaluation of other journalists, individual/collaborative activities for the issue coverage, resources needed for the coverage, and heteronomous influences. The establishment of a theme was justified by two standards. It needed to be mentioned by two or more interviewees among the similar type of actors in the same platform. It was also not disconfirmed by other interviewees among the similar type of actors in the same platform. For each outlet, the set of themes were refined after multiple rounds of reorganizing notes and re-reading transcripts.

In step three, I focused on the objectivity elements that they enlisted in their self-evaluation and their evaluation for each other to analyze the patterns of correspondence, non-correspondence and contradictions. Specifically, I considered these objectivity elements in light of prior research on professional and citizen journalism. By comparing prior research to the objectivity elements that emerged from my interview data, I highlighted how the journalists mentioned particular elements of objectivity together in the ways that were similar or dissimilar with previous findings, and how the journalists resorted to narratives and discursive strategies to make sense of certain connections/disconnections between elements or some seeming contradictions in the connections they made. In this way, the discreet objectivity elements from my interview data were threaded together into narratives by which the journalists contested over the meaning of objectivity and established their epistemic authority.

In step four, I analyzed the connections between their discursive claims on the understanding of objectivity and their individual/collaborative activities involved in the issue

coverage. In particular, I paid attention to the specific activities where the understanding of objectivity as they claimed was put into action, and some activities which showed some tension with the understanding of objectivity as they claimed.

In step five, I analyzed the connections between the activities of issue coverage, the resources involved in the issue coverage, and the heteronomous influences. I paid attention to the journalists' narratives about how the resources enabled the enactment of their understanding of objectivity in practice, and how the heteronomous influence constrained it.

Following the five steps, the themes for objectivity elements, issue coverage activities, resources, and heteronomous influences were integrated into coherent narratives around the dynamics of the journalists' contestation over objectivity, revealing how they were re-articulating the meanings of objectivity through discourse and practice in relation to field resources and field influences.

Other sources of data.

In-depth reading. The in-depth reading of selected news, opinion and blog pieces was intended to further deepen my examination of the journalists' understanding and enactment of objectivity beyond what was already revealed by content analysis and the interviews. The content analysis showed the main differences in the textual manifestation of objectivity elements, and the interviews unveiled the journalists' different understandings of objectivity and the related activities. But the results from these two parts of analysis often led to further questions. For example, for *the Washington Post*, its journalist interviewees were highly emphatic upon their newsroom collaboration in original reporting. So, what were the cues of original reporting in the content of issue coverage, and how did the coverage by journalists on different beats speak to

each other? For *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, content analysis and interviews demonstrated the importance of political ideology for their blogging. So, how did they orchestrate information to support political ideology? For *the Huffington Post*, the blogger interviewees said that they were interested in blogging due to a civic intellectual interest. So, how was the intellectual aspect of debate reflected in their blog writing?

Guided by these questions, I selected some pieces from their issue coverage for in-depth reading. The selection of pieces depended on the questions I hoped to answer. For example, to understand more about the textual manifestation of original reporting activities at *the Washington Post*, I selected its news articles during the critical discourse moments of healthcare reform and gun control debate when its issue coverage was relatively more emphatic upon news reporting. For *Daily Kos*, *RedState*, and *the Huffington Post*, to understand the textual manifestation of blogging for political ideology and blogging out of an intellectual interest, I selected their blog pieces during the critical discourse moments when partisan fight was more pronounced, such as the period right after the Newtown tragedy in gun control debate, and the period of townhall meetings across the country in healthcare reform.

Accordingly, in the in-depth reading, I would pay attention to the details of writing as relevant to these questions I hoped to answer. For instance, in the blog pieces I read, I would pay attention to what components of the content conveyed the message of political ideology and political activism, how these components were positioned in the blog pieces, whether the author cited information attributable to certain sources or information channels, and how the cited information was related to political ideology and activism messages. In the news articles I read, I would pay attention to whether and how the journalists indicated their efforts of original reporting in the content, what topics the journalists on different beats chose to cover, and how

these different topics related to each other. The examination of these details enabled a more in-depth understanding of how these journalists understood objectivity differently and enacted the different understandings in the issue coverage.

Secondary materials. Secondary materials were collected and analyzed for purpose of triangulation, confirming what the interviewees explained to me and deepening the understanding for some subject matters where I could not manage to elicit rich responses through interviews. Although the in-depth interviews were largely effective for eliciting responses regarding the journalists' self-evaluation and evaluation of other actors, this method option was limited in two aspects. First, it mainly relied on the interviewees' recall of what happened two or three years ago to collect data on the activities involved in their issue coverage. The qualitative data thus collected was less rich and valid, if compared to the interviews conducted right after the issue coverage or to ethnographic observation in the newsroom during the occurrence of issue coverage. Secondly, the subject matters such as structural influences on the issue coverage were sensitive to interviewees, especially those professional journalists employed by *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*. Most interviewees only gave brief indications of the influences they were susceptible to, and among those interviewees, many chose to speak off the record.

Due to the two main limitations of in-depth interviews, I collected and analyzed previous research papers, trade journal articles from the *Columbia Journalism Review* or the *American Journalism Review* and writings/talks/interviews of these journalists in other occasions regarding two main topics: the activities of journalistic work or blogging in these media platforms, and the various influences from political elites, market and civil society on these media platforms during healthcare reform and gun control debate. Some analysis of these secondary materials was

conducted before the interviews to prepare for the discussions with interviewees. More of these secondary materials analyses was conducted while I was analyzing the interview data so as to confirm, disconfirm, and deepen my understanding regarding these topics, reinforcing validity and richness of findings for this research.

Chapter 4

Varied Manifestations of Objectivity in Contents: News Coverage and Opinion Representations of Healthcare Reform and Gun Control Debate

In this chapter, I will depict varied manifestations of objectivity in the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate among the four media outlets: *the Washington Post* newspaper and blog, *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos*, and *RedState*. As discussed in Chapter 3, these media outlets differ not only in their respective status on the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum, but also in political ideology and media technology. An inference embedded in this analysis states that journalists working in these outlets differ in their news production practices. A main line of differences, as reviewed in Chapter 2, are about how they construct the contents of news reporting and opinion representation by the different rules as implied by their different approaches to objectivity. It is such differences that undergird the variations in the content manifestation shown in the analyses reported in this chapter.

Specifically, I analyzed the manifestations of objectivity in the four media outlets' journalistic contents of news and opinion coverage of the two issues by the following sequence. Firstly, corresponding to the outlets' variation in professional status, I examined a series of hypothesized relationships between their professional status and four aspects of manifestations of objectivity: 1) the distribution of two forms of content, news (including purely informational "newsy" blogs) vs. opinions, 2) the standards of balance and transparency in news reporting, 3) the practices involved in objective reporting, such as sourcing in news and citing different types of factual evidence in opinions, and 4) the account of reality constructed in the contents, including the range of topics in news coverage and the balance of conflicting views in opinion representation. Then, corresponding to these outlets' variations in political ideological leaning

and media technology, I also examined 5) the relationship between the outlets' political ideological stances and ideological leanings of opinion representations, and 6) that between digital vs. traditional media technology and content aggregation in news.

Corresponding to the six thematic areas mentioned above, this chapter includes six main parts where the findings are presented with the support of figures and tables. In each part, I will go through the findings about the issue of healthcare reform and that of gun control debate, one issue at a time. Here, the two issues mainly serve as mutual replications. As explained in Chapter 3, they were both policy issues that involved highly polarized political and civic debate. I conducted the analysis mainly to look for the common patterns between issues, which can inform the overall understanding of how the textual manifestations of objectivity differed among the outlets in relation to their professional status, political ideology and technological basis. Meanwhile, in some of the thematic areas, the patterns showed between-issue differences, which I also paid attention to. But it should be noted that my between-issue comparison was not based on formal statistical analysis, but more of an informal comparison by considering/interpreting the different patterns in the context of the issues.

As the results will show to us, these media outlets' contrasts in the manifestations of objectivity in journalistic contents are multi-faceted and dynamic, where patterns differ across the aspects under examination. The results reveal some major disparities between the outlets in relation to professional status, political ideology, and technological basis. The outlets located differently on the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum showed significant differences in their emphasis on news vs. opinion coverage, the extents of abiding by the standards of balance and transparency in news, the reliance on elected official sources, and the attempt of including conflicting views in opinion representations. The liberal and conservative outlets showed sharp

polarization in opinion offerings. The digital media platforms used content aggregation far more than the traditional media platform. But besides these major disparities, the results also demonstrated some minor differences and even some similarities between these media outlets. In a nutshell, the overall results speak to the argument I made in Chapter 2 that the contestation is not the absolute negation vs. endorsement of the notion of objectivity per se, but rather about how journalistic objectivity should be enacted.

Differentiation in Forms of Content: Predominance of News or Opinion

As the first line of inquiry in the content analysis, I tested the hypothesis on the relationship between the media outlets' professional status and the proportions of news in issue coverage (H1). As explained in the previous chapter, in this research, I coded all the pieces of journalistic content for two main forms of content: news or opinion. "News" is broadly defined as a piece where its title and body of content contain information and/or some inferences made by the author when quoting sources (Hickman & Trapp, 1998). It thus includes news articles as well as the purely informational "newsy" blogs. "Opinion" is broadly defined as a piece that contains direct statement(s) of the author's own opinion concerning the issues. As the results show, while *the Washington Post's* coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate featured the predominance of news content over opinion content, this tendency weakened and even reversed when the media outlets are positioned more toward the citizen journalistic side of the professional vs. citizen journalism spectrum. In sharp contrast to *the Washington Post*, the issue coverage by the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* featured the predominance of opinion content over news content.

Starting with the analysis for the healthcare reform coverage (Figure 4.1), the results show strong evidence for the relationship between professional status and the proportion of

news, $\chi^2(2, N=1146)= 323.895, p<0.001$, and for the relationship between professional status and the proportion of opinion, $\chi^2(2, N=1146)= 308.483, p<0.001$. For *the Washington Post*, 68.4% of its articles on healthcare reform were news articles, and 31.4% were opinion articles. For *the Huffington Post*, 38.9% of their articles on healthcare reform were news articles (including purely informational “newsy” blogs), and 58.0% were opinion articles. For the citizen journalism websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, 4.3% were news (that is, purely informational “newsy” blogs) and 94.4% were opinions articles. Overall, the healthcare reform coverage by journalists in the outlets that are more toward the professional side of the professional-citizen journalism spectrum contains a larger proportion of news coverage, compared to the coverage by those positioned more toward the citizen journalistic side. Post hoc Bonferroni tests show that the overall patterns hold in pairwise comparisons as well. In all the pairwise comparisons, the outlets with different professional status show significant differences at $p<.001$ level.

Moving on to the analysis for the coverage of gun control debate (Figure 4.2), there is also strong evidence for the relationship between professional status and the proportion of news, $\chi^2(2, N=1013)= 330.554, p<0.001$, and for the relationship between professional status and the proportion of opinion, $\chi^2(2, N=1013)= 326.122, p<0.001$. For *the Washington Post*, 80.4% of its articles on gun control debate were news articles, and 19.1% were opinion articles. For *the Huffington Post*, 61.0% of its articles on gun control debate were news (including purely informational “newsy” blogs), and 36.0% were opinion articles. For the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, 13.0% of their articles on gun control debate were news (that is, purely informational “newsy” blogs), and 85.4% were opinion articles. Overall, as in healthcare reform coverage, the gun coverage by the media outlets that are more toward the professional side of the professional-citizen journalism spectrum contains a larger proportion of

news coverage, compared to the coverage by those positioned more toward the citizen journalistic side. Post hoc Bonferroni tests show that the overall patterns hold in the pairwise comparisons, all with significant differences at $p < .001$ level.

Figure 4.1

Distribution of forms of content (news vs. opinion) for professional media vs. semi-professional media vs. citizen journalism websites in their coverage of health care reform

Chi-square tests of independence show that the relationship between news (vs. non-news) and media professional status was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=1146) = 323.895, p < 0.001$, and the relationship between opinion (vs. non-opinion) and media professional status was also significant, $\chi^2(2, N=1146) = 308.483, p < 0.001$.

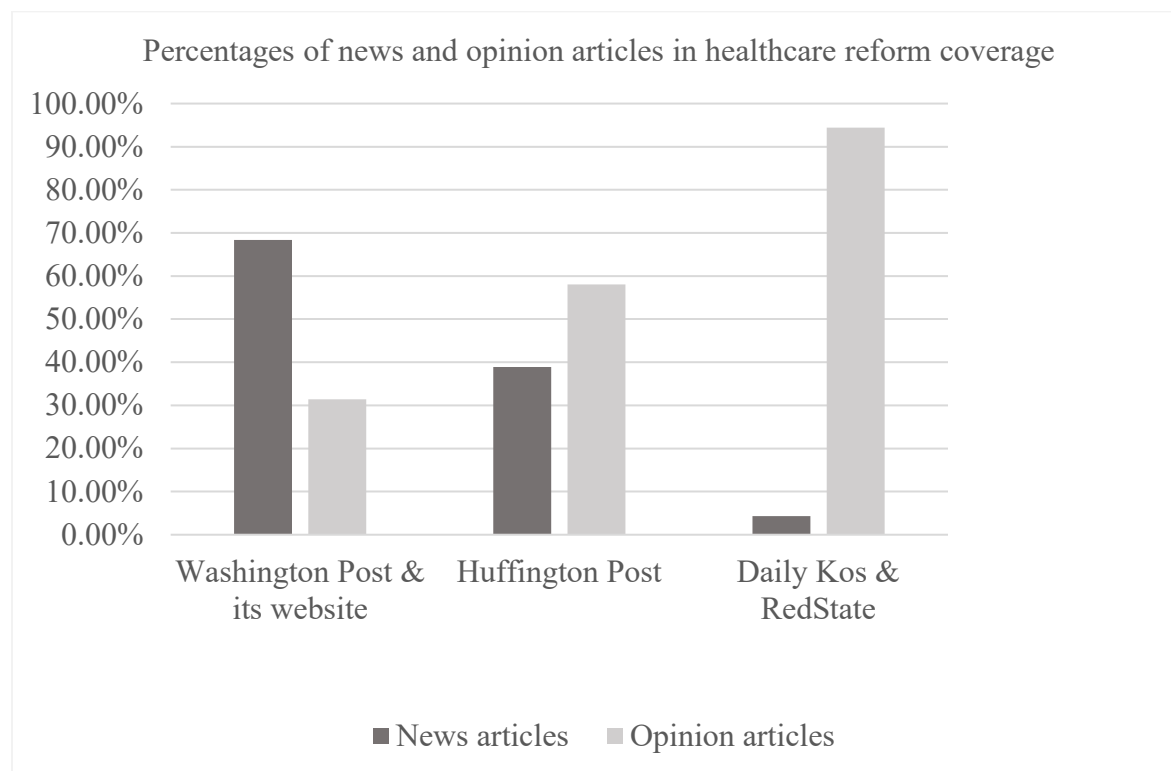
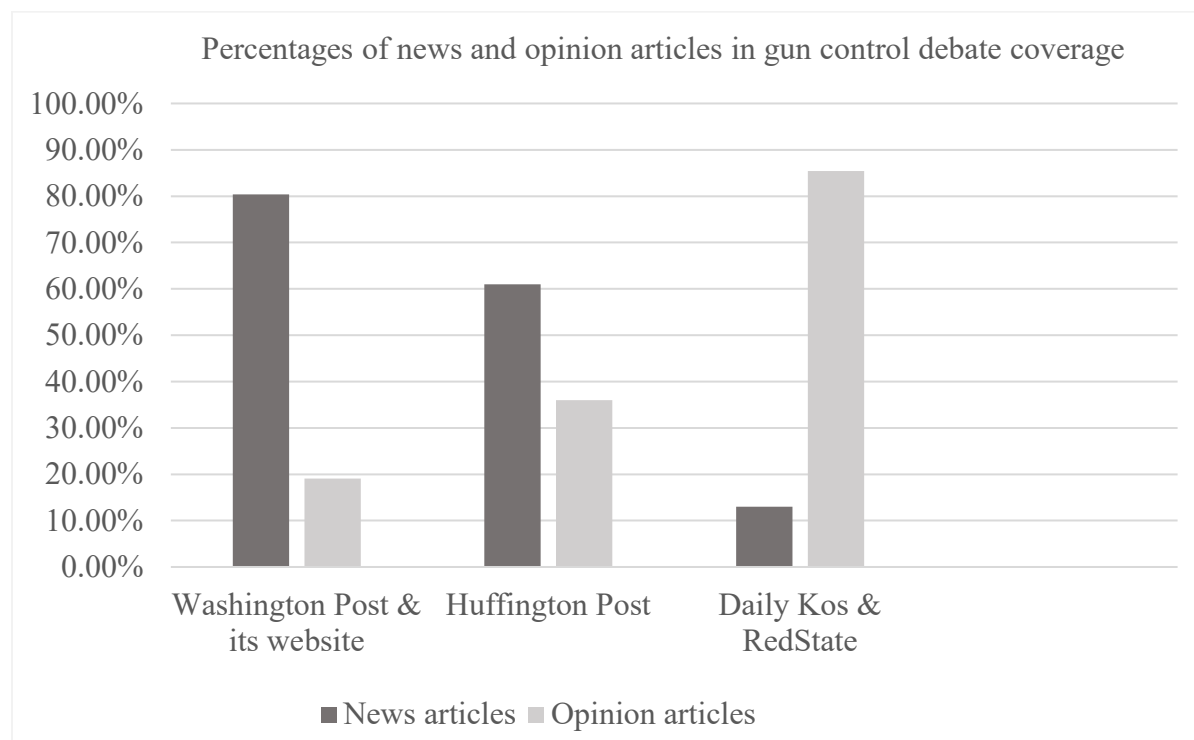


Figure 4.2

Distribution of forms of content (news vs. opinion) for professional media vs. semi-professional media vs. citizen journalism websites in their coverage of gun control debate

Chi-square tests of independence show that the relationship between news (vs. non-news) and media professional status was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=1,013)=330.554, p<0.001$, and the relationship between opinion (vs. non-opinion) and media professional status was also significant, $\chi^2(2, N=1,013)=326.122, p<0.001$.



The findings that demonstrate the relationship between professional status and the proportions of news vs. opinions resonate with prior research regarding the dominance of the informational style of journalism in U.S. media system that stresses news reporting (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and previous findings that citizen journalists are not passionate for writing purely factual news articles, emphasizing instead on using commentary as the main form of expression in political blogging (Bruns, 2006; Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012).

Comparing between the two issues shows some differences in how these relationships are manifested depending on what the specific issue was. The proportion of news in the issue coverage by all the selected media outlets turns out to be higher with regard to the issue of gun control debate, compared to healthcare reform. Lying behind this pattern could be different reasons for professional news media vs. citizen journalism platforms. For professional media, it could be a consequence of op-ed gatekeeping. According to Rosenfeld (2000), op-ed editors could gatekeep what topics get a position in op-ed pages by considering whether it would contribute to “the cooling reasoned debate” that they hope to nurture, instead of something that is “abusive and inflammatory” (p. 9). Compared to healthcare reform, gun control debate touches upon more value-related, cultural-war topics such as gun right, life and security. It was possible that professional editors took a more cautious and moderate measure in the opinion coverage of gun, while mainly relied on news reporting where they would have a rich array of means of objective reporting for “strategic ritual”, helping themselves avoid disputes (Tuchman, 1972). For citizen journalism platforms, then, it could be related to citizen journalists’ motivation for factual reporting around gun control debate which was initiated by the school shooting as a major breaking news. As Bruns (2006) pointed out, despite citizen journalists’ general distaste for news reporting, their tendency for news reporting is more pronounced in the context of

breaking news, as shown in the example of Indymedia and Wikinews. It was possible that the salience of the shooting event as well as the following heated gun debate could better motivate their investment of time and energy on gathering and presenting factual information.

What Standard to Emphasize in News: Balance or Transparency

The second line of inquiry in the content analysis is the comparison concerning two standards of objectivity, balance and transparency, in news coverage of the issue. I tested the hypothesis on the relationship between the media outlets' professional status and the proportion of news articles that utilize the standard of balance by presenting people's conflicting viewpoints on both sides of the issue (H2a). It is measured as the inclusion of sources favoring healthcare reform, gun control or specific policy components involved therein, and sources opposing them. I also tested the hypothesized relationship between the media outlets' professional status and the proportion of news articles that utilize the standard of transparency by explaining the author's political bias on the issues or information collection procedure (H2b). It is measured as the inclusion of explanations of the author's rationale/process of information collection, or the author's political ideological stance which does not involve specific opinions on issues. The results show that the emphasis on the standard of balance and the standard of transparency differ significantly by the outlets' professional status in the news coverage of healthcare reform. But there is no such difference in the news coverage of gun control debate, which actually may not suggest an absence of conflict over objectivity as will be explained below.

In the news coverage of healthcare reform, the results (Figure 4.3) show a statistically significant relationship between the outlets' professional status and the proportion of news articles that utilized the standard of balance by presenting people's views on both sides of the issue, $\chi^2(2, N=494) = 51.016, p < 0.001$. Specifically, the standard of balance was utilized in

77.5% of news articles by *the Washington Post*, 46.0% of news articles or purely informational newsy blogs by *the Huffington Post*, and 30.1% of the newsy blogs by the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*. As shown by post-hoc Bonferroni tests, the differentiation of the proportion by professional status holds in the comparisons of *the Washington Post* to *the Huffington Post* with $p < .001$, and *the Washington Post* to *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p < .01$. But there is no significant differentiation when we compare *the Huffington Post* to *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p = .710$.

Similarly, the results (Figure 4.4) also show a statistically significant relationship between the outlets' professional status and the proportion of news articles that utilized the standard of transparency by explaining the author's political bias on the issues or information collection procedure, $\chi^2(2, N=494) = 20.107, p < .001$. The standard of transparency was used in 8.5% of news articles by *the Washington Post*, 20.2% of news articles or purely informational newsy blogs by *the Huffington Post*, and 30.8% of newsy blogs by the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests show that the differentiation of this proportion by professional status holds in the comparisons of *the Washington Post* to *the Huffington Post* with $p < .001$, and *the Washington Post* to *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p < .05$, but not in the comparison of *the Huffington Post* to *Daily Kos* and *RedState*. Considering the results for balance and transparency together, there is a clear distinction that in the news coverage of healthcare reform, the professional news outlet placed great emphasis on the standard of balance, whereas the semi-professional and citizen media outlets did not, who nonetheless placed more emphasis on transparency than the professional media outlet.

Figure 4.3

Percentages of news articles that utilize the standard of balance by presenting people's viewpoints on both sides of the issue in the coverage of healthcare reform for professional media vs. semi-professional media vs. citizen journalism websites

A Chi-square test of independence show that the relationships between the proportion of balanced news reporting and media professional status was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=494)=51.016$, $p<0.001$.

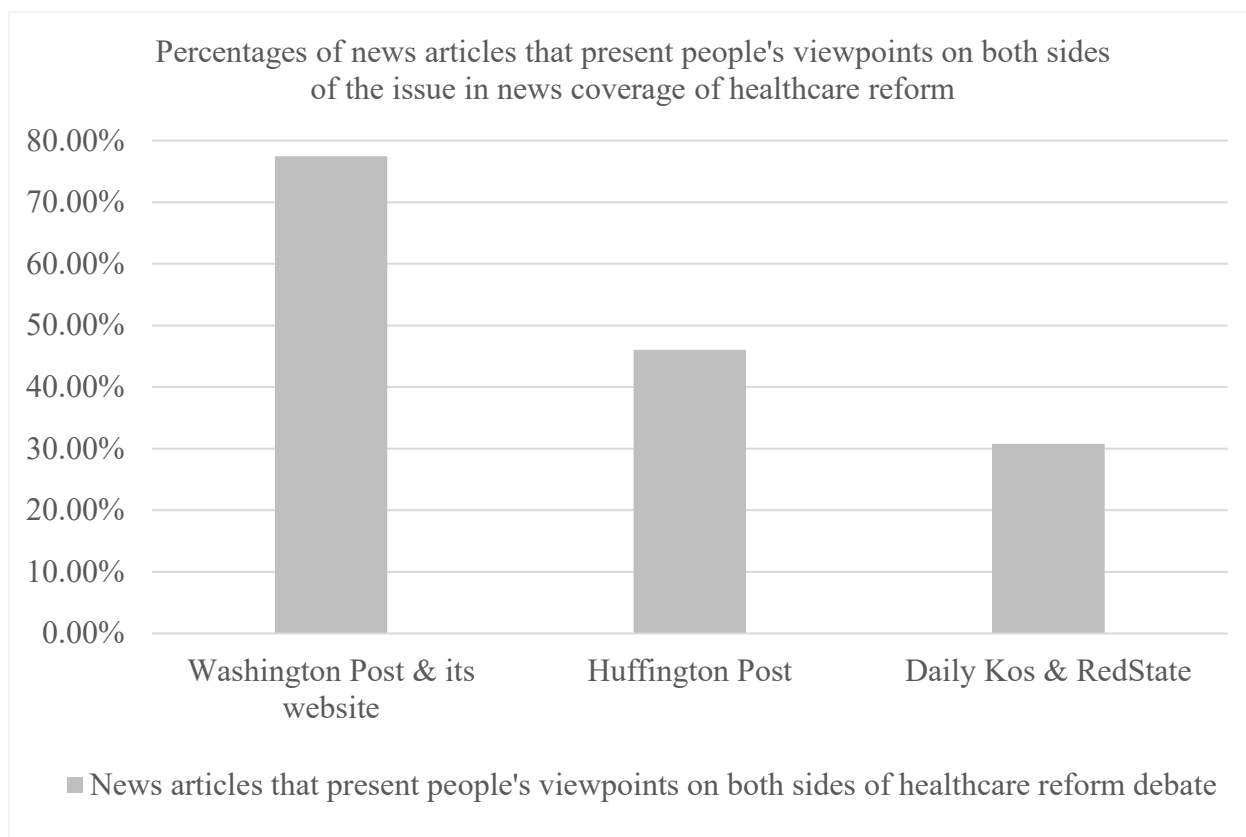
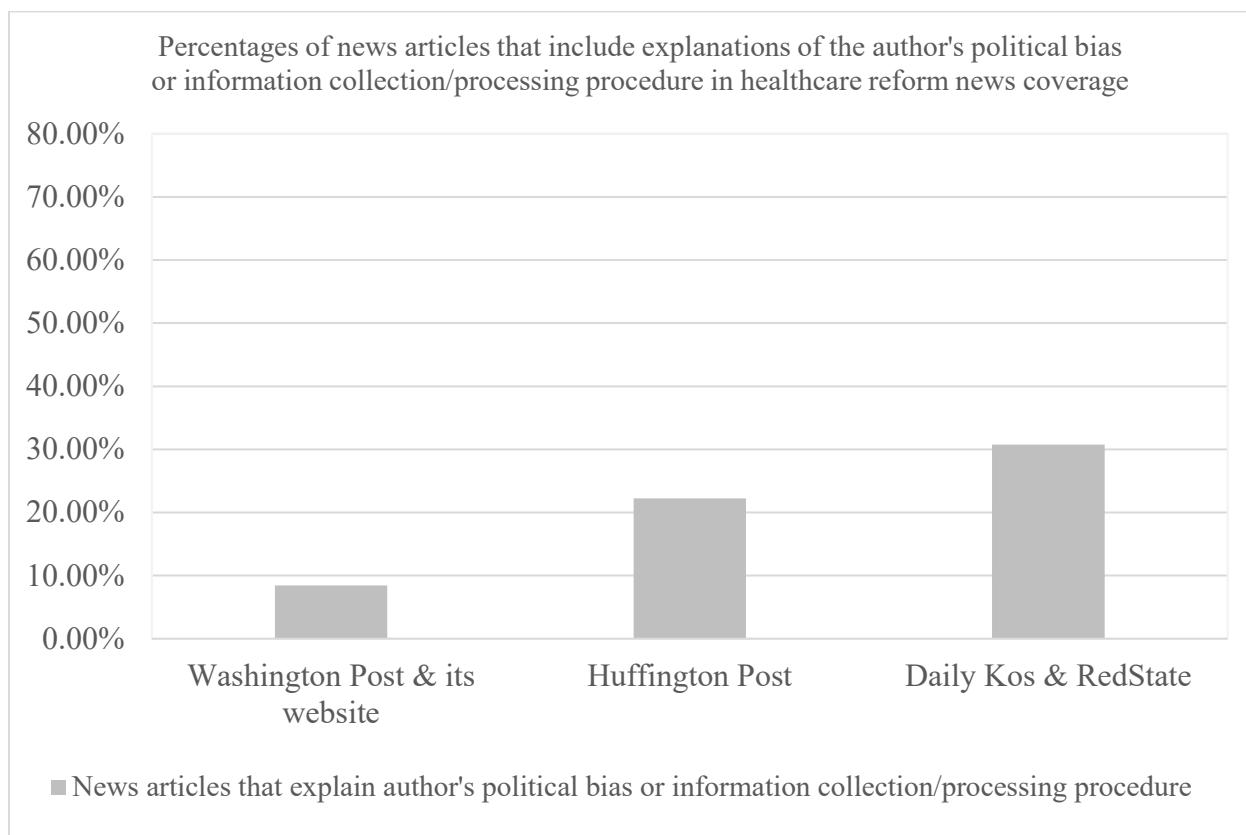


Figure 4.4

Percentages of news articles that utilize the standard of transparency by including explanations of the author's political bias or information collection/processing procedure in the coverage of healthcare reform for professional media vs. semi-professional media vs. citizen journalism websites

A chi-square test of independence shows that the relationship between the proportion of transparent news reporting and media professional status was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=494) = 20.107$, $p < .001$.



In the coverage of gun control debate, there is only moderate evidence for the association between the outlets' professional status and the proportion of news articles that utilized the standard of balance by presenting conflicting views on the issues, $\chi^2(2, N=543) = 6.536, p < 0.05$, as shown in Figure 4.5. But post hoc Bonferroni tests reveal that this association mostly came from the difference between *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post* with $p = .045$. The difference is also not entirely as hypothesized – the standard of balance was utilized in less than half of news articles (46.1%) by *the Washington Post*, whereas it was utilized in a slight majority of news articles or newsy blogs (57.4%) by *the Huffington Post*. Meanwhile, the proportion of newsy blogs by *Daily Kos* and *RedState* (43.9%) was at a similar level with *the Washington Post*.

Moving on to the comparison concerning the standard of transparency in news coverage of the gun issue, there is no significant association between professional status and the proportion of news articles that utilized the standard of transparency by including explanations of the author's political bias or information collection procedure, $\chi^2(2, N=543) = 1.035, p = 0.596$, as shown in Figure 4.6. Across the media outlets, the standard of transparency was utilized in a 2%-4% small minority of their news articles or news blogs.

Figure 4.5

Percentages of news articles that utilize the standard of balance by presenting people's viewpoints on both sides of the issue in the coverage of gun control debate for professional media vs. semi-professional media vs. citizen journalism websites

A Chi-square test of independence shows that the relationships between the proportion of balanced news reporting and media professional status was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=543)=6.536$, $p<0.05$.

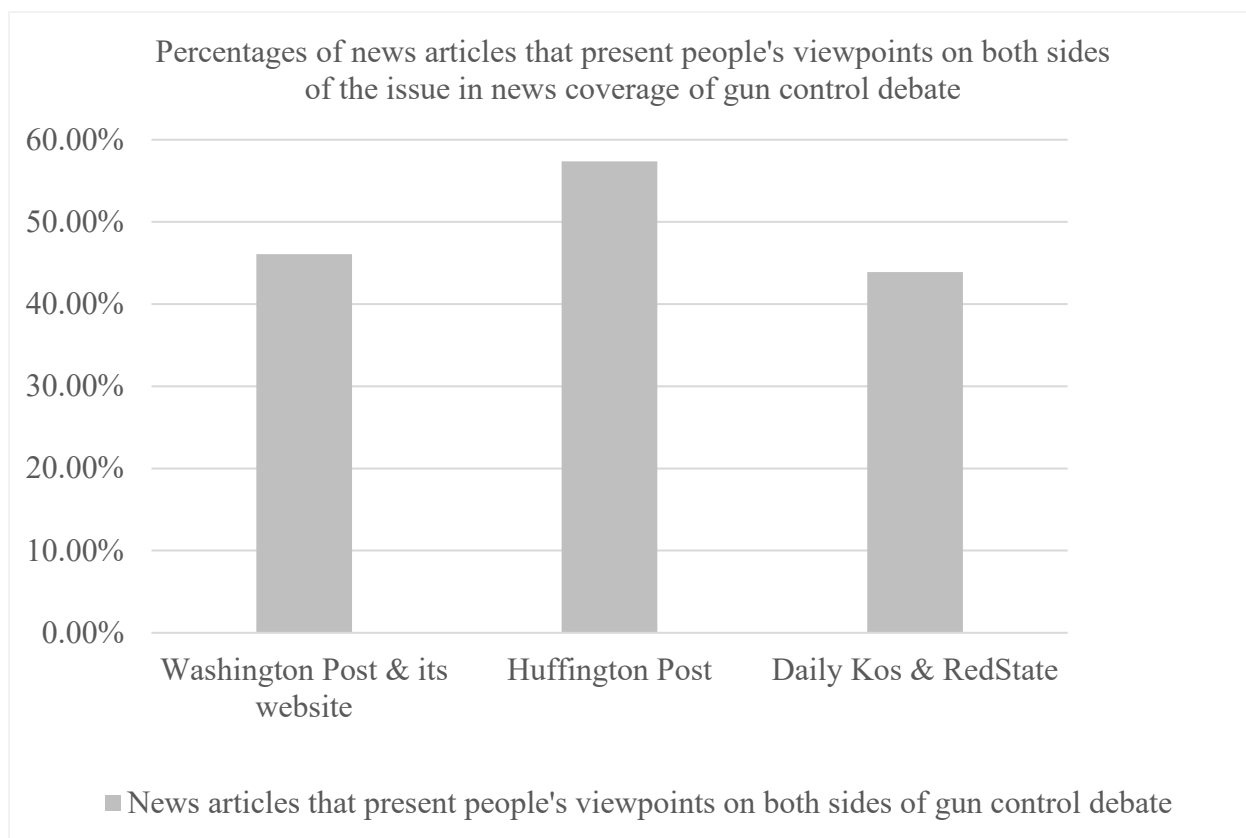
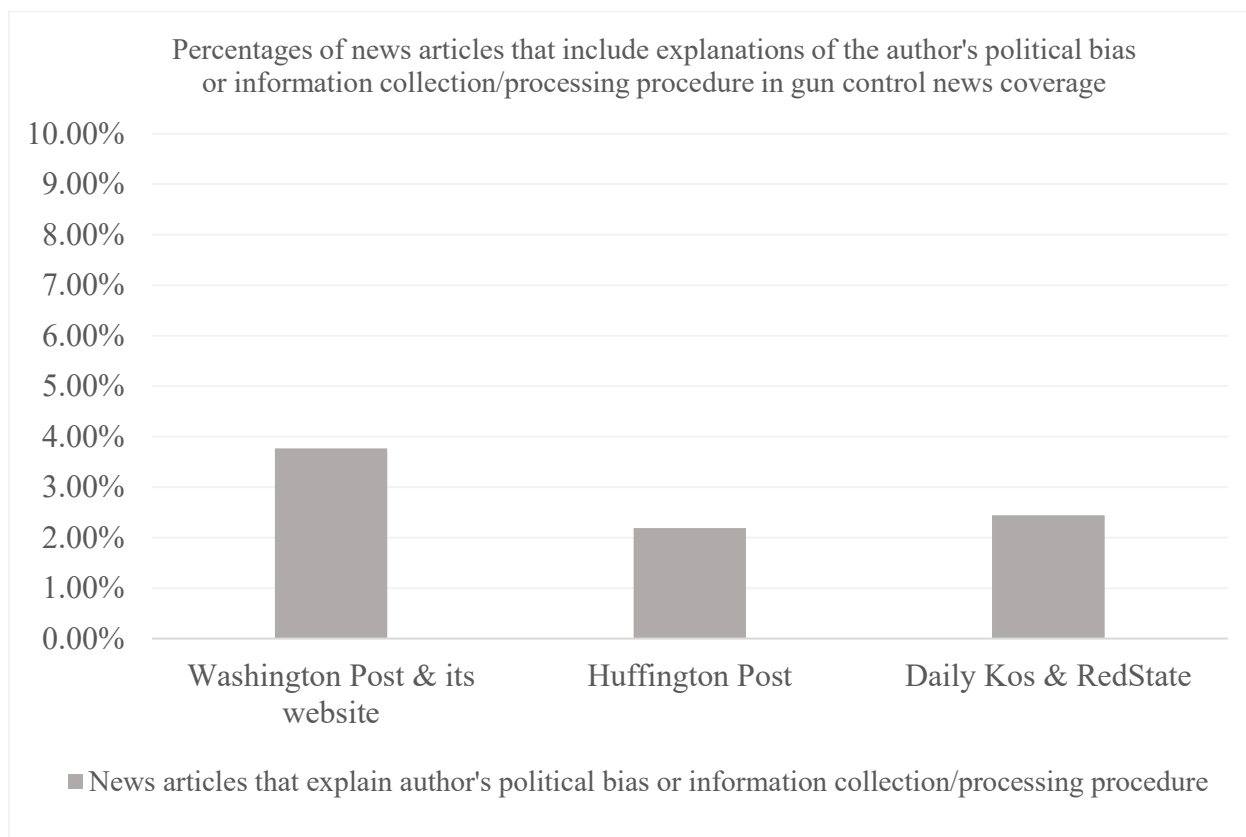


Figure 4.6

Percentages of news articles that utilize the standard of transparency by including explanations of the author's political bias or information collection/processing procedure in the coverage of gun control debate for professional media vs. semi-professional media vs. citizen journalism websites

A chi-square test of independence shows that the relationship between the proportion of transparent news reporting and media professional status was not significant, $\chi^2(2, N=543)=1.035, p=0.596$.



The above results with regards to healthcare reform coverage are compatible with prior research on the importance of news balance in professional journalism (Ward, 2010), citizen journalists' dispute of this professional standard in particular (Kerbel, 2015), as well as citizen journalists' endorsement of transparency as the new form of objectivity plus their narrative that it is not as emphasized by professional journalists (Weinberger, 2009). However, the results from the analysis of gun control debate coverage deserves contemplation. It may not suggest an absence of conflict over objectivity regarding gun issue, but rather a more nuanced manifestation of the conflict over objectivity for the issue of gun control debate. When legacy media as *the Washington Post* are less balanced than usual in its news coverage of gun control debate, it might indicate that professional journalists have an opinion on this issue and give more weight to sources with opinions on one particular side of the issue. This may invite challenge from citizen journalists and audiences on the pro-gun-right side, accusing professional journalism for simply claiming to be balanced but failing to be so. This was indeed a main complaint from conservative bloggers as we will see in the following chapter on discursive contestation. On the other side, when citizen journalists are not as transparent about their political bias or information collection procedure on the gun issue, it may be related to how the partisan divide on the gun issue is value-embedded and thus more unyielding than that on the other issues. As Weinberger (2009) explained, the standard of transparency is for allowing readers to recognize "the ever-present biases" and inviting further inquiries. But in a moral cultural war issue as gun control debate, the citizen journalistic authors may not be as willing to invite dialogue, and readers may not try as much to seek out authors with different stances. This would create the echo-chambers within which it is not as necessary to utilize transparency for inviting challenges and inquiries. If this is the case, the contestation over objectivity would be manifested more in the form of ideological

warfare among conservatives and liberals fighting over gun policies. This inference actually finds support in the results with regard to ideological leaning of opinion representations that we will read later in this chapter.

Contrasts in Practices of Sourcing and Citing Facts: Facts from Whom?

For the third line of inquiry in my content analysis, I tested the hypotheses on the relationships between the outlets' professional status and the practices of using official and ordinary citizen sources in news (H3a and H3b), and of citing personal (vs. non-personal facts) in opinions (H3c). In this research, all the opinion pieces were coded for what types of information are cited, which was classified into seven categories of information: 1) quotations from elected officials, 2) quotations from ordinary citizens (not including authors themselves or their personal connections), 3) government documents, 4) U.S. law and legal documents, 5) public opinion polls, 6) scholarly research, and 7) personal observations/anecdotes of the authors themselves or people they know personally. Among them, the last category was considered personal facts, while the first six categories were considered non-personal facts.

The results, in general, lend support to the differentiations between professional and citizen journalism with regard to the practices of using official sources in news, and citing personal facts (vs. non-personal facts) in opinions. But two points deserve attention. First, the hypothesized relationship between professional status and the proportion of news articles that used ordinary citizen sources does not find support in the coverage of the two issues. Secondly, the differentiation in citing personal facts in opinions between the outlets varying in professional status is pronounced in healthcare reform coverage, but not so in gun control debate coverage.

Elected official sources vs. ordinary citizen sources in news. In the news coverage of healthcare reform, the analysis shows that the outlets' professional status indeed relates with the proportion of news articles that used elected official sources, $\chi^2(2, N=494)=22.876, p<.001$ (Figure 4.7). Post-hoc Bonferroni tests show that elected official sources were used in a larger proportion of news articles by *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*, compared to the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, with $p<.001$ for both pairwise comparisons. But there is no significant difference in the pairwise comparison of *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*, with $p=.181$. These results lend partial support to H3a.

The analysis also shows that professional status relates with the proportion of news articles that used ordinary citizen sources, $\chi^2(2, N=494)=11.337, p=.003$. However, post-hoc Bonferroni test shows that there are no significant differences in the pairwise comparison between *the Washington Post* and the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p=1.000$, and in the pairwise comparison of *the Huffington Post* vs. *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p=.189$. The only significant difference is that ordinary citizen sources were used in a larger proportion of news articles or newsy blogs by *the Huffington Post*, compared to that for *the Washington Post* with $p<.01$. This is even opposite to the relationship hypothesized in H3b.

The same analysis for the news coverage of gun control debate shows similar patterns (Figure 4.8). In the gun coverage, the outlets' professional status relates to the proportion of news articles that used elected official sources, $\chi^2(2, N=543)=29.027, p<.001$. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests show that *the Washington Post* used elected official sources in a larger proportion of news articles than *the Huffington Post* with $p<.01$, and that *the Huffington Post*, in turn, used elected official sources in a larger proportion of news articles than *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p<.01$. It offers strong evidence in support of H3a.

Yet, it also turns out that professional status does not have a significant relationship with the proportion of news articles that used ordinary citizen sources, $\chi^2(2, N=543) = .966, p = .617$. These media outlets that vary by professional status do not differ significantly in their practice of using ordinary citizen sources. It does not give support to H3b.

The above results suggest that the emphasis on elected official sources indeed weakens for the media outlets that are positioned more toward the citizen journalistic side, although the differentiation between the coverage by *the Washington Post* and that by *the Huffington Post* is only observed for the gun control debate coverage, but not for the healthcare reform coverage. The overall pattern in the results speaks well to what prior research found about the routine of using elected official sources in professional journalism (Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1973), and citizen journalists' criticism of this routine (Bock, 2015). Moreover, the results also suggest that despite some citizen journalists' emphasis on using sources without official status (Bock, 2015) and the lack of such a claim from professional journalists, the tendency of use ordinary citizen sources does not seem to weaken for the media outlets that are positioned more toward the professional side. Professional journalists used ordinary citizen sources to the same extent as their citizen journalistic counterparts. What differentiates them from citizen journalists is the relative predominance of elected official sources over ordinary citizen sources, which could give the impression that voices from ordinary citizens were overwhelmed by those of the powerful.

Figure 4.7

Distribution of news articles using elected official sources vs. ordinary citizen sources in the news coverage of healthcare reform for professional media vs. semi-professional media vs. citizen journalism websites

Chi-square tests of independence show that the relationship between using elected official sources and media professional status was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=494)=22.876, p<.001$, and the relationship between using ordinary citizen sources and media professional status was also significant, $\chi^2(2, N=494)=11.337, p=.003$.

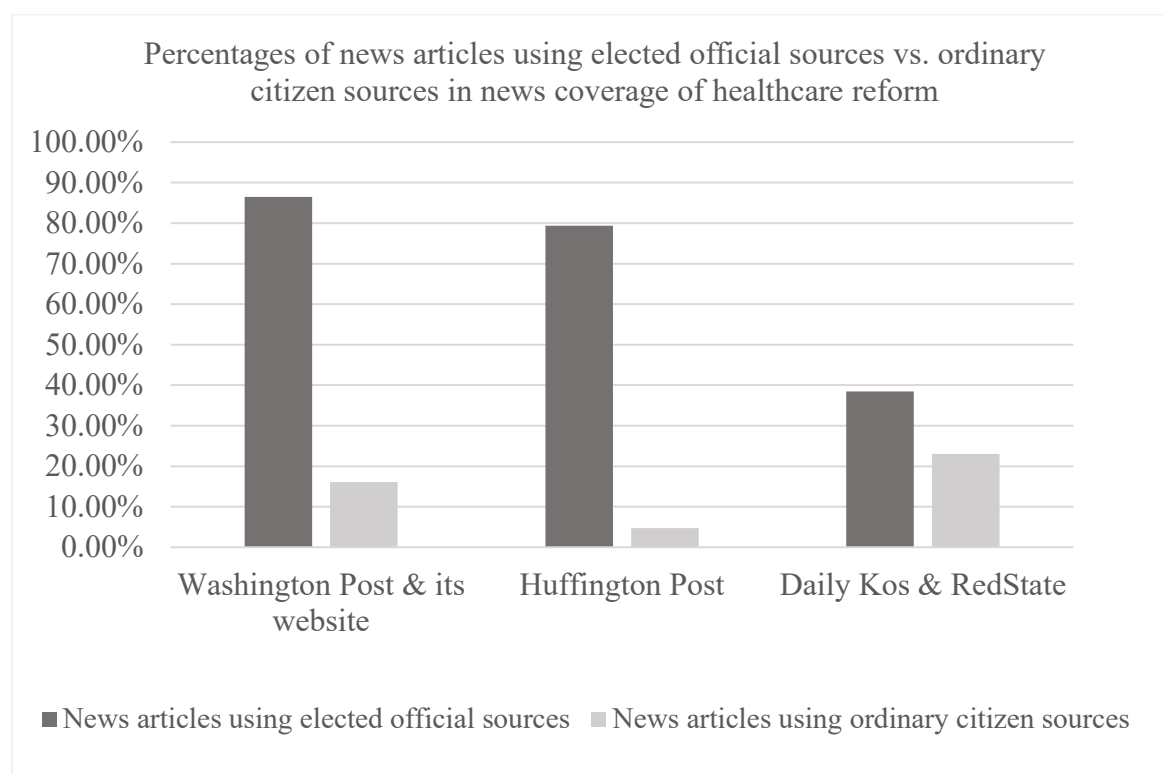
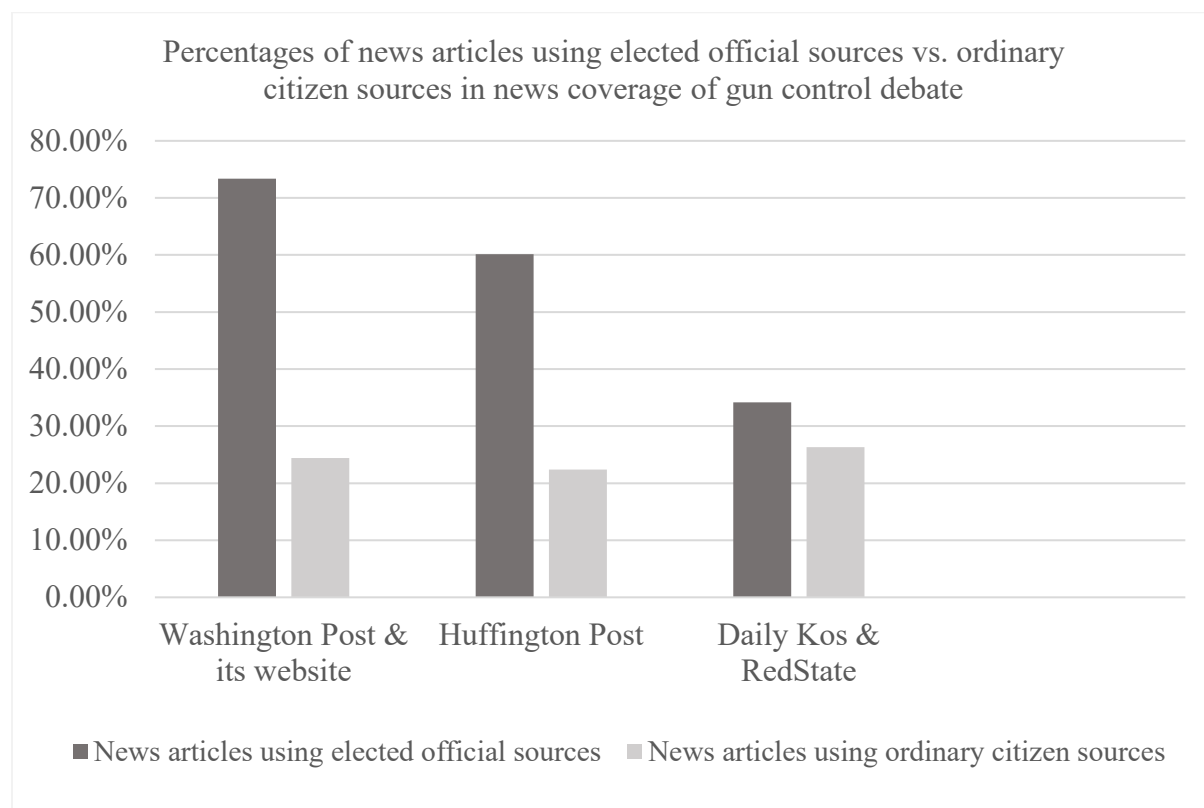


Figure 4.8

Distribution of news articles using elected official sources vs. ordinary citizen sources in the news coverage of gun control debate for professional media vs. semi-professional media vs. citizen journalism websites

Chi-square tests of independence show that the relationship between using elected official sources and media professional status was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=543)=29.027, p<.001$, but the relationship between using ordinary citizen sources and media professional status was not significant, $\chi^2(2, N=543)=.966, p=.617$.



Personal vs. non-personal facts in opinions. Let's move the focus to the practice of citing information in opinion pieces, which include editorials, opinion columns or blog posts that contain direct statements of the author's own opinion regarding the issues. Starting from the opinion pieces on healthcare reform, the analysis shows that media outlets' professional status indeed relates to the proportion of opinion pieces that cited personal anecdotes/observations, $\chi^2(2, N=637) = 11.488, p < .01$ (Table 4.1). Post-hoc Bonferroni test shows that such personal facts were cited in a smaller proportion of opinion pieces by *the Washington Post* than the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p < .01$. But there was no significant differentiations in the pairwise comparisons between *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post* with $p = .109$, and between *the Huffington Post* and citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, with $p = .724$. These results offer partial support for H3c.

Looking further into the specific types of non-personal facts, it turns out that professional status relates to the practices of citing two categories of non-personal facts in the opinion coverage of healthcare reform. First, there is a significant relationship between the outlets' professional status and the proportion of opinion pieces that cited facts from elected officials, $\chi^2(2, N=637) = 66.718, p < .001$. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests show that facts from elected officials were cited in a larger proportion of opinion pieces by *the Washington Post* than the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p < .001$, and that this proportion for the *Huffington Post* was also higher than that for the citizen journalistic websites with $p < .001$. But there was no significant differentiation between *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*.

Secondly, there is also a significant relationship between the media outlets' professional status and the proportion of opinions that cited facts from ordinary citizens, $\chi^2(2, N=637) = 9.258, p < .05$. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests show that this proportion was higher for the citizen

journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* compared to *the Washington Post* with $p < .05$.

But there were no significant differences in the pairwise comparison of *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*, and that of *the Huffington Post* and the citizen journalistic websites.

The same set of analyses were conducted for the opinion pieces on gun control debate (Table 4.2). It is shown that the media outlets' professional status relates to the proportion of opinions that cited personal anecdotes/observations, $\chi^2 (2, N=637) = 20.369, p < .001$. However, post-hoc Bonferroni tests show that the association mainly came from *the Huffington Post*'s particularly high proportion of opinions that cited personal facts, which far exceeds the proportion for *the Washington Post* with $p < .01$, and also surpasses the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* with $p < .001$. There was no significant differentiation in the pairwise comparison between *the Washington Post* and the citizen journalistic websites with $p = 1.000$. The results do not support the relationship as hypothesized in H3c.

Looking further into the specific types of non-personal facts, the analysis shows that professional status relates to the proportions of opinion articles that cited four types of non-personal facts: facts from elected officials, $\chi^2 (2, N=637) = 23.991, p < .001$; public opinion polls, $\chi^2 (2, N=637) = 22.851, p < .001$; law and legal documents, $\chi^2 (2, N=637) = 13.293, p < .01$; and scholarly research, $\chi^2 (2, N=637) = 10.059, p < .01$. First, with regards to facts from elected officials, public opinion polls, and law and legal documents, post-hoc Bonferroni test shows the consistent patterns that these types of information were cited in a larger proportion of opinion pieces by *the Washington Post* in the pairwise comparison to *the Huffington Post* as well as in the pairwise comparison to the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*. But there were no significant differentiations between the *Huffington Post* and the citizen journalistic sites.

Secondly, for facts from scholarly research, post-hoc Bonferroni test shows that there was no significant differentiation between *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*. But for these two media outlets, their proportions of opinion pieces that cited scholarly research were both significantly higher than the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*.

Overall, these results show that the relationship between the media outlets' professional status and the practice of citing personal facts hypothesized in H3c varies between the issues. In the opinion representations of healthcare reform, the tendency to cite personal facts for evidence becomes weaker for the media outlets positioned more toward the professional side, exactly as hypothesized in H3c. This pattern resonates with the prior finding that citizen journalists emphasize using personal experiences in their commentaries (Bock, 2015).

However, in the opinion representations of gun control debate, *the Washington Post's* proportion of opinions that cited personal facts was at a similar level with that of *Daily Kos* and *Red State*, and the Huffington Post's proportion of opinions that cited personal facts was a particularly high percentage, 40.7%. My inference from this pattern is that it might have to do with the uniqueness of the gun issue as a sensitive moral cultural war issue, and the event-driven characteristic of gun control debate coverage. Firstly, unlike the healthcare reform that was mainly a top-down policy making process where politicians had the power to define the agenda for media and the public, political and civic discourses around gun control was initiated by the tragedy in Newtown, which led gun control supporters and gun rights advocates to call for or oppose legislative actions. The policy making process and the corresponding media coverage of the process were, in this sense, event-driven. Thus, for bloggers and professional columnists alike, it could be possible that they needed to rely on personal experiences and observations to make sense of what was happening and which stance they wanted to take. Secondly, given the

sensitivity of the value-laden gun control debate, it could also be possible that professional columnists, in their attempt to speak for people with diverse opinions, needed to resort to the personalization of the story (Bennett, 2016) to a greater extent, while focused relatively less on the deeper issues and concerns involved in the debate. Both the possibilities could account for the unique pattern we observed here.

Another notable pattern in the results is that *the Washington Post's* emphasis on using elected official sources in news is also reflected in its opinion representations. On the one hand, its opinion coverage cited information from a variety of information channels, including elected officials. But on the other hand, overall, their opinion coverage is still characterized by the relative predominance of information from elected officials over the other channels.

Table 4.1

Percentages of opinion articles using personal facts (personal anecdotes or observations) vs. non-personal facts in the opinion coverage of healthcare reform for professional media, semi-professional media and citizen journalism websites

	Professional media	Semi-professional media	Citizen journalism websites	χ^2 (2, N=637)
	Washington Post & its website	Huffington Post	Daily Kos & RedState	
Personal facts	10.43%	19.15%	23.43%	11.488**
Non-personal facts				
Elected officials	77.30%	78.19%	46.50%	66.718***
Government document	2.45%	5.85%	5.59%	2.770
Ordinary citizens	8.59%	10.11%	17.48%	9.258*
Public opinion polls	6.13%	8.51%	6.99%	0.776
Law & legal documents	1.23%	0.53%	1.75%	1.356
Scholarly research	4.29%	4.26%	3.50%	0.253

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.2

Percentages of opinion articles using personal facts (personal anecdotes or observations) vs. non-personal facts in the opinion coverage of gun control debate for professional media, semi-professional media and citizen journalism websites

	Professional media	Semi-professional media	Citizen journalism websites	χ^2 (2, N=454)
	Washington Post & website	Huffington Post	Daily Kos & RedState	
Personal facts	19.74%	40.74%	19.26%	20.369***
Non-personal facts				
Elected officials	59.21%	25.93%	32.59%	23.991***
Government document	15.79%	15.74%	12.96%	0.707
Ordinary citizens	13.16%	8.33%	12.96%	1.717
Public opinion polls	23.68%	7.41%	5.93%	22.851***
Law & legal documents	17.11%	2.78%	7.04%	13.293**
Scholarly research	13.16%	12.04%	4.44%	10.059**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Disparities in the Constructed Social Reality

For the fourth line of inquiry in content analysis, I compared the reality depictions constructed by these media outlets through examining the relationship between the outlets' professional status and the range of topics in news coverage (H4a), and the relationship between professional status and the structural balance of opinion offerings (H4b). Overall, the results support the hypothesis that media outlets positioned more toward the professional side offered a wider range of topics in news coverage of the issues. Compared to *the Washington Post*, the semi-professional platform of *the Huffington Post* or the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* covered a narrower range of topics in news. But their news coverage featured the emphasis on some topics that were important to the public, but not as well represented by *the Washington Post*. The results also support the hypothesis that media outlets positioned more toward the professional side offered more balanced opinion representations of the issues. Opinion coverage by *the Washington Post* was overall in favor of healthcare reform and gun control, but still contained some pieces that criticized healthcare reform and supported gun right. The other media outlets showed less of the attempt for balanced opinion offerings.

The width of the range of news topics. As explained in the previous chapter, the width of the range of news topics was operationalized as comprised of two aspects, the richness of topics which is measured as the number of topics in all the news articles by the media outlet, and the relative abundance across topics which is measured as the Simpson's diversity index (Simpson's D). Thus, a smaller number of topics means a narrower range in terms of the richness of topics. Holding the richness of topics constant, a smaller Simpson's D value means a narrower range in the sense that the news coverage is not evenly distributed across topics, but rather converge on some topics while giving less attention to others. Both the richness of topics and the

relative abundance across topics are aggregate-level statistics describing the width of range of news topics for a media outlet altogether. Thus, in this part, hypothesis testing is through direct comparison of the aggregate-level values among media outlets, rather than statistical inference based on the significance levels.

Starting from the analysis of the healthcare reform coverage, we can see that the media outlets' professional status indeed relates to the width of the range of news topics (Table 4.3). First, let's compare the richness of topics across the media outlets. Compared to the news coverage of healthcare reform by *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*, the news coverage of the issue by *Daily Kos* and *RedState* did not contain any pieces on two topics: political fight and responses among politicians, and how healthcare reform influenced different industries. Secondly, let's compare the relative abundance of topics as measured as the Simpson's *D*. Compared to the coverage by *the Washington Post*, the coverage by *the Huffington Post* has a slightly lower Simpson's *D* value, due to its concentration of coverage on topics such as political fight and responses among politicians, and public debate and advocacy around healthcare reform. So, even though *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post* does not differ on the richness of topics, the *Washington Post* still has a better degree of relative abundance across the seven news topics on healthcare reform. These results lend support to H4a.

Looking further into the news coverage across these topics by these media outlets, the results show that the emphasis on the same topics can also vary by professional status. Most notably, the emphasis on two topics, healthcare reform's policies and implications, and public debate and advocacy around the reform, turns out to correlate with professional status. Chi-square tests show that professional status relates to the proportion of news articles that cover the topic of the reform's policies and implications, $\chi^2(2, N=494) = 10.854, p < .01$, and also relates to

the proportion of news articles that cover the topic of public debate and advocacy, $\chi^2(2, N=494)=8.369, p<.05$. Post-hoc Bonferroni tests show that these associations mainly came from the difference between *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*. *The Washington Post* had a larger proportion of news articles about the reform's policies and implications with $p<.01$, while had a lower proportion of news articles about public debate and advocacy with $p<.05$, compared to *the Huffington Post*. The tests do not show any significance differences in the other pairwise comparisons, either between *the Huffington Post* and the citizen journalistic websites or between *the Washington Post* and the citizen journalistic websites.

Turning to the news coverage of gun control debate (Table 4.4), let's first compare the richness of topics. We can see that the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* did not cover the topics of mental illness and school safety, which makes their range of topics narrower by comparison to *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post*. However, if we make the comparison between *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post* by the relative abundance of topics, then the results show that although their news coverage of the gun issue featured the same richness of topics, the coverage by *the Washington Post* had a lower Simpson's D value, being more convergent on some particular topics such as gun politics and the Newtown tragedy. By comparison, *the Huffington Post* gave more of its attention to the other topics as well, and in this sense, had a slightly wider range of topics than the *Washington Post*. Overall, these results only lend partial support to H4a.

Looking further into the news coverage across these topics by the media outlets, it turns out that the outlets' professional status relates to the proportion of news articles on the topic of gun violence (unrelated to the Newtown tragedy), $\chi^2(2, N=543)=28.115, p<.001$, and to the proportion of news articles on the topic of gun business, $\chi^2(2, N=543)=14.238, p<.001$. Post-

hoc Bonferroni tests show that the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* had a larger proportion of news coverage about the topic of gun violence compared to the *Washington Post* ($p < .001$), and also compared to *the Huffington Post* ($p < .001$). Post-hoc Bonferroni tests also show that *the Huffington Post* had a higher proportion of news coverage about the topic of gun business than the *Washington Post* ($p < .01$).

Overall, the results in this part show that the media outlets positioned more toward the professional side offered a wider range of news topics. We should acknowledge the contribution by professional news media such as *the Washington Post* to covering a wide range of topics for the public. As shown by the results, the issue coverage by *the Washington Post* featured a higher level of richness of topics for both issues. For healthcare reform, its coverage also featured a more even distribution across the topics. This is not surprising, if we consider prior research that revealed all the economic support, organizational procedures and institutional resources lying behind professional news media's news net (Tuchman, 1972). But meanwhile, we should also note that the semi-professional media platform of *the Huffington Post* and the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* gave more of their attention to some important topics, such as public debates and advocacy around the healthcare reform, gun violence, and gun business, which by comparison were not as well represented by *the Washington Post*. This resonates with prior research on citizen journalism showing that citizen journalists seek to represent the picture of social reality that is different from or even invisible in the mainstream media (Robinson, 2009).

Table 4.3

The width of range of topics in news coverage of healthcare reform for professional media, semi-professional media and citizen journalism websites

Topics	Professional media	Semi-professional media	Citizen blogging sites	χ^2 (2, N=494)
	Washington Post & its website	Huffington Post	Daily Kos & RedState	
HCR legislation	24.51%	12.70%	23.08%	7.715*
Political fight & response	24.51%	36.51%	0.00%	11.726**
HCR policy & implication	14.93%	3.97%	7.69%	10.854**
Public debate & advocacy	14.93%	25.40%	30.77%	8.368*
Key individual players	12.68%	5.56%	7.69%	5.051
HCR influence on industry	4.79%	3.17%	0.00%	1.188
Media coverage of HCR	1.41%	5.56%	7.69%	7.576*
Richness (Number of topics)	7	7	5	
Simpson's <i>D</i>	0.82	0.78	0.83	

Note. Based on the research on diversity of species in ecology research (McDonald & Dimmick, 2003; Simpson, 1949), the width of range of topics is understood as comprised of two dimensions, richness (number of topics) and relative abundance (evenness of distribution across different topics). Simpson's diversity index takes both richness and relative abundance into account. It is calculated as $1 - \sum(n/N)^2$, where n=total number of units of a particular species, and N=total number of units of all species. When we hold richness constant, a higher value of Simpson's *D* indicates a greater level of relative abundance. A chi-square test of independence was also performed to examine the overall relationship between the proportions of different topics and media professional status. The relationship was significant, $\chi^2(14, N=494) = 50.386, p < 0.001$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.4

The width of range of topics in news coverage of gun control debate for professional media, semi-professional media and citizen journalism websites

Topics	Professional media	Semi-professional media	Citizen blogging sites	$\chi^2 (2, N=543)$
	Washington Post & its website	Huffington Post	Daily Kos & RedState	
Gun politics	79.31%	71.04%	63.41%	7.664*
Newtown tragedy	9.09%	4.37%	2.44%	5.396
Gun violence	4.39%	7.10%	26.83%	28.115***
Gun business	1.25%	7.65%	2.44%	14.238**
Mental illness	0.31%	1.64%	0.00%	3.125
School safety	1.57%	4.37%	0.00%	5.001
Richness (Number of topics)	6	6	4	
Simpson's <i>D</i>	0.36	0.48	0.52	

Note. A chi-square test of independence was also performed to examine the overall relationship between the proportions of different topics and media professional status. The relationship was significant, $\chi^2 (12, N=543)= 54.872, p<0.001$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The structural balance of opinions. As explained in the previous chapter, the overall degree of balance/imbalance for opinion coverage on healthcare reform and gun control debate was measured via the structural imbalance score (Fico, Zeldes & Diddi, 2004). Each opinion piece was coded for their opinion direction on five dimensions of opinion divisions as specific to the issues, such as “criticize HCR” vs. “favor HCR” on the dimension of “public option” for an opinion piece on healthcare reform, or “favor gun right” vs. “favor gun control” on the dimension of “NRA” for an opinion piece on gun control debate. A structural imbalance score was then computed for each media outlet’s overall opinion representations of an issue. A higher score represents a higher level of imbalance in its overall opinion representation. Thus, in this part, hypothesis testing is also through direct comparison of the aggregate-level structural imbalance scores, rather than statistical inference based on the significance levels.

For the opinion coverage of healthcare reform, the results show a clear pattern that for the media outlets positioned more toward the professional side offered more balanced opinion representations between the conflicting sides that favor healthcare reform and that criticize healthcare reform (Table 4.5). Comparing the structural imbalance scores for each media outlet, we can see that the overall opinion coverage by *the Washington Post* is more balanced than that by *the Huffington Post*, which in turn is more balanced than that by *Daily Kos* and *RedState*. Looking further into each dimension of opinion division, we can see an interesting pattern that the opinion coverage by *the Washington Post* contained some pieces against healthcare reform across the five dimensions. In particular on the dimension of healthcare reform’s impacts on economy, the opinion coverage by *the Washington Post* even contained a larger proportion of articles criticizing healthcare reform than favoring the reform. Similarly, although to a lesser

extent, the opinion coverage by *the Huffington Post* also contained some pieces criticizing healthcare reform across the different dimensions. Overall, these results give support to H4b.

For the opinion coverage of gun control debate, the results (Table 4.6) show that the opinion coverage by the *Washington Post* is more balanced than that the semi-professional platform of the *Huffington Post*, as well as that the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*. The opinion coverage by the *Washington Post* is overall more favorable toward the side of gun control than toward the side of gun right. But it still contains some pieces that took the perspective of gun right on four out of the five dimensions, including: what kind of issue the Newtown is about (the issue of gun violence, or other issues such as school safety and mental illness), whether gun right is sacred and inviolable, whether gun right should be subject to some control, and whether liberals or conservatives are to blame for irrationality in the gun debate. By comparison, if we look at the balance/imbalance of opinion representations for the other three media outlets, we can see that all these outlets, *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, offered opinions that were consistently aligned with their ideological leaning. The opinions at *the Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos* were more favorable to gun control. The opinions at *RedState* were more favorable to gun right. Overall, these results give support to H4b.

These results speak to prior research on opinion journalism that professional news media seek to represent different viewpoints with fairness in their opinion offerings (Rosenfeld, 2000). Here, a better degree of fairness was attained by the inclusion of some articles that took the sides of healthcare reform critics and gun right supporters. But meanwhile, comparing the results between the two issues, we can also see that opinion representations by *the Washington Post* and *the Huffington Post* were more polarized in the coverage of gun control debate as a moral cultural war issue, despite the professional or semi-professional status of these media outlets.

Table 4.5

Structural imbalance of the opinion coverage of healthcare reform for professional media, semi-professional media, and citizen journalism websites

Opinions regarding	Professional media		Semi-professional media		Citizen blogging sites			
	Washington Post & its website		Huffington Post		Daily Kos		RedState	
	Criticize HCR	Favor HCR	Criticize HCR	Favor HCR	Criticize HCR	Favor HCR	Criticize HCR	Favor HCR
HCR in general	16.56%	61.96%	3.72%	83.51%	1.26%	91.63%	97.87%	0.00%
Government role	3.07%	33.13%	2.13%	56.38%	0.00%	38.91%	63.83%	0.00%
Impacts on economy	23.31%	16.56%	11.17%	15.96%	1.67%	3.77%	55.32%	0.00%
Public option	4.91%	10.43%	4.79%	16.49%	0.00%	26.78%	19.15%	0.00%
Partisan bias	1.23%	20.25%	1.06%	36.17%	0.00%	52.30%	59.57%	0.00%
Structural imbalance score	2.48		3.51		4.34		5	

Note. The percentages were calculated as the number of opinion articles that contain a certain opinion on a certain subject divided by the total number of opinion articles in the media's coverage. The calculation of structural imbalance score was based on Fico, Zeldes & Diddi's (2004) study. For each subject of opinion, an imbalance score was first calculated as $(n1-n2)/(n1+n2)$, where $n1$ = number of articles favoring the issue and $n2$ =number of articles opposing the issue. The absolute value of the sum of five imbalance scores was used for the structural imbalance score.

Table 4.6

Structural imbalance in the opinion coverage of gun control debate for professional media, semi-professional media, and citizen journalism websites

Opinions regarding	Professional media		Semi-professional media		Citizen blogging sites			
	Washington Post & its website		Huffington Post		Daily Kos		RedState	
	Favor gun right	Favor gun control	Favor gun right	Favor gun control	Favor gun right	Favor gun control	Favor gun right	Favor gun control
Newtown tragedy	1.32%	17.11%	1.85%	12.04%	1.35%	4.04%	17.02%	0.00%
Gun right	2.63%	18.42%	0.00%	22.22%	0.00%	21.52%	44.68%	2.13%
Gun control	2.63%	55.26%	0.00%	27.78%	0.00%	21.08%	46.81%	0.00%
NRA	0.00%	19.74%	0.00%	21.30%	0.45%	28.25%	6.38%	0.00%
Partisan bias	1.32%	1.32%	0.00%	1.85%	0.90%	7.62%	17.02%	0.00%
Structural imbalance score	3.52		4.73		4.26		4.91	

Ideological Warfare in the Representation of Opinions

With the deep ideological divide between the liberal and the conservative in the society, the conflict over objectivity among professional and citizen journalists is also complicated by the ideological divide. Although this research is not focused on the ideological warfare in the space of public communication, the selection of three media cases with explicit political ideological leanings including *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState* allow me to take a look, by testing H4c, at how the ideological warfare played out in these partisan media outlets' opinion representations with regard to healthcare reform and gun control debate. The results show that these media outlets represented opinions in the ways that are consistent with their political ideological leanings, especially in the coverage of gun control debate. This is meaningful to our understanding of the conflict over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists. This conflict, when there are these semi-professional or citizen journalistic media outlets open about their political stances, is not isolated from the ideological divide. Regarding the representation of opinions from public debate, the conflict is not simply about whether or not to seek balance or fairness in opinion offerings as demonstrated in the previous part. It is also about which side of debate these media outlets represent or oppose, which is also likely to lead to different types of dispute to the pursuit of balance and fairness by professional news media as explained below.

In the opinion coverage of healthcare reform, the results give strong evidence for H4c that the media outlet's political ideological leaning relate to the direction of its opinion offerings on the issue (Table 4.7). Opinion pieces on healthcare reform were coded as "favor HCR" or "criticize HCR" on five dimensions of opinion divisions when applicable: 1) the author's attitude being supportive or critical of healthcare reform in general; 2) whether the government plays the role of improving healthcare system and helping the uninsured, or endangering free market and

affecting individual choice with government intervention; 3) whether the economic repercussions of healthcare reform are reasonable and necessary, or it causes economic pressure that are also not well addressed by the bill; 4) whether the author supports or opposes the public option proposal; and 5) whether conservatives should be blamed for irrationality in the debate, or the liberals should be. The results show that the media outlet's political ideological leaning relates with the proportion of opinion articles that favor or criticize healthcare reform in all the five dimensions, with $p < .001$ for all the Chi-square tests. The results also show that, for these media outlets, the overall directions of their opinion coverage are consistent across the five dimensions, being in line with their political ideological leanings. Opinion coverage by the liberal media outlets of *the Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos* was predominantly supportive of healthcare reform. That by the conservative media outlet *RedState* was completely critical of healthcare reform.

The similar pattern of opinion polarization was also observed in the opinion coverage of gun control debate (Table 4.8). Opinion articles on gun control debate were coded as "favor gun control" or "favor gun right" on five dimensions of opinion divisions when applicable: 1) whether the Newtown tragedy was primarily an issue of gun violence, or more about some other issues such as school safety and mental illness; 2) whether gun right should be rightly subject to some moral, social and legal control, or it is a sacred right that cannot be violated; 3) whether gun control legislation is a necessary government measure to curb gun violence, or it is government infringement on gun owners' fundamental freedom; 4) whether National Rifle Association (NRA) and other similar gun lobbying groups are bad and irresponsible organizations that manipulate policy outcomes with money and fear mongering, or they are the guardians of gun right; and 5) whether the conservatives are to blame for irrationality in the gun control debate, or the liberals should be. The results show that the media outlets' political

ideological leanings relate to the proportions of their opinion articles that favor gun control or favor gun right in all the five dimensions, with $p < .001$ in all the Chi-square tests. The opinion representations by *RedState* was predominantly for gun right. Conversely, the opinion representations by *the Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos* was predominantly for gun control.

Compare these results between the two issues, we can see that the degree of opinion polarization was even greater in the coverage of gun control debate than in the coverage of healthcare reform. For the conservative media outlet *RedState*, its opinion representations of both issues were almost completely partisan, criticizing healthcare reform and favoring gun rights. But for the liberal media outlets of *the Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos*, their overall opinion coverage of healthcare reform featured a lower degree of structural imbalance than their overall opinion coverage of gun control debate, as shown in the structural imbalance scores. Looking further into the opinion directions in specific dimensions, we can see that the liberal media outlets' opinion coverage of healthcare reform contained some pieces criticizing healthcare reform in all the five dimensions, especially concerning the economic impact of the reform – out of all the opinion pieces on healthcare reform by the liberal media outlets, 5.85% were critical about the economic impact of the reform. Whereas in their opinion coverage on gun, opinions favoring gun rights were contained in a smaller proportion of the total opinion coverage. Taken together, we can see that the liberal vs. conservative polarization was more pronounced in the opinion coverage on gun than that on healthcare reform.

An inference from these results is that, when these partisan media outlets differed sharply in the direction of opinion representations on the issues, the challenge to professional news media's pursuit of balance and fairness from these partisan media and the journalistic practitioners on these platforms may also differ accordingly. As we see in the previous part,

opinion coverage by *the Washington Post* were more balanced, but still characterized by an overall direction of opinion for healthcare reform and gun control. Given the opinion polarization as explained above, the approach by *the Washington Post* could be disputed by journalists from the liberal media platforms as well as those from the conservative ones. Those on the left could take issue with *the Washington Post's* inclusion of opinions that take the perspective of healthcare reform critics or gun right supporters. Whereas those on the right could be angry about its overall direction of opinion offerings being pro-healthcare reform and pro-gun control. Such implications for the contestation over objectivity, which are not demonstrated directly here in the results from content analysis, will be further examined in the next chapter.

Table 4.7.

The ideological leaning of opinion coverage of healthcare reform by liberal media vs. conservative media

Opinions regarding	Media with explicit ideology				χ^2
	Liberal		Conservative		
	Huffington Post & Daily Kos		RedState		
	Criticize HCR	Favor HCR	Criticize HCR	Favor HCR	
HCR in general	2.34%	88.06%	97.87%	0.00%	345.664***
Government role	0.94%	46.60%	63.83%	0.00%	201.537***
Impacts on economy	5.85%	9.13%	55.32%	0.00%	27.960***
Public option	2.11%	22.25%	19.15%	0.00%	51.611***
Partisan bias	0.47%	45.20%	59.57%	0.00%	205.999***
Structural imbalance score	3.93		5		

Note. Opinion pieces were coded as “criticize HCR”, or “favor HCR” on the five dimensions of opinion divisions when applicable. The numbers of applicable opinion pieces differed among dimensions, that is, the *N* number for each Chi-square test is different. The specific Chi-square test results for each dimension are: for HCR in general, $\chi^2(1, N=432) = 345.664$; for government role, $\chi^2(1, N=233) = 201.537$; for impacts on economy, $\chi^2(1, N=90) = 27.960$; for public option, $\chi^2(1, N=113) = 51.611$; for partisan bias, $\chi^2(1, N=223) = 205.999$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.8

The ideological leaning of the opinion coverage of gun control debate by liberal media vs. conservative media

Opinions regarding	Media with explicit ideology				χ^2
	Liberal		Conservative		
	Huffington Post & Daily Kos		RedState		
	Favor gun right	Favor gun control	Favor gun right	Favor gun control	
Newtown tragedy	1.51%	6.65%	17.02%	0.00%	17.550***
Gun right	0.00%	21.75%	44.68%	2.13%	88.498***
Gun control	0.00%	23.26%	46.81%	0.00%	99.000***
NRA	0.30%	25.98%	6.38%	0.00%	66.724***
Partisan bias	0.60%	5.74%	17.02%	0.00%	20.990***
Structural imbalance score	4.42		4.91		

Note. Opinion pieces were coded as “favor gun right”, or “favor gun control” on the five dimensions of opinion divisions when applicable. The numbers of applicable opinion pieces differed among dimensions, that is, the *N* number for each Chi-square test is different. The specific Chi-square test results for each dimension are: for Newtown tragedy, $\chi^2(1, N=35) = 17.550$; for gun right, $\chi^2(1, N=94) = 88.498$; for gun control, $\chi^2(1, N=99) = 99.000$; for NRA, $\chi^2(1, N=90) = 66.724$; for partisan bias, $\chi^2(1, N=29) = 20.990$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Content Aggregation in News Coverage: The Old vs. New Media Divide

Lastly, I examined the media technological variation of old vs. new media as related to the practice of content aggregation in news coverage. This is not the focus of the research, but it can help contribute to our understanding of how the conflict over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists can be complicated by media technology. Here, I examined the possible implications of new media technology for journalistic practitioners to rely more on content aggregation in news work through testing H5, which hypothesized that digital media platforms (*Daily Kos*, *RedState*, *the Huffington Post* and *the Washington Post* blog) utilized content aggregation in a larger proportion of their news pieces on the issues, compared to the traditional media platform (*the Washington Post* newspaper).

In the news coverage of healthcare reform, when we compare the traditional media platform of *the Washington Post* newspaper to all the digital media platforms combined as illustrated in Figure 4.9, the proportion of news articles that used content aggregation for *the Washington Post* newspaper was significantly lower than that for all the digital media platforms combined, $\chi^2(1, N=494)=40.549, p<.001$. Moreover, if we control for the variation of professional status, comparing the traditional media platform of *the Washington Post* newspaper only to the digital media platform of *the Washington Post* blog, the same pattern persists, as illustrated in Figure 4.10. The proportion of news articles that used content aggregation for the newspaper was lower than that for the blog, $\chi^2(1, N=355)=15.872, p<.001$. Based on these results, we can see that journalists at *the Washington Post* newspaper also use content aggregation in their news coverage of healthcare reform, as they still need to cite information from news agencies, other mainstream media outlets and sometimes social media sources. Yet on

the other hand, journalists at the digital branch of the paper were indeed more reliant upon content aggregation. Overall, these results show strong evidence for H5.

Figure 4.9

Percentages of news articles using content aggregation in news coverage of healthcare reform for all digital media platforms combined vs. the Washington Post newspaper as a traditional media platform

A chi-square test of independence shows that the relationship between content aggregation and media technology is significant, $\chi^2(1, N=494)=40.549, p<.001$.

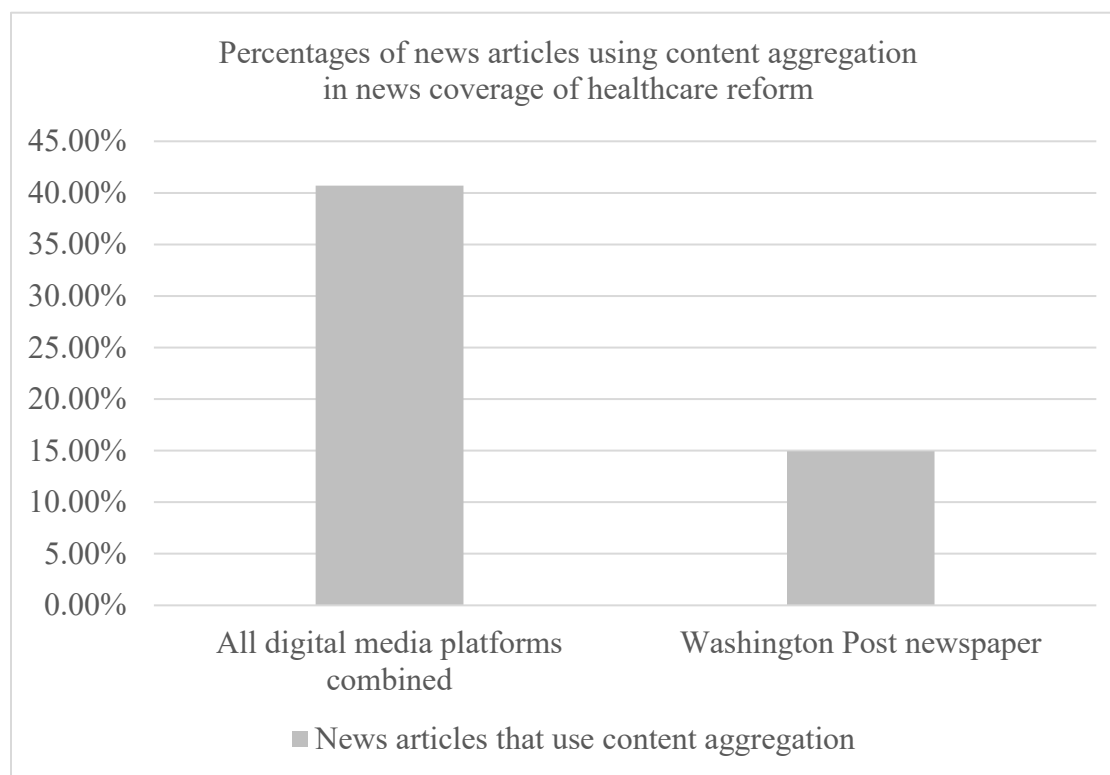
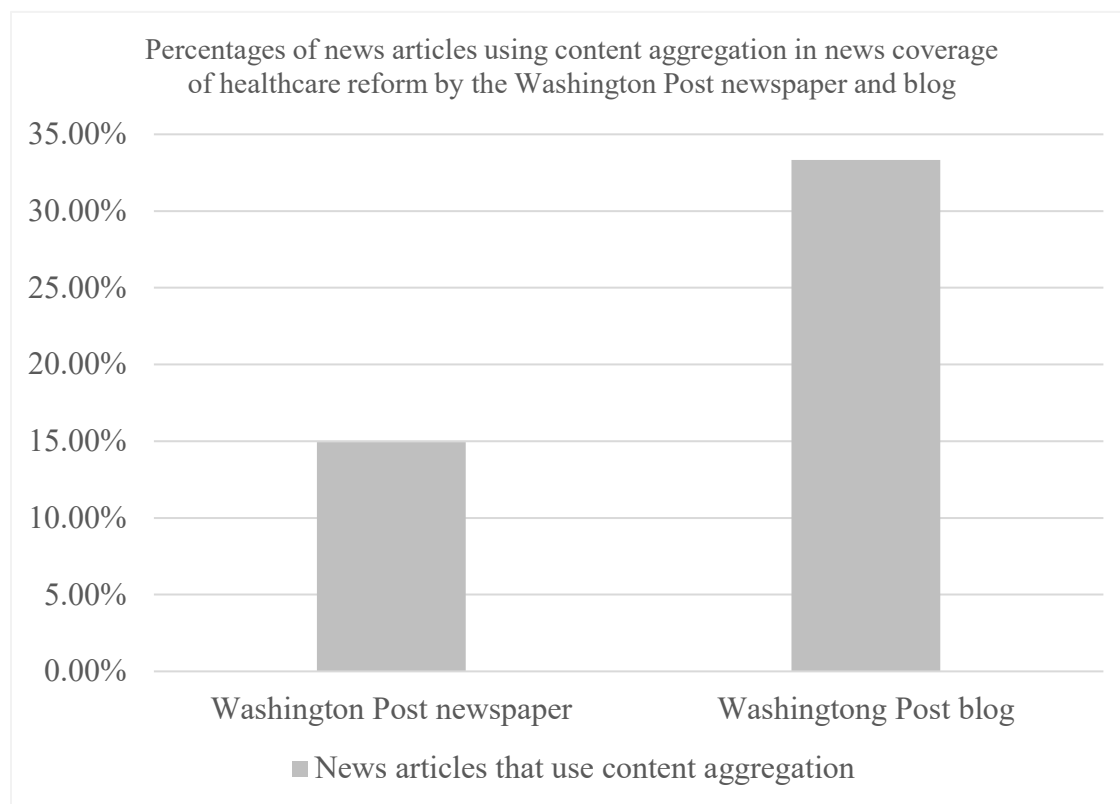


Figure 4.10

Percentages of news articles using content aggregation in the news coverage of healthcare reform for the Washington Post newspaper vs. the Washington Post blog

A chi-square test of independence shows that the relation between content aggregation and media technology was significant, $\chi^2(1, N=355) = 15.872, p < .001$.



In the news coverage of gun control debate, when we compare *the Washington Post* newspaper to all the digital media platforms combined, the pattern remains the same, as illustrated in Figure 4.11. The proportion of news articles that used content aggregation for *the Washington Post* newspaper was lower than that for all the digital media platforms combined, $\chi^2(1, N=543)=54.649, p<.001$. When we control for the variation in professional status to compare *the Washington Post* newspaper only to its blog, the pattern remains the same, as illustrated in Figure 4.12. The proportion of news articles that used content aggregation for the newspaper was lower than that for those at its blog, $\chi^2(1, N=319)=8.918, p<.01$. Overall, these results show strong evidence for H5.

Figure 4.11

Percentages of news articles using content aggregation in the news coverage of gun control debate for all digital media platforms combined vs. the Washington Post newspaper as a traditional media platform

A chi-square test of independence shows that the relationship between content aggregation and media technology was significant, $\chi^2(1, N=543)=54.649, p<.001$.

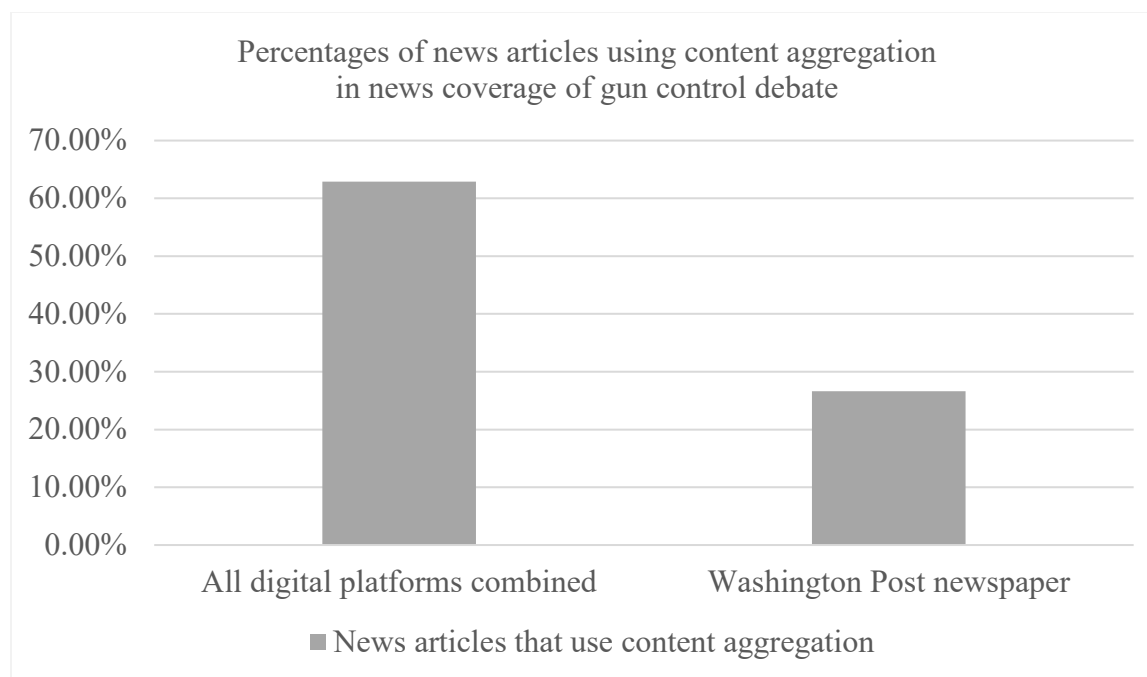
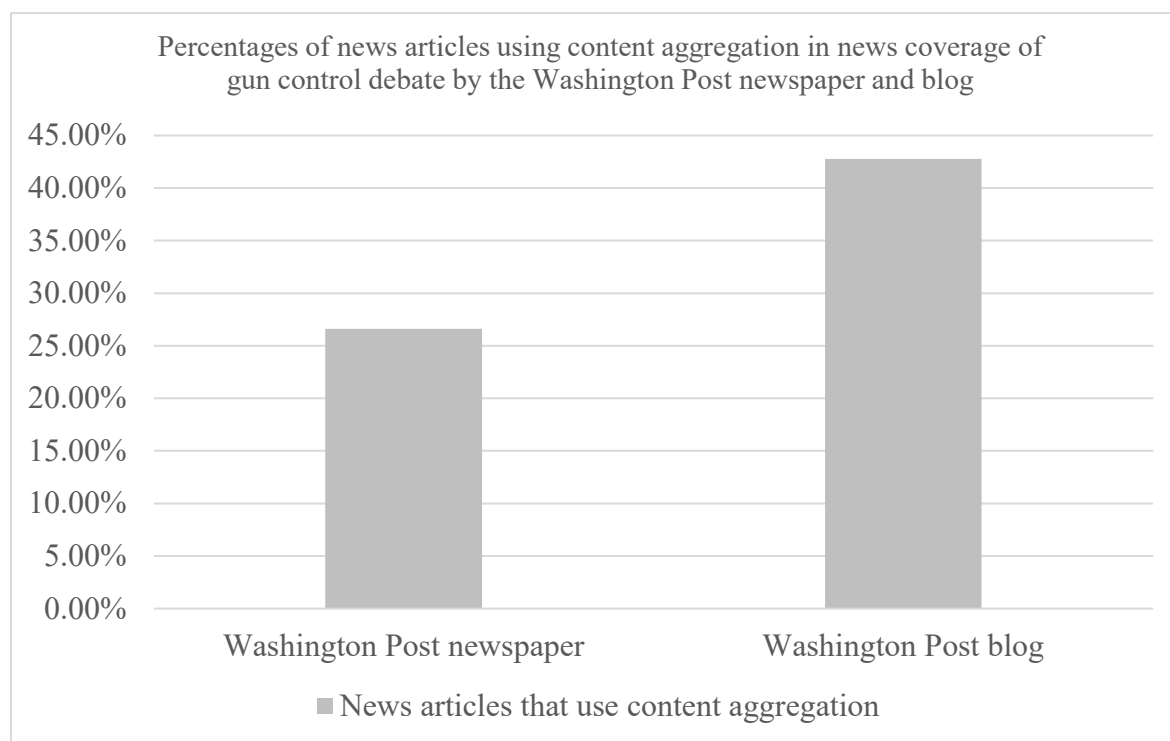


Figure 4.12

Percentages of news articles using content aggregation in the news coverage of gun control debate for the Washington Post newspaper vs. the Washington Post blog

A chi-square test of independence shows that the relationship between content aggregation and media technology was significant, $\chi^2(1, N=319) = 8.918, p < .01$.



An interesting pattern to be noted in the above results is that professional news media do not totally avoid the practice of content aggregation. Even though some professional journalists criticize content aggregation by new media websites as a robbery of and threat to original reporting, the “iron core” of objective reporting (The New Republic Editors, 2011; Jones, 2009), this practice still exists in professional news media’s offline and online news operations, as shown by the results. Actually, the practice of content aggregation, that is, the use of third-party content through interlinking, quotation or rewriting, has not been foreign to professional news

work. In traditional newsrooms, it has long been part of routine news-gathering practices to use information from news agencies. In recent years, as Anderson (2013) found, it has been increasingly adopted by professional news media and even considered as a legitimate part of today's news routines. But meanwhile, the overall pattern of the results still shows that the traditional media platform of *the Washington Post* newspaper tended to use content aggregation much less than digital media platforms. This indicates that content aggregation, which is greatly facilitated by the Internet technology, is still more embraced by digital media platforms.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I have presented data assessing the content characteristics of the four media outlets in their coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate in terms of a set of objectivity criteria. The results depict varied manifestations of objectivity so assessed. The four media outlets differed significantly in how they covered each of the ideologically controversial issues. These differences reveal the varying degrees of compatibility with the normative prescriptions of objectivity, suggesting different journalistic practices in relation to variations in professional orientation, political ideology and technological basis among various media outlets. In addition, such variations in the criteria of objectivity also correspond to different depictions of reality with regard to both issues.

First, let's summarize the main results. The examination of healthcare reform coverage shows that the media outlets positioned more toward the professional side were more emphatic on news coverage than opinion representation (H1), more balanced yet less transparent about journalists' political bias and information collection/processing procedures in news coverage (H2a; H2b), used elected official sources in a larger proportion of news articles (H3a), cited personal anecdotes or observations less frequently in opinion pieces (H3c), covered a wider

range of topics in news (H4a), and were more balanced in opinion representation of the issue (H4b). But the hypothesis (H3b) on the association between professional status and using ordinary citizen sources in news did not find support. By contrast, the examination of gun control debate coverage gives evidence for the hypotheses regarding the forms of content, elected official sources in news, the width of range of news topics, and the balance of opinion representations of the issue. But those regarding the standards of balance and transparency in news, ordinary citizen sources in news, and personal facts in opinion pieces did not find support. Furthermore, with regard to the outlets' variation in political ideological leaning and media technology, the results show that, on both issues, the liberal or conservative media outlets made an ideologically compatible opinion representation (H4c), and digital media platforms used content aggregation in a larger proportion of news pieces than traditional media platform (H5).

Overall, these results tell us that the varied manifestations of objectivity in contents of issue coverage indeed relate to the media outlets' professional orientations, political ideological leanings and technological differentiation. Journalism scholars have long informed us of the normative prescriptions of objectivity for professional journalistic work. It is reflected in the predominance of news production (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), compliance to the standards such as balance and fairness (Tuchman, 1972), and development of news routines that focus on official sources and information channels (Gans, 2004). These remain the tag of professional media's issue coverage in this research.

Meanwhile, the previous findings about citizen journalism, such as citizen journalists' challenge to professional journalism by proposing alternative standards (Weinberger, 2009), using content forms unbounded by news (Lewis, Kaufhold & Larorsa, 2010), and depicting the

grassroots reality (Bock, 2015), also remain valid characterization of issue coverage by the semi-professional or citizen journalistic outlets in this research.

The results also confirm that partisan media's opinion representation is divided along the ideological line (Reese et al., 2007), and that the practice of news aggregation has been adopted by citizen media as well as professional media (Anderson, 2013).

Compared to prior research, an interesting aspect of findings in this chapter is how some relationships between the manifestations of objectivity and the outlets' professional status turned out to be issue dependent. The hypothesized variations with regard to the standards of balance and transparency in news pieces and the practice of citing personal facts in opinion pieces were significant in healthcare reform coverage, but not for the gun coverage. In these aspects, the professional media outlet (*the Washington Post*) and the citizen journalistic websites (*Daily Kos* and *RedState*) did not differ significantly in their gun coverage. Concerning *the Washington Post* in particular, compared to its news coverage of healthcare reform, its news coverage of gun control debate was less balanced, and its opinion coverage of gun was also more reliant on personal observations/anecdotes. In addition, when we consider these media outlets altogether, the liberal vs. conservative divide in their opinion representations was more pronounced in the gun coverage, compared to the healthcare reform coverage. What is unique about the gun issue that can account for these patterns? There could be three main reasons. Firstly, compared to healthcare reform, the moral cultural war issue of gun control debate was more value-laden. Its relevance to such basic values as gun rights, life and safety, especially how the conservatives framed the debate in terms of gun ownership as a sacred constitutional right, made it difficult for this issue to fit well into what Hallin (1989) called "the sphere of legitimate controversy" (p. 198) in civic debate. Thus, the inference is that it was more likely to invite intense struggle on

the front of political ideology. Even professional journalists could resort less to the defensive strategy of balance in news reporting. Secondly, given the controversy over the gun issue, professional news media, which wanted to speak to people with diverse opinions, might need to resort to “personalization” of the story (Bennett, 2016) in its opinion offerings. Thirdly, policy making and media coverage around gun control debate was more event-driven, compared to healthcare reform. This could also make it more necessary for professional and citizen journalists alike to rely on their personal experiences to make sense of what had happened.

Moreover, while the difference between *the Washington Post* and citizen journalistic websites is sharp and distinct, the results also reveal that the manifestations of objectivity in the contents of issue coverage by *the Huffington Post* were neither like the citizen journalistic websites nor like *the Washington Post*. Compared to the citizen journalistic websites, *the Huffington Post* was more emphatic on news production. In its opinion coverage of healthcare reform, it was also more inclusive of opinions critical of the reform, despite its explicit liberal leaning. Meanwhile, compared to *the Washington Post*, it placed more emphasis on opinion coverage, relied more on using personal facts in opinions, and highlighted some news topics underrepresented by *the Washington Post*. These traits make it hard to place the coverage of *the Huffington Post* neatly in the category of professional journalism or citizen journalism. The hybrid nature as suggested by these traits is probably attributed to *the Huffington Post* journalists’ efforts of maintaining their unique position in the field, although the content analysis alone cannot give us direct evidence for this.

Actually, for all the four media outlets, when we consider the varied manifestations of objectivity in their content as shown in this chapter, an inference is that lying behind these differences in content characteristic, journalistic practitioners at these outlets could have different

understandings of how objectivity should be accomplished in journalism, and correspondingly, resort to different practices for the creation of their issue coverage. While the content analysis cannot offer direct evidence for this inference, I will shift the focus onto the dimensions of discourse and practices in the next two chapters, trying to understand more about the underlying differentiation in the approaches to objectivity used by journalistic practitioners at these outlets.

Last but not least, some nuanced findings from the results of content analysis also suggest the necessity for us to look beyond the dimension of content, if we want to understand the contestation over objectivity. Firstly, the results show that *the Washington Post* used ordinary citizen sources as much as the semi-professional or citizen journalistic media outlets. If that is the case, why do citizen journalists want to emphasize their community-level perspective and their utilization of sources without official status in their challenge to mainstream media (Groshek & Han, 2011)? Secondly, the results also show that even *the Washington Post* newspaper also used content aggregation in its news coverage. If that is the case, what makes some professional journalists criticize the news aggregation in online citizen journalism as the robbery of their original reporting (The New Republic Editors, 2011)? Thirdly, none of the results presented in this chapter was an absolute one-or-zero differentiation between professional and citizen media outlets. They were mostly differentiations in the extent of emphasis on various elements involved in their respective approaches of objectivity. Then, when professional and citizen journalists challenge each other's approach of objectivity or defend themselves against such challenges, what is their contestation exactly about and what do they engage in the contestation for? There is much more to the contestation over objectivity that must be understood in the dimension of discourse, by listening directly to what was said by the professional and citizen journalists themselves, as we will do in next chapter.

Chapter 5

Journalistic Objectivity Contested Discursively: Voices from the Practitioners of Differently Positioned Outlets

In previous chapter, we have looked at varied manifestations of objectivity in the contents of issue coverage by the four media outlets. The results show the variations between these outlets in terms of different objectivity criteria and depictions of reality. A key inference from such variations in content is that in relation to the outlets' professional status, journalists of these outlets may follow different approaches to objectivity in their practices, having different understandings about how objectivity should be accomplished in journalism. Is this really the case? In this chapter, I will look directly into these different understandings by presenting the voices from the practitioners of these outlets. In Carlson's (2016) term, these voices are among the constituents of "meta-journalistic discourse", which, in turn, is the site where they contest the meaning of journalism and negotiate the basis of journalistic objectivity.

The analyses in this chapter revolve around two interrelated concepts: journalists' epistemic authority and their boundary-work (Carlson, 2017; Gieryn, 1999). As explained in Chapter 2, journalists' epistemic authority refers to their legitimate power to depict and interpret social reality about events/issues in the world for the public. The epistemic authority can be allocated and negotiated through the process of boundary-work. In the boundary-work, they discursively attribute selected qualities to journalists, journalistic methods and journalistic accounts of reality so as to construct the boundary of journalism as a realm of work. In the journalistic field, different groups of journalists can construct the boundary of journalism in different ways to support competing epistemic authority claims.

Thus, based upon the analysis of interview data complemented with secondary materials, I will present the results about the journalists' discursive contestation over objectivity, focusing on how they made competing epistemic authority claims through the boundary-work. I will go through the results for each media outlet, starting from political bloggers at *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, then continuing to journalists at *the Washington Post*, and lastly talking about those at *the Huffington Post*. For each media outlet, I will explain the journalists' boundary-work involved in the contestation, demonstrating how they ascribed meanings for and built connections between objectivity-relating elements in different ways, thereby negotiating the boundary of journalism. I will also explicate how they established epistemic authority through the boundary-work. They not only staked their epistemic authority claim by emphasizing the set of standards and practices that they followed in their journalistic work, but also justified their authority with different narratives about the significance of their work.

In a nutshell, the results show that in their contestation over objectivity, these journalists differently located in the journalistic field were trying to defend and solidify the professional boundary of journalism, or soften and stretch the boundary from their postures of activist journalism and semi-professional journalism. The boundary of journalism became a contested realm where different visions of journalism met. Through the boundary-work, they claimed the epistemic authority of knowing and presenting the reality on very different bases. For professional journalists, it was based on the detachment as observers who wanted to provide shared factual knowledge for the general public. For citizen journalists, it was based on the information and experience meaningfully threaded through their own worldviews. The former was to be inclusive for people of diverse opinions. The latter was to present what was excluded or under-represented in the former approach.

Data in this chapter is mainly from in-depth interviews conducted with 27 reporters, editors, columnists and bloggers from the four media outlets. A list of interviewees and their roles in their respective platforms could be found in Table 3.8 in Chapter 3. Pseudonyms are used to refer to interviewees for purpose of protecting their confidentiality, but information about their background will be included to help us understand what they said in appropriate context.

Blurred Boundary between Journalism and Political Activism: Building Epistemic Authority upon Professional Journalism's Failures

When it comes to the topic of objectivity for citizen journalism, it seems easy to make the case for those examples where citizens journalists tell stories for local communities where mainstream media cannot reach, or they disseminate first-hand information as witnesses of major news event before reporters have time to respond. In these cases, citizen journalists' contribution to journalistic truth-seeking is celebrated by scholars (Kaye & Toddson, 2004; Robinson, 2009) and professional news media (Kelly, 2009; Lasica, 2003). But with regards to citizen journalism in the form of political blogging on media platforms with explicit ideological leanings, it is often conceived as going along with the goal of accomplishing objectivity in journalism. When interviewed by Lewis, Kaufhold and Lasorsa (2010), the publisher of a local newspaper complained, "(these citizen journalists) are usually someone who has a political viewpoint or agenda they want to express" (p. 171), and a newspaper editor said, "I see a lot of the 'citizen', but not a lot of journalism." (p. 170). Taking the perspective of these professional journalists, such engagement by citizens in the expression of their partisan opinions or their underlying political agenda does not appear to be related to the pursuit of objectivity, which, by the normative prescriptions of professional journalism, is predicated on separating values from facts.

But what if we take citizen journalists' perspective instead? The two citizen journalistic platforms selected in my dissertation, *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, are both political blogging websites with explicit ideological leanings. This offers the vantage point for us to take a listen to political bloggers themselves about how they understand objectivity as enacted in their own journalistic work and importantly, how they rhetorically make the connection between the pursuit of objectivity and political ideology, despite the tension between the two aspects as mentioned above. For example, when I was interviewing a blogger from *RedState*, I noticed that he often played with the word of "right" in the two senses of not only offering a correct account of social reality, but also being on the politically conservative side. I could not help noting this interesting observation to him during the interview. Without any hesitation, he responded:

It was an international use of the word 'right'. It has a dual meaning. That does not necessarily mean that I am always right because sometimes I'm not. I'm always right because I am on the right side of the political stature, I'm a conservative. I am always right also because I'm always looking for the truth.

For him, journalistic truth-seeking and his political ideological stance obviously belong together. Interestingly, similar to him, many bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* whom I interviewed showed the attempt of rhetorically amalgamating the pursuit of objectivity into their political ideological stance and their need for political activism, which actually constitutes the core value in their approach to objectivity as differentiated from the professional approach. In these liberal or conservative bloggers' narratives, their approach to objectivity is justified by mainstream media's failures in conveying social reality truthfully, and necessitated in relation to the backdrop of broader social political context. All of them also try to shore up the legitimacy of their approach by enlisting the standards/practices they follow and the expertise they possess. On the whole, these interviews will reveal how, in their contestation over objectivity, these citizen journalists seek to blur the boundary between journalism and political activism, and to establish

their journalistic authority through storytelling as well as explanation of the empirical basis for their blogging. I will present the interview findings in two parts, respectively for the *Daily Kos* bloggers and *RedState* bloggers so as to demonstrate the similarities and differences between the two platforms with opposite ideological leanings.

Daily Kos. The founder of *Daily Kos*, Markos Moulitsas Zúniga (2008), described this website as “an online community of progressive bloggers seeking change”. As his description indicates, *Daily Kos* bloggers’ interest is not just information dissemination, but also political activism in driving changes with progressive ideas. It is explicitly defined in the website’s “About Me” statement, “It is at once a news organization, community, and activist hub ... to shape a political world once the exclusive domain of the rich, connected, and powerful” (www.dailykos.com, 2000). Given this mission, it is often considered a case of “activist journalism” (Dahlgren, 2016, p. 254), where journalists disseminate information to depict reality from their ideological perspective and seek to mobilize action with the information. So, in this case of activist journalism, how did the practitioners make sense of what they were doing, defining their approach to objectivity and staking their journalistic authority claim? Let’s take a look.

Altogether I interviewed five *Daily Kos* bloggers including two front-page writers and three ordinary bloggers. Two ordinary bloggers also play the role of founder/editor of online groups on the topics of healthcare reform or gun in the *Daily Kos* community. They came from a wide range of backgrounds, working as university researcher, financial consultant, copy writer in advertising agency and web developer or having retired from teaching in college.

Table 5.1 contains the main themes these bloggers mentioned, corresponding to the two levels of boundary-work where they seek to define the boundary of journalism: the explanations

of their own approach to objectivity and the evaluations of the professional approach. These themes fall into four categories of elements that are involved in the approaches to objectivity held by them or by professional journalists: value, standard, expertise and practice. The interviewees did not offer meaningful feedbacks with regards to all the four categories on both levels of boundary-work. For example, no one talked about the “expertise” category in their evaluation of the professional approach, which is noted in the table as “Not mentioned by interviewees”. Overall, these themes are focused on three aspects: 1) the critique of professional journalism as a market failure; 2) the importance of countering right-wing influences by their blogging; 3) the explication of standards, practices and expertise involved in blogging.

Table 5.1

The Daily Kos journalists' boundary-work around objectivity

	Value	Standard	Expertise	Practice	
<i>Daily Kos</i>	Evaluation of their own approach	Finding facts and countering falsehood as a liberal activist	Factuality	Professional expertise, academic training, or other knowledge/skills acquired in blogging	Extensive reading & research on some topic(s); citing information from credible sources; correction & revision
	Evaluation of professional journalists' approach	Professional journalism as commercial operation for profit and market	False equivalence in the name of balance to appear apolitical rather than be factual	Note: Not mentioned by interviewees	The "hit-and-run" approach in issue coverage; lack of fact-checking due to deadline or competition

Criticizing professional journalism as a market failure. An important reason for Markos Moulitsas Zúniga's founding of *Daily Kos* was his frustration over mainstream media's performance. For Zúniga (2008), professional journalists no longer seem to do their job of "reporting what they know to be the truth", which he attributed mainly to the market influences. In his words, mainstream media is "a dramatic market failure", which is why citizen journalists, "once hostage to the mass media conglomerates", need to create their own media outlets and do journalism in different ways from professional journalists. In my interviews of the *Daily Kos* bloggers who wrote on the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate, this narrative around professional journalism as a market failure was shared by most of the interviewees. Through this critique, these bloggers contested the professional approach to objectivity, and legitimated their participation in journalism as well as their ways of doing journalism.

First, it should be noted that the bloggers did not totally negate the value of professional journalism. Instead, most of them gave their acknowledgement and even appreciation to professional journalism. University researcher and blogger Taylor recognized the importance of professional journalists' original reporting on gun violence, "They are able to write stories that include real people's lives and how gun violence has impacted them. I can't go out and interview individuals to write original stories about their experience." Former psychology professor and frontpage writer Ron conceded that big newspapers such as *the New York Times* and *the Washington Post* indeed produced "solid articles", and that some opinions in these papers were also similar to his own. Harper, a financial advisor who wrote business columns for his local newspaper in Santa Barbara and also wrote blogs at *Daily Kos*, said that he was inspired by Paul Krugman's column in *the New York Times* to start writing his analyses on social issues from an economic perspective.

But, at the same time, these bloggers were highly critical of the market-oriented aspect of professional journalism. When I asked Ron, “How do you compare your writings on political issues to the writings by professional journalists?” He answered:

I assume the common goal is that we're trying to educate the public, who are the readers. I think that's what they want to do and I know that's what I want to do. But we're in it for somewhat different purposes. They're in it to inform, but also as money-making. They are in this or their editors are in this to make money.

This critique of the “money-making” goal of professional journalism was echoed by most other interviewees. Harper put it in even stronger terms, “They are all corporate! All the main media now is owned by corporations.”

Specifically, their main accusations about professional journalism as a market failure were about two problems, false equivalence and the hit-and-run approach, both of which, in their opinion, prevented professional journalism from depicting social realities truthfully. This was also why they wanted to participate in political blogging and conduct blogging in different ways from professional journalists.

Most of them were unhappy about the false equivalence in professional media’s news reporting in the name of news balance. “Evenhandedness is not really even,” Ron said, “They are trying to be giving equal time for each point of view, but the points of view or the data for these points of view are not equal.” They also explicitly made the connection between the issue of false equivalence and the corporate operation of news media. Harper said, “They try to be balanced, which is not really being factual. They don’t pursue the truth. They instead try to pursue the balanced perspective, because of the corporate ownership of the mass media now.” For him, professional media attempted to appear balanced and apolitical for the sake of

maximizing the audience base, and this was exactly where the problem existed in professional media's coverage of gun control debate. He explained:

Why so much mass shooting? It's the fault of the mass media. It's because they don't want to disturb, they don't want to be too political or what they consider to be political, and upset, shrink their reader base. I disagree with that. You go after the truth. The truth is, when you look at our country versus all the other countries, that we need so much more gun control.

It was the need to reveal the truth around gun violence not sufficiently represented by media that made him write blogs, utilizing his knowledge in finance to talk about the gun violence issue from an economic perspective and call for gun control. Similarly, when web developer and blogger Robert talked about the issue of false equivalence, he said that professional news media needed to be balanced in their commercial pursuit for market, while as a blogger, he had "more freedom than professional journalists to inject his views" into his writings on healthcare reform. Here, we can see how these bloggers made sense of their approach to blogging, particularly the need for opinion expression, through comparing to and criticizing the professional approach.

Most of the interviewees were also upset about the hit-and-miss approach by professional news media. For Ron, market-driven media "do a lot of short-term stuff, hit and miss, hit and run," paying too much attention to "what is trending." For Harper, it is exactly by contrast to this hit-and-miss approach by professional news media that he thought his blogging on gun control debate was meaningful,

Most mass media can write one or two columns on it, and then they have to go onto something else, whereas I can pursue it more in depth because I have that freedom. They bring things to our attention with a few facts, and I try to dig deeper. They're the elephant in the room. I'm this little gnat out there, buzzing around, trying to dig deeper, dig deeper.

Similarly, for Taylor, a main reason why she started blogging on gun law and research was that mainstream media "for the most part don't report much about gun law", except some occasional

in-depth coverage of the topic after the occurrence of major gun violence events. For Robert, what made him decide to analyze the data on Affordable Care Act (ACA) enrollments in all states was that he found, against his expectation, mainstream media, which had offered abundant coverage of healthcare reform, did not follow up to offer enough explanation on the ACA enrollment numbers. Again, the critique of professional journalism was used for the rationale of why, in their blogging, they wanted to dig persistently into the issues they care about.

In my discussion with Ron and Harper, we had some extra time after finishing the main interview questions. So, I mentioned the debate on journalistic objectivity between *the New York Times* editor Bill Keller and the lawyer-blogger Glenn Greenwald (Keller, 2013), with the hope of getting more feedbacks. Both of them leaned toward Greenwald's opinion that, due to problems such as false equivalence and the hit-and-miss approach, mainstream media is not "aggressive" enough in its pursuit of objectivity. Given this, they chose to be, as Ron said, "just doing what little part I can".

To summarize, in the above-described critique of professional journalism, the *Daily Kos* bloggers called into question how, under the influence of market, professional news media failed to represent social reality sufficiently on issues such as healthcare reform and gun control debate due to the problems of false equivalence and the hit-and-miss approach. Yet, more than simply contesting the professional approach to objectivity, they made it a narrative for explaining why they participated into journalism as bloggers, "doing what little part I can", and why they conducted blogging, "injecting views" in writing and "digging deep" on particular issues. That is, their involvement in citizen journalism was justified by the problems of market-driven professional media. Through such a narrative, they not only engaged in the boundary-work of

evaluating the professional approach to objectivity, but also justified some features of their own approach as a legitimate move in response to professional journalism's problems.

Countering the right-wing influences. The mission of *Daily Kos*, as mentioned before, is to use blogging for the activism purposes of shaping the political world by the progressive agenda. As revealed by the interviews, the *Daily Kos* bloggers had a strong sense of identification with the mission of activist journalism. They considered themselves as information providers plus political activists, and they acted accordingly in their blogging.

For example, in the ice-breaking session of the interview with Ron, the front-page writer, I asked him, "Why do you choose to write at the Daily Kos?" He answered that it was because he "liked" this platform. "You like it." I echoed him. He followed up explaining what he meant, "I would say I like the news, the information part of it, as well as the activity, action part of it, some of both."

So it is for Robert, the blogger who wrote on healthcare reform. In the online community of *Daily Kos* bloggers, he not only wrote blogs regularly, but also played the role as group editors for two online activism groups, "Healthcare reform: We've only just begun" and "Single payer: The fight for Medicare for all". In March 2010, he organized the *Daily Kos* community to deliver roses to Nancy Pelosi as a collective gesture to celebrate the passage of the healthcare reform bill and recognize Pelosi's contribution. In the interview, he was glad to recollect that experience, commenting that "that was probably the point where the *Daily Kos* community became my home online". As we can see from these examples, for these bloggers, blogging at *Daily Kos* is closely related to their interest and involvement in political activism, exactly as indicated by the website's mission of activist journalism.

Moreover, at the core of these bloggers' understanding of the mission is the value that their pursuit of objectivity is amalgamated to the need for political activism. They make sense of the core value through an interesting narrative around countering right-wing influences. In their narrative, political and public debates on the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate contained some right-wing influences, which not only affected policy procedures by the conservative agenda, but also endangered the representation of truths on these issues. What they were trying to do through blogging, thus, was for the dualistic purpose of countering right-wing influences and contributing to journalistic truth-seeking. The two aspects were not incompatible, but amalgamated into each other in this narrative. For example, when I asked Ron why he wrote blogs on the issue of gun violence, he told me:

They keep electing the people who are against what these people (Note: the American people) believe in. I don't know exactly what to do about it other than providing the information to the public and exposing the stuff, exposing the statements that the NRA and their allies put out that are factually untrue.

For him, National Rifle Association (NRA) played the corrupting influence of disseminating “factual untrue” statements, and what he did was to resist the NRA's influence on gun policy by “exposing the statements”. Similarly, when I asked Harper, the blogger who wrote blogs to analyze the cultural and economic reasons for gun violence, why he decided to write these pieces, he replied:

You have this incredible gun lobby that spends millions and millions of dollars, and motivates the Second Amendment defenders ... They've succeeded in their lobbying efforts. The way to change that is to have more truth tellers. ... All I can do is to write about what I write about it and try to influence others with it.

For him, because of how the gun lobby manipulated public opinion with money, he needed to counter this right-wing influence, and to counter this influence, he needed to become a “truth teller” through his blogging.

Robert resorted to the same narrative to explain his purpose of blogging. In his account, his writing on healthcare reform during the period of 2009-2010 was “in response to the tea party frenzy in the summer of 2009 and going on 2010 where ... it was getting really ugly”. Part of the “ugly” dynamics in public debate was that many conservatives would indiscriminately cite public opinion polling results to back up the claim that general Americans opposed the reform. To counter the “tea party frenzy”, he wrote blogs to clarify the conflicting results from various healthcare reform public opinion polls, because he thought that it was important for people to know “what is it that you’re really talking about when you say somebody opposes a law”, rather than cherry-picking polling results for a certain conclusion. Similar to Ron and Harper, here in Robert’s account, the engagement in clarifying facts in blogging and the liberal activist position on healthcare reform were not incompatible, because “the tea-party frenzy” was based on the wrong understanding of the true public opinion.

To summarize, in the narrative around the right-wing influences on healthcare and gun politics, these bloggers made sense of the core value for activist journalism that their pursuit of facts and truth is for countering the right-wing influences, which shows a sharp contrast to the normative prescription of journalistic professionalism as predicated upon separating values and facts (Schudson, 1978). Through highlighting the deviance from facts and truth in the right-wing influences, they rhetorically amalgamated the pursuit of objectivity into the activist goal of countering the right-wing influences, making objectivity and the need for political activism compatible with each other and ascribing legitimacy to their mission of activist journalism as necessitated by what was happening in healthcare and gun politics.

Validating the non-professional approach to objectivity. Lastly, despite that the core value of their approach to objectivity is different from that of the professional approach, these

Daily Kos bloggers also enlisted the standards/practices they follow and the knowledge/skills they possess in describing their own efforts for blogging. By talking about these elements, they highlighted the empirical basis of their blogging efforts, further reinforcing the journalistic authority that they constructed through the previous narratives.

First, most of the interviewees stressed that despite their activist goal, they abided by the standard of factuality. With regard to his main standard for blogging, Harper said, “as a responsible journalist, I am not going to publish blather”, so he would rely on his research to “dig down and find facts”. For Ron, the standard of factuality is so important that he would even call out some democratic politicians for some policy proposals that were not built on a factual basis. He proudly recounted to me that he once wrote a blog post to criticize a democratic policy proposal about reporting and disarming the mentally ill with likely violence risks. He said,

Those are not based upon facts. They're wrongly focused. It is extremely difficult to predict who is going to be violent. I mean, there's another finding of the MacArthur Foundation and some of the very early studies that show predicting violence is extremely difficult because of so many things ... That's the point of that. I don't care if they're republicans, democrats, or independents. If they're wrong, they're wrong.

Similarly, for Robert, it is important to make sure his writings are “not factually wrong”. He said, “As a blogger, I have the luxury of saying ‘Hey, I am just this guy. I am just a blogger.’ But I feel I can’t. It is just my own moral compass, my own ethical standard”.

Secondly, these bloggers also explained that their pursuit of facts is not just a claim, but rather accomplished through following some important practices in blogging. All of the interviewees described some routine practices that they would normally do for citing information from credible information sources. They would make sure that they use “primary sources”, or “respectable” online media outlets that have “won journalism awards”, or “peer-reviewed

academic research”. Some of them would verify information by checking multiple sources. They would also be carefully in presenting the cited information as direct quotations or by including the links. In the words of Rowan, a frontpage writer who wrote on healthcare reform, citing information in these ways helped show that “that’s the story that’s out there, and if it turns out not to be true, that’s not on me”. Moreover, most of these interviewees emphasized their investment of time and effort in reading and researching about the topics they write about. Lastly, two of them also mentioned the practices of revision and correction. For Robert, it was important for him to make corrections within one or two days if he found a mistake in previous posts. For Ron, it was one of the most pleasant things about writing at the Daily Kos that he could engage in ongoing revisions by interacting with readers’ comment. He said,

If people found something factually wrong, they can comment on that. In the process, I can go back and revise it at that time, so you can do ongoing revisions as necessary, or additions if that's indicated. There were a number of people who commented on those and then we talked back and forth in the comments. There is a give and take.

Thirdly, all of the interviewees also mentioned how their various types of expertise were important to their blogging, giving them the perspective for setting truth apart from falsehood. For some, it was the academic or professional knowledge or skills that they already had before they started political blogging, with their diverse background as college professor, researcher, financial consultant, or copy writer in the advertising industry. For example, Harper explained that the expertise he had as a former student in engineering and long-term financial consultant and former student made him better equipped to “seek the truth”, because he knew how to use the “scientific method” and the “critical mind”. He said:

You seek the truth, and you seek the truth wherever you can. You try not to be influenced. I tell you I actually studied engineering for three years at Berkeley before I got into economics. I think having that scientific background is so important because you understand how to weigh facts, have a critical mind about that, and separating the chaff

from the wheat, as we say, so you really get to the truth of it, whatever it is. You have to have a scientific and very inquiring mind to do that.

For some other interviewees, the expertise also included the knowledge/skills they acquired in the process of writing on an issue, such as the knowledge on healthcare policies and gun law, or data analytic skills. Some of them also emphasized the domain knowledge that would made them credible even to people with opposing ideological stances. For example, when Taylor, a Ph.D. researcher who wrote many blogs on the Newtown tragedy as well as gun law and policy during the gun control debate, tried to explain why her writings were credible even for gun rights advocates, she emphasized her experiences in the military including “small arms weapons training”.

An interesting side note here is that after explaining the standards and practices he followed in blogging, one of the interviewees, Robert, actually challenged me about making the distinction of professional vs. citizen journalism in the interview. He said, “Is there a distinction? Should one be considered more credible, be given more credence than the other?” Obviously, from him perspective, his blogging at *Daily Kos*, the platform of activist journalism, should be no less credible than any professional journalists.

The other *Daily Kos* interviewee did not challenge me in the same direct way, luckily for me as the interviewee. But based on the interview results presented in this part, we can see that the same attempt to claim journalistic authority was shared by all the interviewees. They ascribed meaning and legitimacy to their participation in journalism and their vision of activist journalism, through the boundary-work where they talked about their own approach and evaluated the professional approach. For them, their journalistic authority was built upon the empirical basis that they followed a set of standards/practices in blogging, and constructed

through the narratives around problems of professional journalism and the truth-corrupting influences from the right wing in social political context.

RedState. Similar to *Daily Kos*, Red State is a platform of activist journalism. Its mission is to “educate” conservatives, and also to “motivate” and “activate” its conservative bloggers and readers to influence policy changes. It is vividly summarized in the slogan on the website: “We yell ‘ready’, ‘aim’ and ‘fire’” (RedState, 2020). The political ideological leaning of *RedState* is that of the tea party movement within the republican side, which seeks to differentiate from the conservative establishment. With regard to the tea party stance of the website, Erick Erickson , the former editor-in-chief of *RedState*, wrote in the book “Red State Uprising” he co-authored with Lewis Uhler: “CONSERVATIVE? There are a lot of people out there who call themselves conservatives who are not defined by their conservatism... Those more defined by their principles put their principles first ... who are defined as conservatives, not as party men” (Erickson & Uhler, 2010, pp. 24-25). This statement points to a core component in modern-day tea party ideology, that is, the demarcation of conservative principles from the Republican Party and people upholding conservative principles from the elite party men. “With the rise of the tea party movement, conservatives must unite to clean up the Republican Party” (p. xi). He also emphasized the urgency for the tea partiers to take actions against the big government. He beckoned the tea-partiers: when the government became the “leviathan” (p. 75), “you can choose to get involved and fight for freedom, or you can side on the sidelines.” (p. xii)

My interviews of *RedState* journalists were conducted after Erickson’s departure from his editorial position at the website in 2015. But as we will see in the results, their understanding of what they were trying to do through blogging still resonated deeply with the tea party ideology that the former editor laid out above. Altogether, I interviewed six *RedState* bloggers, including

the website's editor-in-chief after Erickson's departure, one frontpage writer, and four ordinary bloggers. They also came from a wide range of backgrounds, working as technology writer, law professor in college, advertising professional, and lawyer. Two of them described themselves as full-time conservative writers, writing blogs for *RedState* as well as several other conservative websites. One of them used to be a full-time columnist for his local paper.

Table 5.2 contains the main themes they mentioned, corresponding to the two levels of boundary-work, where they defined their approach to objectivity, and evaluated the professional approach. These themes fall into four categories of elements that are involved in the approaches to objectivity held by them or by professional journalists: value, standard, expertise and practice. Because no one talked about the "expertise" category in their evaluation of the professional approach, it is noted in the table as "Not mentioned by interviewees". Overall, these themes are focused on three aspects: 1) the tea-party narrative around getting the "real" conservatives message out; 2) the critique of liberal bias in professional journalism; 3) the explication of their "honest" approach to objectivity by enlisting standards, practices and expertise involved in their blogging.

Table 5.2

The RedState journalists' boundary-work around objectivity

	Value	Standard	Expertise	Practice	
<i>Red-State</i>	Evaluation of their own approach	Presenting the perspective of non-elite conservative activists;	Criticisms based upon facts; being explicit about political ideology & religious faith	Professional expertise & academic training	Extensive reading & research on some topics; citing information from credible sources; correction & revision
	Evaluation of professional journalists' approach	Professional journalists being overall liberal in training & ideology	Claiming to be balanced, but biased against conservatives & not transparent about it	Note: Not mentioned by interviewees	Writing news in the ways that show the bias against conservatives

Getting the “real” conservatives’ message out. The interview results show that, similar to the *Daily Kos* bloggers, the *RedState* bloggers’ approach to objectivity was built around the core value that blogging serves the purpose of partisan expression and political activism, which is in sharp contrast to the professional approach. However, different from the *Daily Kos* bloggers who targeted at the truth-corrupting influences from the right-wing, the *RedState* bloggers defined the core value by resorting to a tea-party narrative that the “real” grassroots conservatives’ perspective of social reality was not known to the public. This narrative allows them to amalgamate the pursuit of objectivity to the need of political activism, since getting the “real” conservatives’ message out through their blogging could then serve the dualistic purpose of contributing to journalistic truth seeking and fighting against the danger to civil rights. Let’s take a look, starting from Gavin, the conservative writer and blogger.

Gavin studied journalism in college in 1970s. After graduation, he worked more than a decade writing columns for a city newspaper in Detroit, while at the same time played an active role in local politics. He had about thirty years of experience of working as an organizer of local community programs about family and education. He said he had worked closely with the state government during the Republican governor Todd Engler’s administration. He became a full-time conservative writer after retirement, blogging at *RedState* and several other conservative media outlets. Gavin was the first blogger who gave consent to my interview request. At that time, without too much understanding of bloggers’ world at that time, I asked the least artful interview question, “In your language, could you explain to me what you are seeking to do as a political blogger?” Over the phone, he answered me as follows:

As a political writer, I write on conservative issues that have not seen the light, that division has not seen the light ... I try to look at the reality of what's happening on the ground. What I'm seeking is balance above everything else. I try to find balance in what I

write and when I look at an issue. And when I say balance, I try to balance it on our side obviously ... Politically, I am talking on being an advocate for people who don't know what's happening on the ground ... and what's been done so far has had zero effect. ...

His explanation was straightforward, but what was fascinating about it to me is how deeply it resonated with the above-mentioned tea party ideology that Erickson and Uhler (2010) laid out. Specifically, this explanation contained two points that deserved our attention.

First, Gavin used the term “advocate” to describe himself, but in the interview, he also described himself as an “educator” in some other places. Later in the interview, when I noted these different terms to him, he explained that as a blogger he played the double roles of writing and advocating. But when he felt that “we have a responsibility to defend and protect our civil rights when there's a danger”, that is, “when there's a real and present danger”, he would “take a position to advocate”. Most of the other *RedState* interviewees also expressed similar opinions, saying that they needed to take up the role of a political advocate or activist due to the urgency of their civil rights getting threatened by gun control legislation or healthcare reform. In the words of the advertising professional and RedState blogger, Scott, his blogging efforts were driven by the “bullying” by the government, which “threatens to take away rights by forcing people to purchase healthcare”. It is “the big government is” that made him want to reveal the bullying to the public, and “pushed” him “into politics”. In these interview results, we can see how the boundary of journalism and political activism became highly blurry for these bloggers. To engage in activist journalism, for them, is a fully justified option in response to the danger of the big government taking away their civil rights.

Secondly, as Gavin's quote revealed, his blogging efforts were driven by the fact that some conservative issues were not represented sufficiently to the public, which necessitated his efforts to blog on these issues so as to find balance on the conservative side. He placed emphasis

particularly on “what’s happening on the ground”. By this phrase, he referred to what he had observed over the years in the black community in urban Detroit or other similar urban communities. He said

Most of these people feel that the police are not going to protect them so they’re going to have a gun. They’re the ones that you hear the shooting even in their own houses. Bullets don’t stop. Not when they go through a window or through a wall. They just come through. That’s the reality.

He stressed that government policies did not played a successful role, or in his words, “what’s been done so far has had zero effect”. His frustration was about government and political elites in general, including political elites on the Republican side. Driven by the frustration, it was his hope that through blogging, some of these grassroots realities can be revealed to the public. It is easy to note the ideological consistency between this explanation from Gavin, and Erickson’s statement about modern-day tea party movement. Actually, this narrative of how the grassroots conservative perspective was not sufficiently known to the public was also shared by most of the other *RedState* interviewees. In the interviews, they described themselves as being a “real conservative”, “actual conservative”, or “strident conservative”, who was not only distrustful for government but also suspicious of conservative elite politicians for being not effective in dealing with conservative issues that mattered for them. For them, their blogging essentially served for the goal of “getting the conservative message out”, or “taking the debate back”. For them, because the grassroots conservative perspective about social reality is not sufficiently know to the public, what they were trying to do through blogging was both conveying the truth and advocating the tea party agenda. The pursuit of objectivity and the need for political activism attain compatibility from this narrative.

If the above interview results already showed how these *RedState* bloggers sought to rhetorically blurred the boundary between journalism and political activism, resorting to the tea-party narrative to amalgamate the pursuit of objectivity to the need of tea party activism, then this stance found an even more explicit statement in the explanations from Ethan, the *RedState* editor-in-chief at the time of interview. Ethan used to be a blogger at the website and succeeded to the editor's chair after Erickson's departure. He said, "We try to report as accurately as possible, but we're also out there to move the needle as well. We have certain ways that we like to see the political system run and we're out there to try to bring that into being as much as possible". By the word "we", he explained to me that he referred to the conservatives who do not live in the Washington D.C., with their "unique from-the-heartland perspective". For him, it is important for *RedState* to be not "captivated by the beltway mentality" and "captive to the Republicans in the congress". He mentioned that he had once refused to move *RedState* into the D.C. to maintain its unique perspective as "independent from what the Republican party wants to say". For him, the value of *RedState* lied in disseminating "news and information from someone who can be trusted to be actual conservatives".

Overall, for these *RedState* bloggers, like their *Daily Kos* counterparts, the journalistic pursuit of facts and truth is an integral part of their efforts for advocating their political ideology and seeking political changes. As conservative writer and blogger, Zack, played with the word "right" in its dualistic senses of being correct and being on the conservative side, when he explained to me "what truth means" for him, "Truth is what's right, because truth is always 'right'. My ultimate goal is to expose the truth about the topics that I'm writing on."

To summarize, in the tea-party narrative around getting the "real" conservatives' message out, these *RedState* bloggers rhetorically blurred the boundary between journalism and political

activism and amalgamated the pursuit of objectivity to the need of tea party activism. Their participation in journalism and their vision of activist journalism were both necessitated by how the “real” grassroots perspective of social reality was not sufficiently known to the public and how the big government endangered their civil rights. This narrative allowed them to be able to promote themselves as legitimate truth-seekers despite their political ideological leaning.

Critique of liberal bias in professional journalism. Besides resorting to the tea-party narrative as above mentioned, what was common to the *RedState* interviewees was their critique of liberal bias in professional journalism. In their evaluation of the professional approach to objectivity, they focused on the aspect of liberal bias, making an all-out accusation of the liberal bias as entrenched in journalists’ training and ideology, in the news coverage that claimed to be balanced but contained bias against conservatives, and in the dishonest practice of wrapping such bias inside news narratives. Through the critique of the liberal bias in professional journalism, these bloggers further justified how they used blogging to defend their conservative ideas.

First, most of the interviewees complained that professional journalists lean toward the liberal side of political ideology by training. Former newspaper columnist, Gavin, said that he knew this based on his experience with “these reporters that I know all my life that I’ve worked with” when he worked for student newspapers earlier in his life and wrote columns for the city newspaper in Detroit later on. Conservative writer and blogger Zack attributed it to how the public schools’ system propagated “the idea of big government” to students. Interestingly, both Gavin and Zack cited some statistics to back up their claims about liberal media bias. Gavin complained that 75% of journalists are liberal, while Zack said that 85% of them voted for the democratic candidate in the Clinton vs. Trump Presidential Election. While they did not mention the sources during the interviews, the first number seemed to come from a summary of political

scientist Robert Lichter's study (Media Research Center, n.d.), by Media Research Center which is a conservative media watchdog website that is often cited by bloggers at *RedState* including Erick Erickson himself. Lichter, Rothman and Lichter's (1986) survey research, conducted in 1981, showed that 75% of journalists at top US media outlets supported the acceptance of homosexuality and government involvement in reducing the poor-rich gap. But the percentage that Zack quoted about journalists' voting decisions seemed to be exaggerated even compared to the statistics from the Media Research Center. According to the summary on the Media Research Center website, entitled "Media Bias Basics" (Media Research Center, n.d.), a 2005 survey by University of Connecticut reported that 53% percent of journalists nationwide voted for the democratic candidate in the Kerry vs. Bush election in 2005. I did not get the chance to verify the sources with the interviewees during the interviews. But regardless of which sources they indeed used, the fact that they remembered these "statistics" and used them readily during the interviews showed that these bloggers' critique about professional journalism came from a deeply embedded perception of liberal media bias in their understanding.

These bloggers also talked about the liberal media bias as manifested in professional news media's coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate. In general, they were far more critical about professional media's coverage of the gun issue, compared to that of healthcare reform. With regard to the healthcare reform coverage, some of them criticized mainstream media for the "ignorance of some importance opinions", such as the consideration of the constitutional status of individual mandate from a tax law perspective. Some of them criticized what they felt as the condescending tone that renowned columnists such as Paul Krugman used in writing on healthcare reform. But there was also an interviewee who positively evaluated mainstream media's coverage of healthcare reform as even-handed. However, when it

came to the gun coverage, most of the interviewees made strong criticisms of mainstream media.

Here is a long quote on both issues from Ethan, the blogger-turned-editor of the *RedState*:

I think in general the (mainstream media's) coverage of Obamacare, has not been as biased as you otherwise could see. If you look at the opinion polls, the public is still relatively firmly opposed to Obamacare. I think that the media at long last has kind of come around to that. They're not as in the tank for it as they otherwise would be. I think the media has done a reasonably (Pause). Let me back up. I think that Obamacare in particular is an issue that's difficult for the media to cover in a lot of the ways that they typically display their bias. It's not one that the conservative position is easy to dismiss as stupid. The main part of the law that remains unpopular today, the individual mandate, is a concept that's easy for middle Americans to grasp, which is to say, 'The government shouldn't be telling me that I have to buy health insurance'. A lot of issues that are kind of signature pet liberal issues and they even reported with admirable frankness on a lot of the failures that have occurred, with United healthcare wanting to pull out and the exchanges shutting down in different states, and so on and so forth. It always could be better, but not the worst issues that I've seen media bias on. In my opinion, media bias tends to show itself most pronounced in a couple of different issues. Number one is abortion. The media is uniformly way more pro-choice than the American public is. They are also way more pro-gun-control than the average American is. On guns, you see where the media is just so far out of step with not just conservatives but with what ordinary Americans think. Their bias shows through probably the clearest.

In this long quote, two points are worth contemplating. First, the editor was evaluating mainstream media's performance in covering healthcare reform vs. gun control debate. For him, on the gun issue, the liberal media bias was "probably the clearest", being "far out of step" with conservatives. By contrast, on healthcare reform, mainstream media was not "as biased as you otherwise could see", and even "reported with admirable frankness" on some aspects of the issue. But interestingly, he did not think that mainstream media did a good job of covering healthcare reform. Instead, he emphasized that "Obamacare in particular is an issue that's difficult for the media to cover in a lot of the ways that they typically display their bias".

Secondly, what is also interesting about the quote was how "public opinion" was adopted as a malleable discursive frame to reify the liberal bias as an attribute of mainstream media. With regard to healthcare reform, he resorted to public opinion polls, stressing that the public was

“firmly opposed to Obamacare” and the main part of the law was “unpopular”. Therefore, he argued that healthcare was an issue where it was difficult for mainstream media to display liberal bias. With regard to gun control debate, he again mentioned “what ordinary Americans think”, arguing that mainstream media were “far out of step” with the public opinion. In other words, whether mainstream media’s coverage was in agreement with the “public opinion”, its liberal bias exists – liberal bias was presented as an attribute of mainstream media instead of that of their coverage on certain issues, and this attribute was only difficult to display on some issues. Now, what the general public opinion really was on the two issues may not be important here for our consideration. What is important is the usage of “public opinion” as a discursive frame that places general public opinion as measured by polls as the epistemic anchor or fact, and that helps build connections between the general public opinion and liberal media bias in nimble ways. It is a discursive frame that resorts to empiricist principle but builds itself upon the constructed representations assumed as an empirical reality. Measured by this “public opinion”, conservative ideas stand for the general American public opinion, and mainstream media are essentially biased not just against conservatives, but also against the American public in general.

The reification of the liberal bias as an attribute of mainstream media is meaningful to these RedState bloggers, because it served to further justify their participation in journalism and their approach of activist journalism. In the words of Erick Erickson, mainstream media “paint tea partiers as fringe when in fact the issues they care about are very American (Erickson & Uhler, 2010, p. xi), and “if the media ... won’t honestly examine its own biases”, “they will actually be thought of as the enemy of the people, because they are so at war with truth” (Erickson, 2019). Therefore, it is important for the tea partiers to engage in journalism and to do journalism in different ways from professional journalists for the sake of “truth”. This argument

could be seen in the more specific results from the *RedState* bloggers' evaluation of the professional approach to objectivity in the category of standard and practice, as shown below.

With regard to the professional standards of objectivity, the *RedState* interviewee's main complaint was that professional journalists failed to live up to the standards of balance and neutrality as they claimed. The former newspaper columnist Gavin said, "These standards are the standards you allegedly learn in J-School, balance, neutrality, objectivity. But reality is something quite different". For him, the problem is that while news should be neutral, editors tell journalists "go and edit your story to make it appear to be more liberal". Similarly, conservative writer and blogger Zack said that the issue with professional journalism is that news media "use balance as their peg phrase" whereas "lots of it are not in balance" and he cannot "trust mainstream media to be balanced". He cited the examples of how mainstream media framed the gun issue with the "buzz phrase", saying "These buzz phrases they want to use to try to prove their point, such as 'assault weapon' and 'reasonable gun control. It's politically correct to blame you as being a right-wing extremist, because you don't savor 'reasonable gun control'. And 'assault weapons'. There's no non-assault weapons!" When he saw these examples of liberal bias in the allegedly balanced reporting, he said that he would consider it his "self-defense" to write blogs and express his opinions on conservative media platforms.

With regard to practices involved in the professional approach to objectivity, the *RedState* interviewees' criticism focused on how professional journalists tended to hide their anti-conservative opinions in news narratives. They used the word "dishonest" to describe how they feel about this practice. For example, the *RedState* frontpage writer Todd said that, when he read an opinion piece from mainstream media, "you can disagree with it, but it's not dishonest", because "it is an opinion piece" where "the organization wants to add an editorial sin, and that's

a fair game”. However, when he read news narratives from mainstream media, he often felt that the stories were “deliberately obscuring facts known to the journalists”, which was for him “dishonest and undesirable”. He concluded, specifically complaining about those long-form news stories he read, “I am really not interested in journalists’ narrative. I want the facts. If I want the narrative, I’ll flip to the opinion pages.” For him, professional journalists’ subjectivity that goes into the creation of news narratives is an opinion in disguise, which makes it dishonest.

This accusation around news narratives sounds vague. So in the interview, I had the chance to show the interviewees a news story from *the Washington Post*’s coverage of the gun issue and asked them how they thought of it. Their responses can demonstrate what they specifically complained about, when they talked about how professional journalists hide opinions in news narratives. To avoid eliciting negative responses simply due to the content of the story, I picked a news article that took the gun owners’ perspective toward the Newtown tragedy, which is entitled “With gun issue in sharp focus, advocates are on the defensive”, published on the third day following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (See Appendix J).

This article described how gun owners and gun rights advocates reacted to the tragedy. They were feeling “horrified” about the occurrence of yet another school shooting and meanwhile worrying that their gun rights could be “taken away”. The *RedState* interviewees’ evaluation process was interesting. They showed some approval to the gun-rights advocates’ perspective of the story at first, but the more they read into the news story, the more they felt angry about what they found to be the news reporter’s bias hidden in it. Here is what the conservative writer and blogger Zack said, while reading through this story. In this long quote, the parts that appear in quotation marks were content from the news story.

I would say yes to his quote from Van Cleave, ‘you would have thought that I had gone up there and done this horrible thing’. Those of us on the Second Amendment side do feel that way many times. ... Now, ‘as the call for new gun-control laws increases, gun owners say they also feel under attack’. Reading this on the surface, he is actually trying to point out the absurdity of a gun owner saying this. ... ‘Challenged by those who see any gun as an instrument of distribution, they defend their beliefs that guns are beneficial. Harder still is to explain the allure of weapons like, the .323-caliber Bushmaster’. Now, he took what could have been a great point and then he used that as a foundation to build, build, build to the point that, if you are someone who can’t even at least agree that the .323 Bushmaster should be outlawed, then you are obviously a radical. ... Now, this quote, ‘Guns are fun and some of them are much more cool than others’. Okay. You are not worried about the Second Amendment. You are just some fruit loop out there that thinks that you should own a gun and be able to shoot at anything that comes by moving. If the purpose of the story is as he said in the beginning that gun owners are just as concerned, then why would he quote this? It wasn’t pro-gun. ... *The Washington Post* is not known for a fair and balanced approach to stories. ... I don’t know who this author is, but this wasn’t supposed to be a story. This was supposed to be an opinion. It ended up being an opinion near the end.

For Zack, *the Washington Post* journalist claimed to make an attempt for journalistic balance by taking the perspective of gun-rights advocates, but by his reading, this story ended up showing the journalist’s hidden “opinion” that gun owners who disagree with gun control are radical and gun rights are not a serious concern about constitutional rights. This interpretation of the story was shared by most of the other *RedState* interviewees whom I showed this story to. They thought that this story about the gun-rights advocates’ perspective exactly demonstrated how professional journalists were “dishonest” in hiding opinions in news narratives. For the advertising professional and blogger, Scott, this is also where he hoped to differentiate his blogging from professional journalists, by expressing his opinions directly and honestly. He said, “I have no problem with giving my opinion in a story. When you give opinions, you make people know it’s an opinion. But they’ll influence the story based on their opinions. And they won’t tell people. That’s the difference between me and the mainstream media”.

To summarize, in their critique of professional journalism, the *RedState* bloggers reified the liberal bias as an attribute of mainstream media and attributed it to journalists’ training and

political ideological leaning. They focused on professional journalists' failure to live up to the standard of balance, and the dishonesty in hiding opinions within news narratives. With this critique, their involvement in journalism and their approach of activist journalism was further justified as a move to defend themselves and their truth against mainstream media.

Establishing an "honest" approach to objectivity. Similar with the *Daily Kos* bloggers, these *RedState* interviewees also laid out a set of standards, practices and expertise that were involved in their efforts of blogging, thereby claiming the epistemic authority in their journalistic work. However, unlike their *Daily Kos* counterparts, these *RedState* interviewees placed great emphasis on the standard of transparency, which they related to the quality of honesty.

All the *RedState* interviewees mentioned the importance of the standard of transparency. They said that it was important for them to remain explicit and open about their subjectivity, whether it is their political ideological leaning, their religious faith, or their intention to opine rather than reporting facts in a blog post. For example, the frontpage writer Todd, who worked as a writer in a technology company, said that he always tried to be open about his tea party principles, such as supporting gun rights and favoring limited government, in his blogs on gun control debate. In his words, being explicit about these principles mattered to him, because "it would be dishonest" otherwise – "For me, to be less than candid about that, I think it would be dishonest. If I am not explicit, then it would be deceptive. It would be wrong." Similarly, advertising professional and blogger, Scott, said that a main standard he used in blogging was "when you give opinions, you let people know it's opinion". For him, as above mentioned, this was to show that he was unlike the "dishonest" mainstream media. Conservative writer and blogger Zack included the claim that he writes "always 'right' columns" in his signature of every blog post to inform readers about his political ideological stance. Law

professor and blogger Steve also tried to be open about his faith as a United Methodist in his blogs about healthcare reform.

Interestingly, if we read blog posts at *Daily Kos*, we will notice that some of the *Daily Kos* interviewees actually tried similar measures of transparency in their writing. But in the interviews, I did not hear them talk about the standard of transparency. In a sharp contrast, the *RedState* interviewees consistently emphasized this standard during the interviews. An inference from this pattern is that the standard of transparency is also used by the *Daily Kos* bloggers, but it carries far more importance in the *RedState* bloggers' boundary-work, being considered a key attribute of their approach to objectivity as differentiated from the professional approach.

Besides the standard of transparency, most of the *RedState* interviewees also stressed the standard of factuality, showing that despite their ideological stance in writing, their opinions, including criticisms, were based on facts. For example, Gavin, the former newspaper columnist, used the word "objective" in explaining why facts mattered for his political blogging:

Critical or not critical, those are the facts, because as a writer, I think you have to be objective. Even when you are an opinion writer, you still should have the basis or foundation of facts for what your values and your principles are, otherwise you're just like anyone else out there yelling into the storm. I mean, so what?

The emphasis on basing one's criticism on facts was shared by other *RedState* interviewees as well, although the reasons they mentioned differed from one to another. Without mentioning the grandiose goal of objectivity like Gavin, some thought that getting the facts right in their criticisms was important, because "your criticism can cost someone their job". Some thought that sticking to facts in their opinions would "gain me credibility in the long run". Some others would consider what option was beneficial for their tea party politics – rumor-based criticisms such as the birthers' argument was "not helpful to what conservatives are trying to do politically". But

what was common to them was the rhetorical attempt of demonstrating that their opinion writing was fact-based and thus valid.

Lastly, it should be noted that similar to *Daily Kos* bloggers, these RedState interviewees also emphasized how their different types of expertise from academic training and professional experiences helped them tell truth from falsehood. They also described a wide range of practices that helped them collect factual information, including their extensive reading and research into the topics they wrote about, citing information from credible sources, and making ongoing corrections and revisions. Just like for their Daily Kos counterparts, the talk of these practices and expertise allowed them to show that their information collection was a process of efforts, knowledge and rationality. Due to the high-level similarity with interview results from *Daily Kos* bloggers, I would not repeat the specific results.

To summarize, from the discursive boundary-work by the *RedState* bloggers as described in this part, we could see that their approach to objectivity is built around the core value that their pursuit of facts and truth served the ideological purpose of getting the “real” conservatives’ message out. Besides, their approach to objectivity was also constituted of the standards, practices and expertise that facilitated their information collection, and supported their epistemic authority. They also established their journalistic authority through the narrative of how the grassroots tea party perspective of social reality was not known to public, with which they could claim to engage in journalistic truth seeking and contributing to the tea party movement. The authority was further justified through their critique of the professional approach to objectivity that focused on the liberal media bias. Both the tea party narrative and the critique of liberal media bias allowed them to promote themselves as important contributors to better representation of the “truth” for the conservatives and the American public.

Professional Game with a Transcendent Commitment: Claiming Epistemic Authority in a Narrative of Journalists' Expertise & Democratic Obligation

Shifting focus to professional journalists of *the Washington Post*, we have discussed in Chapter 2 that the norm of objectivity is the cornerstone of professional ideology for journalists in the U.S. (Deuze, 2005). It denotes the commitment to fact-based news reporting as predicated on the importance of separating subjective values from facts (Schudson, 1978). With this commitment, professional news media and journalists have developed and employed a set of standards and routines to guide the implementation of their work (Ward, 2010). Meanwhile, in Maras's (2013) apt term, objectivity is also an "adaptive norm" (p. 139). It has been constantly debated, re-appraised and adapted for the new needs by the professional community of journalists, as we have seen in the history for interpretive journalism, investigative reporting, photojournalism and so on. It has been through the debates, re-appraisals and adaptations that they have constantly maintained and reinforced the basis of their epistemic authority. So, in the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists as involved in the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate, how would professional journalists make sense of their approach to objectivity and evaluate the approach by citizen journalists? What elements would they highlight in the professional approach as the basis of their epistemic authority claim, and what elements would they note in citizen journalists' approach to demarcate citizen journalism from what they are doing?

For purpose of forming some understanding concerning these questions, I interviewed eight professional journalists from *the Washington Post* newspaper and blog, who contributed to the coverage of healthcare reform or gun control debate, in addition to one journalist of *the New York Times* with whom I pretested my interview questions. Among them, there were two

Pulitzer-winning reporters, an ombudsman, a business reporter and former White House correspondent, two editor-and-writers and one general assignment reporter from *the Washington Post* blog, and two college professors hired as external columnists/bloggers. With the diversity of their functions within the professional media outlet, I triangulated what they said to discern the main patterns of their discourse.

Table 5.3 contains the main themes these journalists mentioned, corresponding to the two levels of boundary work, where they talked about their professional approach to objectivity, and evaluated citizen journalists' performance. These themes fall into four categories of elements that are involved in the approaches to objectivity held by them or by professional journalists: value, standard, expertise and practice. Overall, these themes are focused on three aspects: 1) the key elements that constitute their approach to objectivity; 2) the narrative around journalists' democratic obligation; 3) their "great expectations" for citizen journalists to follow the professional standards and contribute to the democratic discourse.

Table 5.3

Professional journalists' boundary-work around objectivity

		Value	Standard	Expertise	Practice
<i>The Washington Post</i> paper & blog	Evaluation of their own approach	suspending one's opinions, which relates to the responsibility for contributing to civic discourse; journalistic independence, esp. in challenging elites;	Fairness; factuality; accuracy in presenting facts;	Professional experiences in writing news & knowledge on a particular field/beat	Reporting issues with in-depth explanation; using trust-worthy & high-status sources & the verification procedure; organizational news work via beats & specialization in the newsroom
	Evaluation of citizen journalists' approach	Still possible to contribute more to the civic discourse	Lacking in factual evidence, accuracy & fairness;	Inadequate knowledge about news reporting & about understanding the system	Write opinions in line with their political background, lacking fairness

Key elements in the professional approach to objectivity. Let's first look at how these journalists of *the Washington Post* laid out the key elements that constituted their professional approach to objectivity. Overall, the interview results show two main patterns. First, the interviewees' explanations about the pursuit of objectivity in their work were similar between those working newspaper and those working for its blog. In general, they attached great importance to the separation of values from facts, and the professional standards of balance, fairness and factuality. But some of them, interestingly, tended to avoid mentioning balance, but instead stress fairness. Secondly, compared to citizen journalists, these journalists were more emphatic upon the "expertise" category in their professional approach to objectivity. For them, to get facts right and to offer in-depth explanations about facts would demand knowledge and skills, placing emphasis particularly on the expertise coming from long-term experiences of journalistic work and enabled within the institution of professional media organizations. Specific findings are as follows.

Separating values form facts. Most of *the Washington Post* interviewees, except for one external blogger who considered himself an opinion writer for the newspaper website, considered it necessary to suspend their opinions while covering the issues. During the interviews with them, for purpose of being consistent with interviews with citizen journalists, I asked each of them how they thought of policies or policy proposals in healthcare reform and gun control legislation. Their responses ranged from polite declination to answer it to slight irritation by my question, followed with some explanations. The former editor of *the Washington Post* website, Greg, told me that journalists' job was not "judging", but "showing". Pulitzer-winning investigative reporter, Ed, said that news reporters should not let readers "see who the reporters agree with and who they disagree with". The external blogger and college professor

Jennifer who wrote economy analysis articles for *the Washington Post* blog, said that although she had her opinion on the issues, her writing for the Post was to “explain what’s going on”, rather than “give an opinion”. From these quotes, we can see from these results, the normative prescription of objectivity for journalists to suspend their opinion in news reporting and maintain the strict distinction between news and opinions remain highly important for these journalists.

Two instances could illustrate how the separation of value from facts, as the core value in the professional approach to objectivity, was deeply internalized by these journalists. Jared was the editor and writer of renowned political blog, *The Fix*. In the interview, I asked about his stance on healthcare reform and gun control. Rather than answering it directly, he answered:

As a journalist, we have a responsibility to write about things in a way that allows people to make their own decisions. As a matter of fact, I even don’t think a lot about what my particular view is, just because I think that’s not terribly helpful towards doing my job helping people come to their own conclusions.

Luke was the former ombudsman of *the Washington Post*. He recounted to me his experience of changing from the role of a news reporter to that of a news ombudsman, which required him to express opinions on newsroom staff’s ethical performances. The journalistic value of suspending one’s opinion in news reporting was so deeply embedded in him that when he initially worked as the ombudsman, “it was a little bit hard for me to so publicly be saying ‘I am rendering an opinion’.” He maintained that journalists were capable of “personal beliefs aside”. From his perspective, “we expect that a judge in a trial can try to put aside their personal beliefs. We feel that way about members of the clergy. On the same basis, journalists are capable of putting their personal beliefs aside.” From the two instances, we can see that both journalists were not only emphasizing the importance of suspending their opinions in news reporting, but also seeking to justify this value position. For Jared, it was fully justified in the context of what he considered as

journalism's function, that is, offering information unmingled with personal views and "helping people to come to their own conclusions". For Luke, it was considered a reasonable value claim that was related to journalism's status as a profession. If the professionals in other comparable professions such as law and clergy can make this claim, so it was for journalists. Both explanations show that the value of suspending opinions in news reporting deeply relates to how journalists see their work. For them, this value position is integral to fulfilling journalism's epistemic function and claiming the status of profession for journalism.

The standard of fairness. In consistency with the value of suspending one's opinion in news coverage, these journalists considered fairness and balance among the foremost standards that they follow in their work. For example, the Pulitzer-winning investigative reporter, Ed, said that "a news story needs to be balanced and fair", and that he was told to maintain the standards "early on" in his career and had "always tried to do it". For example, later in the interview, when more trust was built up, he talked about the gun issue in a personal way, recounting sadly a gun-induced death in his own family. But he refused to let his personal attitude go into his coverage of the gun issue so as to make his stories balanced and fair. This emphasis on the standards of fairness and balance was echoed by several other interviewees of *the Washington Post* as well.

However, interestingly, some other interviewees of *the Washington Post* placed equal emphasis on fairness, the importance of presenting multiple sides of the argument to the public, but without mentioning the need to be balanced. For example, the Fix editor and writer, Jared, said that it was important to write about all the relevant sides of a public debate, because that would help him "provide a fair assessment of the current state of our politics", and "have credibility with people of all the different political persuasions". Some of them also tried to differentiate fairness from false equivalence. For example, the former ombudsman, Luke,

defined fairness as “presenting the various relevant sides of an issue in an intellectually honest way”, rather than “false equivalence”. College professor and external blogger Jennifer explained that it was possible that, on highly nuanced issues such as healthcare reform or gun control, people might not have a clear attitude, or they might agree with some policy proposals while disagree with others, which made it even more important to represent different shades of opinions fairly for the public. But she emphasized that it did not mean false equivalence:

There's this notion also of false equivalency that one person says one thing, so you have to report it equally, give it equal time as another. That's not true. Someone could say that the sun's going to rise in the west tomorrow and the other person says the sun always rises in the east. You're not going to say some false equivalency that you need to report that someone said the sun's rising in the west tomorrow.

In the interviews, I did not get a chance to dig deeper into their understanding of false equivalence in the context of healthcare reform or gun coverage. But based on what they said, we can see that these journalists were well aware of how the mere pursuit of balance could lead to the problem of false equivalence in journalism. Thus, they tried to explain their approach in the ways that highlighted fairness instead of balance, which could be both rhetorical distancing from the problem and some reflection on how to avoid the problem in their journalistic work.

The pursuit of factuality through journalistic practice & expertise. Not surprisingly, all the interviewees mentioned the importance of factuality for news reporting as well as opinion writing. When I pretested my interview guidance with Dean, a Pulitzer-winning reporter of *the New York Times*, I could not help throwing the profound question of “what objectivity means to you”. For him, one of the main implications of this professional norm was the emphasis on objective facts. He answered, “Journalism needs to be objective in the sense that it should reflect objective facts which everybody can agree on. The airplane crashed. That’s an objective fact. What its meaning is, that is not an objective fact. That’s the standard that I use”. External blogger

and college professor Nathan, who considered himself an opinion writer, said that the most important standard for his economy and policy column was to make sure every statement was “factually correct”.

For external blogger and college professor, Jennifer, the power of facts is that facts could go beyond ideology. She proudly recalled how she revealed important facts about a problem in healthcare reform, which turned out to bring meaningful information to readers despite their ideological differences:

When I wrote that piece about older women bearing the brunt of higher insurance costs under the Affordable Care Act, I got a lot of comments about that. Some people really liked it. Some didn't. It was something that actually even some Republicans loved. Here it is, in the Post, which often gets accused of being liberal, and here's something that actually was critical of the Affordable Care Act, and it was a factual based piece. So you find something that actually tells you a different story and that's what you try to do, you want to write a piece that doesn't tell people what they already know. You can say, “Well, have you looked at this aspect of it?” That's what I try to do.

It should be noted that, as reflected in these quotes from Dean or Jennifer, their emphasis on factuality in their writing is closely related to their goal that their journalism should speak to everyone despite their possible disagreements. This is the same goal that the other journalists, such as Jared, emphasized when he talked about separating one’s opinions from facts in news reporting and the standard of fairness. For these journalists, the value position and the standards make a mutually compatible set of principles around the shared goal.

Moreover, for these journalists, it was also not enough to only get facts rights. They emphasized taking a step further to offer in-depth explanation about the facts. The interviewees included the writer of the Fix, known for its political analysis. But it turned out that most other interviewees also expressed their emphasis on in-depth explanation about facts.

The Fix editor and writer, Jared, said that his job as a reporter at the Fix was “getting to the truth of political debates” through explaining the deeper reasons lying behind political procedures and public opinions.

People have their different views on what is the correct responses to tragedies like the Sandy Hook tragedy. Our goal is to explain why something is happening, why something isn't happening, how the American people are perceiving a debate and how to understand it (public opinion) in the most truthful context.

He then talked about how he sought to attain the goal in his coverage of gun control debate. For example, he kept track of the measurements of opinions on gun control from various public opinion polls, paying attention to the direction of public opinion in relation to what survey questions were used. He said, “90% of Americans in most polls would say that they agree with more gun control after the tragedy. But when polls asked this question in different ways. ‘Do you believe that the answer to this kind of tragedy is more gun laws or do you believe it’s for people, law-abiding citizens to carry more guns?’ It’s not so clear that there’s more support for more gun laws.” To clarify the confusion in different polling results, he wrote “Does gun control suddenly have real momentum?” in February 2013, putting the polling results into context for readers, before the Congress took action to write gun bills and cast votes during March and April.

The similar emphasis on in-depth explanation was heard from other journalists, no matter whether their job was investigating reporting, general reporting on the business news, or writing as an external blogger. For example, investigative reporter, Ed, said that his reporting followed three steps: “recognize an event”, “prove a pattern”, and “explain the mechanism”. For him, it was the final step that “makes a really great story”. His investigation of “gun deaths shaped by race in America” was published in March 2013. In this piece, He made the contrast between the victim families’ stance on gun control, the solutions suggested by these families, scholars’

opinions, and NRA officials' views. He also combined a detailed analysis into different categories of gun deaths for different racial groups with a corresponding comparison of public opinions on gun control in different racial groups. With all the information about the issue of gun deaths in American families and the patterns of different types of gun deaths by geography and race, the whole piece explained how the factors of gun ownership, race, geography and NRA's framing of information all played a role in the phenomenon of gun violence.

With regard to the coverage of healthcare reform as well, journalists of the *Washington Post* made efforts to offer in-depth explanation for readers. The former ombudsman, Luke, stressed that especially for "a complex debate like healthcare is", where many readers "didn't know how to get to it", the explanations of policies and impacts were important. Business reporter and former White House correspondent, Mike, said that he was not specifically assigned to cover the topic of healthcare reform, but still he took it upon himself to explain the impacts of healthcare reform on corporations and their employees. External blogger and college professor Nathan mentioned that when he wrote on this topic in the early stage of healthcare reform during August 2009, policy makers and the public started to debate heatedly on the reform. He thought that in that context, it was important for him, as a scholar on finance and law, to explain the economic aspect of the reform by clarifying different alternatives for reducing costs involved in the reform. That made him write "The hearing: healthcare coverage vs. costs".

In all the above examples, we can see that *the Washington Post* journalists across different functions not only sought to pursue factuality and get facts right, but also hoped to offer in-depth explanation about the facts for the public. More interestingly, when they elaborated on how these goals were achieved through practices and utilization of expertise, they were more emphatic upon the expertise elements compared to the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*.

With regard to the practices involved in their work for the pursuit of factuality, these interviewees described their different routines of information collection and verification. For example, college professor and external blogger Jennifer quoted Ronald Reagan, “facts are stubborn things”. “There are zillions of facts out there. You can change the starting or ending point of some time series you are measuring for economy, and it can either be the best thing since sliced bread or the worst thing since humans started writing”, said she. A routine she tried in her blog was to cite information from academic research by respected scientists and present it in accessible language for readers, since people would “trust research by respected scientists”. *The Fix* editor and writer, Jared, put a great amount of efforts going into verifying links that he cited from. If the cited information did not “ring true” to him, he would “fact-check them and not use it if it turns out to be incorrect”. For investigative reporter Ed, the main source of his facts was database. He would resort to the routine of verifying his findings from computer-assisted data investigation against the real-world life of people, calling it a procedure of “ground-truthing”. He said, “I don’t trust or believe what it (data) says until I go out and interview the people in the data”. Recalling his investigation on the topics such as gun-related deaths and the NRA’s influence on Congress, he explained that it was important to interview the victims and the NRA officials behind the data patterns so that he could confirm the findings and make connections to real-life people. The ground-truthing procedure in combination with data analysis made him feel “confident” in publishing the story. He also explained that this practice of “ground-truthing” was related to a general policy in *the Washington Post*, which indicates that their journalists were required to verify information with people involved in the story, speaking to them directly and giving them the chance to say it was not true. In all these examples, we can

see that these journalists were not just describing the routines, but also emphasizing that, due to these routines, their information was robustly researched and verified, and therefore credible.

To find facts and offer in-depth explanation about facts, for these journalists, also demands expertise. Similar with the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, they emphasized how their journalistic work was based on the foundation of knowledge they commanded. For college professor and external blogger Nathan, it was his academic training in economics and law that allowed him to offer strong explanation on financial mechanics involved in healthcare reform. When college professor and external blogger Jennifer talked about her writing on healthcare reform, she stressed her Ph.D. training in economics, which allowed her to both understand and present the facts around economic matters accurately. But for the other interviewees who worked as full-time employees of *the Washington Post* (or *the New York Times*), the expertise that mattered for their work as they explained was not academic training, but knowledge attained from their professional experience or enabled within the institution of media organization.

For example, when the Fix editor and writer Jared explained his daily routine of information verification, he stressed that sometimes deadlines would not allow him much time to fact-check every link. But relying on the knowledge that he developed from working in his position, he knew which sites had been used before and already proved to be credible, which helped him collect information with accuracy and speed, despite the deadline pressure. In a similar vein, *the New York Times* investigative reporter Dean said that good journalists, like himself, had knowledge about “how the system works”, based on years of reporting and researching on economic subjects, which enabled them to offer in-depth explanation for readers.

Investigative reporter Ed said that for journalists like him, who used computer assisted database analysis in news reporting, the accumulation of knowledge on certain types of data and

the beat experience were highly important. According to him, his data analysis for the topics of gun or NRA was normally a running procedure in which he paid attention to related databases for a long time and through different projects. Prior experience with similar data were helpful for him to find patterns in an on-going project. He placed great emphasis on his beat experience, because “to do deep, thoughtful work really requires time on a beat”. By the beat experience, he referred to “knowledge about data on the subject” and “contacts on the beat”. The former allowed him to know “what databases one can pursue”, “how they interact”, “how one dataset can inform another”, and “what the strengths and weakness of the datasets are”. The latter allowed him to get access to database and conduct interviews for the purpose of ground-truthing.

Business reporter and former White House correspondent, Mike, in his account of *the Washington Post*'s healthcare reform coverage, explained to me that the explanatory coverage of healthcare reform was “technically challenging”. “It gets pretty esoteric for people but it’s also a very important subject, very fundamental to our lives”, he said. The key to the newspaper’s coverage was the dedication of a team of experts from the newsroom, especially “experts on health insurance” and “Capitol Hill reporters who were experts on the congress committees”.

In these above examples, these journalists highlighted a wide range of expertise that they developed in different functions within the news organization. Two points needed to be noted here. First, the expertise they mentioned was mostly nothing esoteric. It was specific knowledge of how to report on a subject area, how to analyze databases, what sources to contact, and even which online source of information was credible. Or in Freidson’s (2001) apt term, it was the “working knowledge” that allowed the journalists to perform the routine tasks of meeting deadlines, making explanations, and covering different topics. Secondly, such working knowledge is still closely related to the journalists’ professional control (Carlson, 2017). With

the expertise, they were not just capable of promoting themselves as authoritative in doing their job. As these interviewees stressed in their explanation, their expertise was attained and refined through the system of specialization in the news organization, particularly the beat system. This claim that the expertise was developed in the institutional setting suggested that it was difficult to be attained, if not totally inaccessible, for amateur.

To summarize, these journalists who worked at *the Washington Post* (plus one journalist from *the New York Times*) explained their approach to objectivity by enlisting the core value of separating values from facts, the standards of factuality, fairness and balance, and their practices and expertise involved in not only getting facts right but also offering in-depth explanation about facts. Some interviewees also showed the attempt of distancing from and reflecting upon the problem of false equivalence by emphasizing the standard of fairness instead of balance. Overall, as reflected in their explanation, these journalists' pursuit of objectivity was intended for the goal of speaking to everyone, despite different opinions and political ideological leanings. Their emphasis on the expertise that they attained from the system of specialization within the media organization suggested an attempt of professional control, highlighting their authority in performing their tasks and commanding the knowledge that amateurs can hardly attain.

Highlighting journalists' democratic obligation. With regard to how these journalists explained their approach to objectivity, one particular aspect deserves special attention. When most of the interviewees mentioned the above value, standards and practices involved in their approach to objectivity, they also talked about these elements in civic moral terms, referring to their commitment to democracy as an obligation as implied in their approach to objectivity.

In our discussion about the pursuit of objectivity for professional journalists, the former ombudsman Luke emphasized what he considered as the journalists' democratic obligation that lied behind their efforts for objectivity. He said,

I'm not a First Amendment scholar, but what little I have read about the founding fathers, the concept of the First Amendment, and Freedom of Expression, Freedom of the Press, Freedom to Petition your government, I don't think that our founding fathers were simply saying, "You have the right to do this." I think they were inferring an obligation, a role for the press being a critical part of the discussion of our democracy.

For Luke, the democratic obligation means two important functions for "the independent press", both deeply related to the value of separating values form facts, and the standards of factuality and fairness. First, journalists "need to ask all politicians very tough questions". Second, journalists should help the public "have a robust debate with lots of different opinions". Fulfilling these functions would require journalists to be able to suspend their opinions and present facts and opinions from all relevant sides. He then referred to Walter Lippmann to explain why this would be meaningful for democracy:

I remember once reading a book about Walter Lippmann. He was the most powerful columnist in America. In one of his columns, he had a quote ... 'Where all think alike, no one thinks much'. In other words, if we all think alike, we're into group think, and we're not thinking broadly. I think that applies to our role as the press. It is not our role to get behind one candidate or one ideology and say, 'Yes, we're going to ride that all the way. It's great.' Our job is to ask tough questions, to make us think in different ways.

From Luke's explanation, we can see how he tried to highlight journalists' democratic obligation as a foundational value that undergirds the professional approach and the elements involved therein. For him, both the value position of separating values form facts and the pursuit of factuality and fairness essentially served the purpose of contributing to a robust debate, neither intimidated by powerful elites nor hindered by people's tendency of groupthink.

Luke was not the only interviewee who related objectivity to journalists' democratic obligation. When investigative reporter Dean explained objectivity, especially his focus on revealing facts through their investigation, he recalled with pride the moments in his career when facts he revealed helped watchdog the powerful elites. Dean said,

I've written many very tough stories. ... I got a worldwide CEO fired. If this were me, I might say he's a no good son of a bitch for having written it, but I can't say the son of bitch made it up or got it wrong ... the reporter did a good job and it was fair... because it was objective, objective in the sense that it reflects objective facts which everybody can agree on.

For him, the pursuit of objectivity facilitates democracy because journalists can use the objective facts to hold powerful elites accountable to the public.

Besides Luke and Dean, business reporter Mike also explained the importance of getting facts right in civic moral terms. He said, "It's important to be professional and to be rigorous about the facts, because it's such a high calling, journalism. We need to remember how important this calling is. To me, it's almost up there with government service in terms of your responsibility to the public". The Fix editor and writer, when he explained the importance of suspending his opinion in news reporting, emphasized that it was to him a "civic responsibility" to "help people come to their own conclusion", rather than being affected by the journalists' opinion. College professor and external blogger, Nathan, when he talked about his attempt to explain the financial mechanics involved in healthcare reform, said that the purpose was for "contributing new perspectives to public debate".

From these quotes, we can see that for these journalists, the pursuit of objectivity, although it contains the core value of suspending one's value in the reporting of facts, is essentially a "moral commitment", in Maras's (2013) term. As Ward (2009) pointed out,

professional ethics in journalism was built upon the liberalist values around the “free marketplace of ideas” and the role of independent press that “informs citizens and acts as a watchdog on government and abuses of power” (p. 298). Suspending one’s opinion in digging and representing factual information in ways that are accurate, verifiable and fair is not the same as being value-free. Rather, this epistemic position is already ingrained with the liberalist values. The pursuit of objectivity, as reflected in the above quotes, is predicated upon the democratic obligation that journalists need to answer the calling for public service, contribute to public debate, and shore up public interests against powerful elites (Pan & Lu, 2017; Abramson, 2016).

Besides, for these journalists, claiming the democratic obligation for themselves could also serve the purpose of staking their journalistic authority. As Freidson (2001) pointed out, professional ideology often contains the ideological claim of collective devotion to the transcendent value, such as justice, beauty, truth and democracy. It encourages the strivings for the ideal goal in professional work, while it also allows the professionals to assert and justify independence from government power, clients’ demand, and critics. If we read into the above quotes, we can also find that these journalists were trying to emphasize the independence of journalism that challenges powerful elites and persists in speaking to everyone rather than adopting any side’ stance. The implication of this narrative around journalism’s transcendent value for journalistic authority will be shown more clearly in the next part, when we look at how these journalists evaluate the work by citizen journalists.

“Great expectations” for citizen journalists. It was not surprising that the elements that these journalists enlisted in explaining their approach to objectivity were also the key aspects in which they evaluated citizen journalists’ work, such as that of the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*. Overall, their evaluation stayed on the level of general characterization and criticism

about political blogging, without going into specifics concerning the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate. The reason could be that these journalists of the professional media outlet did not pay great attention to the issue coverage on these political blogging sites. Or, it could be that they could not recall the specifics about political bloggers' issue coverage, as the times of interview were several years later than the occurrence of the debates. In addition, their evaluation in general featured a tone of criticism-based expectation. They offered criticisms corresponding to the elements involved in their professional approach to objectivity and expressed expectations for the bloggers to better their jobs accordingly.

Let's start from what the Pulitzer-winning investigative reporter Dean said about the political bloggers. Dean did not totally negate the value of citizen journalism. Instead, in his opinion, "We need different kinds of journalism". But speaking of online political blogging, he turned critical. He said,

The citizen things, I am glad that there are people who are paying attention. But Jesus! There are people who don't know how government works. They don't understand the economy. They see something. They run off with it. And we end up with our civic debate being polluted. This kind of half baked, going off half-cocked citizen journalism is polluting our public understanding. ...To get the facts rights, it often involves skills. Checking, cross checking, cross checking again, putting things in their universe, and writing a narrative. All of these things involve skills.

What the above criticism directly targeted was the bloggers who failed to get facts right and understand facts correctly. But the interviewee also focused on two other aspects: professional expertise required for understanding facts correctly, and journalism's democratic implication for civic debate and public understanding. From his perspective, when citizen journalists lacked the necessary knowledge and skills that professional journalists command, their output would not have a solid factual basis, which would be harmful for democracy. We can see how the standard of factuality, the professional expertise, and journalists' democratic obligation, these elements

that were mentioned in professional journalists' explanations of their own work, became the criteria by which citizen journalism was judged. Dean's evaluation was not focused on the specific accounts of social reality concerning healthcare reform or gun control debate. Instead, it was mainly focused on the vision of journalism, that is, how journalistic work should be conducted to represent social reality truthfully and contribute to civic debate. From his perspective, citizen journalists need to follow the vision adopted by professional journalists.

Similarly, the former ombudsman, Luke, said with regard to citizen journalism such as political blogging at *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, "as long as you (citizen journalists) are adhering to the core value of journalism, I think it's marvelous". He thought that "there aren't enough credible bloggers". He hoped that bloggers could make more efforts for offering "accurate credible information" and "a diversity of opinions", which would help "form a solid foundation for the civic discourse, for the debate that we want to keep going on in a democracy".

The other interviewees were not as elaborate in their evaluation of citizen journalists' work. But most of them also used the standards of factuality or fairness as the criteria for evaluation. For the Fix editor and writer Jared, the political bloggers' work was not "a type of journalism that is particularly of use" to him, because he thought that rather than offering opinions, they should "have a solid base in facts and then offer their interpretation of the facts". The news reporter of the Washington Post blog, Emily, said that political blogs were "polarized and partisan". Business reporter and former White House correspondent, Mike, complained that the world of blogging as "the wild west of media", "where you can have some blogger who is wrong 90% of the time and be right 10% of the time".

In general, from these journalists of a professional media outlet such as *the Washington Post* (or *the New York Times*), the contribution of citizen journalists should not be denied,

because they are “making good competition for traditional journalism”, “doing journalism in a different way” or “giving us more journalism”. But at the same time, they emphasized the value, standards, and expertise in their professional approach to objectivity as the epistemic and moral benchmark that citizen journalists should live up to. In other words, through expressing the great expectations for citizen journalists, they also justified the professional vision of journalism as the legitimate rule of game in the journalistic field – citizen journalists are welcomed to engage in journalism, but they need to play the game by the rule.

To summarize, the interview results show how the professional journalists of *the Washington Post* (and one from *the New York Times*) explained the values, standards, practices and expertise that constituted their approach to objectivity, and through these explanations, established their journalistic authority, especially vis-à-vis citizen journalists. They explained that their work, with emphasis on separating values from facts, factuality and fairness, served the purpose of speaking to everyone despite different opinions or ideologies. They saw the pursuit of objectivity as a moral commitment to the transcendent value of democratic obligation. In the discourse, they staked the authority claim not only through laying out the set of standards and practices they followed, but also through emphasizing the professional expertise involved in their work and the transcendent value they strived for. Accordingly, their set expectations for citizen journalists to follow the professional standards, strengthen the knowledge and skills needed for journalistic work, and contribute more to civic discourse.

One additional pattern needs to be noted here. Although I conducted the interview with the hope of comparing the discourse in relation to media technology, the results have not shown substantive differences between the newspaper journalists, and the writers of *the Washington Post* blog. The online journalists, including the two external bloggers, talked about their work

and evaluated citizen journalism in largely consistent ways with the newspaper journalists. The normative prescriptions of journalistic professionalism did not seem to relax on the newspaper's digital platform, which will be further demonstrated in the analysis of next chapter about how these journalists adapted the form of blogging to professional standards.

The Semi-Professional Space of Journalism: Constructing a Unique Epistemic Position Through the Appraisal of Professional and Citizen Journalism

Let's move on to the boundary-work by the journalists of *the Huffington Post*, including both its professional reporters/columnists and its bloggers. In prior research, *the Huffington Post* was considered a "pro-amateurish" model journalism (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2012), because it is a combination of blogging with professional news reporting on the same platform. From the field perspective, as explained in Chapter 2, it could be conceived as located in between professional news media and purely citizen journalistic platforms, occupying the "semi-professional" position in the journalistic field.

So, is this really the way how its journalists themselves understand this platform and their ways of doing journalism on this platform? If so, how do they make sense of their own approach to objectivity? How do they establish their journalistic authority vis-à-vis the other players in the field? The interview results in this part will shed light on these questions.

I interviewed seven journalists at *the Huffington Post*, including professional journalists and bloggers. In line with the hybrid nature of the platform, these interviewees were a hybrid group of people in terms of professional status, occupational background, and ideological leaning. They included a young news reporter for whom doing political reporting at *the Huffington Post* was an important step early in his career, and a veteran journalist who had

worked at a national newspaper for 30 years and were convinced by Arianna Huffington to work as a full-time senior columnist for the platform. The blogger interviewees' occupational backgrounds ranged from medical doctors and college professors, to professionals in the fields of advertising and public theology. Also, despite the liberal leaning of the platform, two blogger interviewees claimed to be politically conservative or independent. This is in line with prior research on the political ideological slant of content at *the Huffington Post*, which found that this platform was not completely liberal in content, featuring an overall liberal slant but showing conservative slant in a 15-20% minority of content (Budak, Goel & Rao, 2016).

Interview results show that these journalists indeed made a claim about doing journalism in a new way at *the Huffington Post* through combining blogging and professional journalism. In their explanations regarding their approach to objectivity, they differentiated themselves from both professional journalists of mainstream media, and political bloggers on purely citizen journalistic websites such as *Daily Kos*. By doing so, they established their unique epistemic position corresponding to their semi-professional location of the field. This allowed them to define a legitimate, semi-professional space of journalism where they followed their own values and standards for conducting journalistic work and representing social reality, as set apart from both professional and citizen journalism. Table 5.4 contains the list of themes from the two levels of boundary-work where they explained their own approach to objectivity and evaluated that of the other players in the field. All the themes were marked as expressed by bloggers or by professional journalists. These themes fall into four categories of elements related to the approach to objectivity: value, standard, expertise and practice. For the categories of standard and expertise, the blogger interviewees did not offer feedback in their evaluation of citizen journalists, and for the category of expertise and practice, the professional journalist interviewees

did not offer feedback in their evaluation of their peers at professional news media. Therefore, in the table, these boxes were noted as “not mentioned by interviewees”. Overall, these themes are focused on three aspects: 1) the narrative of “doing journalism in a new way” at *the Huffington Post*; 2) its bloggers’ attempt to differentiate from blogging that serves purpose of political activism; 3) its professional journalists’ attempt to differentiate from mainstream media, with their refusal to be neutral. The second and third aspects altogether show how they established their unique epistemic position and staked their journalism authority claim.

Table 5.4

The boundary-work around objectivity by journalists at the Huffington Post, the semi-professional media platform

		Value	Standard	Expertise	Practice
<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Evaluation of their own approach	[Bloggers] Intellectual interest in civic engagement in political debate; finding facts and countering falsehood in line with ideological leaning	[Bloggers] Factuality, and accuracy [Professional journalists] Use the standard of fairness, but refuse to be neutral	[Bloggers] Professional or academic knowledge in a particular field	[Bloggers] Making comments from personal experience; working with blog editors [Professional journalists] Original reporting & verification
	Evaluation of professional journalists' approach at mainstream media	[Professional journalists] Seeking "perfect objectivity" with no opinion [Bloggers] Pursuit of objectivity as driven by market profit	[Professional journalists] No need to be perfectly neutral & balanced, which obscures facts [Bloggers] Overemphasis on neutrality & balance, which prevents the revelation of lies	Note: Not mentioned by interviewees	Note: Not mentioned by interviewees
	Evaluation of other citizen journalists' approach	[Bloggers] Political activism more than intellectual civic engagement	Note: Not mentioned by interviewees	Note: Not mentioned by interviewees	[Professional journalists] No original reporting [Bloggers] no editorial selection based on quality

The narrative of “doing journalism in a new way”. The idea lying behind the founding of *the Huffington Post* was not complicated. Its main founders, such as Arianna Huffington and Kenneth Lerer, hoped to create a combination of blogging and professional journalism, seeing it as a liberal alternative to the influential *Drudge Report* on the conservative side. Books and articles on the operation of this platform (The Huffington Post, 2008; Shapiro, 2012; Gillman, 2014) revealed to us more specifics about how the combination of blogging and professional journalism was made possible. It included two levels of collaboration between professional journalists and bloggers: content production, and editorial curation. First, on the level of content production, professional journalists in *the Huffington Post* newsrooms offer news coverage on selected topics by the means of original reporting and content aggregation, and hired columnists write opinion articles in specific topical areas with support from their teams of journalistic staff. At the same time, bloggers on the platform formulate a mega-size group blog, contributing large amounts of blog content on a continual basis for readers and offering more personal perspectives on the topics under discussion. Secondly, even though *the Huffington Post* bloggers had been unpaid for a long time until 2018, it has not been easy for them to get their writings published on this platform. On the level of editorial curation, the platform has a group of blogging editors who are responsible for selecting pieces as they see fit to publish, utilizing a set of standards and tips to guide the bloggers’ writing, such as relating to personal experiences in writing to make one’s blog sticky, illustrating one’s argument with anecdotes, offering a brief background of debate in opinion articles, double-checking facts before submission, and etc. The blog content that get to see the readers is the output of bloggers’ labor as well as the blogging editors’ gatekeeping.

Interestingly, my interviews and reading of secondary materials show that *the Huffington Post* founders and journalists indeed deemed the above-mentioned combination of blogging and

professional journalism as the main feature to mark their existence as differentiated from professional news media and purely citizen journalistic websites. Their explanations revolved around a narrative around how, through the combination, they were doing journalism in a way that is new, transformative, and therefore better than the other players in the journalistic field.

Not surprisingly, the website's founders promoted themselves as doing journalism in a new way. Soon after the launch of the website, as Kenneth Lerer recalled, he found that "this simple combination of news and blog worked incredibly well" and he felt that "we made something new" (The Huffington Post, 2008). In an interview by *the New Yorker* magazine, Lerer said that "this new way of thinking about and presenting the news" was "transforming news as much as CNN did thirty years ago" (Alterman, 2018).

The excitement of joining something new and transformative was echoed by journalists I interviewed. When I asked the veteran newspaper journalist, Mia, why she joined *the Huffington Post* as a senior columnist, she said, "I figured if the twenty-somethings are redefining journalism, I want in, I want to be a part of that". For the same question, medical doctor and blogger Keith said that the ways of how blogging and news reporting was combined at *the Huffington Post* made it "a very new platform" at that time. For him, "It was exciting to be involved in this. You felt like participating something that is meaningful. That was terrific!"

More importantly, it was the combination of blogging and professional journalism that made them feel that their journalism was better than other players in the field. For example, for Arianna Huffington, this was the incorporation of "the best of the Old Media and the best of the New Media" on one platform. It was the Old Media reinforced with "transfusion of passion and immediacy the New Media revolution has inspired" (The Huffington Post, 2008). Similarly, in the interview, its political reporter Henry compared his platform to mainstream media, saying

“Bloggers glean information from elsewhere and often gives it a different angle (from that of professional news reporters). That’s a great thing that bloggers do. And that’s also something that bloggers at the Huffington Post do, too.” Meanwhile, he also compared his platform to purely citizen journalistic websites such as Daily Kos, emphasizing that “we do more traditional reporting at Huff Po”.

The bloggers placed more emphasis on the editorial curation component involved in the pro-amateurish model of journalism, when they explained why they chose to blog on this platform over others. College professor and blogger, Matthew, said that the editorial curation at *the Huffington Post* was an important reason that he wanted to stay on this platform. Unlike many other political blogging websites such as *Daily Kos*, where “it is just like this sea of voices and there is no curation at all”, he found that here, the blogging editors “select blogs by quality”. For him, this meant that *the Huffington Post* was “saying to the world ‘what this guy has to say is worthwhile’”, which allowed him to convey his ideas to audience more effectively. For public theology writer and blogger, the writings at the other political blogging platforms “tend to be more off the cuff”, whereas at *the Huffington Post*, the editorial requirement for the quality of writing at the Huffington Post led bloggers to “spend more time thinking and developing ideas”, which was helpful for the clarity of debate. For medical doctor and conservative blogger, Brian, the editorial curation at *the Huffington Post* offered a rare chance for him to exchange opinions with liberal readers. He was surprised to find that his conservative-leaning criticism of Obamacare was accepted by the blogging editor, even when his opinion was “certainly not what the left wants to hear”. Since then, *the Huffington Post* has become a platform for him to speak to the liberals about the problems in healthcare reform. For these bloggers, it was the editorial

curation that guaranteed the quality of writing and facilitated the expression of opinions, which made the Huffington Post a better option for blogging over the other websites.

To summarize, the results show that *the Huffington Post* founders and journalists considered the combination of blogging and professional journalism as the basis of their differentiation and even superiority vis-à-vis professional news media or purely citizen journalistic websites. In the combination, traditional news reporting was reinforced by the “passion” and “immediacy” of new media, and new media was reinforced by the “quality”-based editorial curation. With the combination, they claimed to do journalism in a new and transformative way, feeling excited to be part of the transformation. From the field perspective, if *the Huffington Post*’s field location is considered a semi-professional one in between professional and citizen journalism as we explained in Chapter 2, the above patterns could demonstrate that these actors indeed saw themselves occupants of the location as differentiated from those other players in the field. But this leads to a further question – given how unique this location is, what approach to objectivity did these actors claims to follow? The rest of interview results can help us answer this question.

Establishing the epistemic position for semi-professional journalism. Besides the combination of blogging and professional journalism, *the Huffington Post* journalists also talked about the values, standards, expertise and practices involved in their own pursuit of objectivity, and those involved in the approach adopted by other players in the field. Their explanations were in part similar with the explanations from journalists of *the Washington Post*, or political bloggers of *Daily Kos* as we previously mentioned. For example, like *Daily Kos* bloggers, they criticized mainstream media for pursuing the perfect objectivity and overemphasizing balance/neutrality. But at the same time, their explanations revealed two main features about

their pursuit of objectivity that helped them establish their unique epistemic position corresponding to the semi-professional location of the field. For its bloggers, it was the interest in intellectual civic engagement with public debate, rather than political activism. For its professional journalists, it was being committed to the standard of fairness but refusing to be neutral. Under the pro-amateurish model of journalism, these features enabled them to represent the social reality in a unique way as differentiated from professional and citizen journalism.

Differentiating from the blogging for political activism. When *the Huffington Post* bloggers talk about their journalistic work, they showed some similarity with *Daily Kos* bloggers in claiming a political ideological stance lying behind their writing. Most of the bloggers whom I interviewed were liberal leaning. They acknowledged it openly and highlighted it as a key reason why they started blogging on political issues such as healthcare reform and gun control debate. They said that their efforts in blogging were driven by the hope of conveying the liberals' perspective on policies, or by the need to dispel rumors and lies from the conservative side. For example, college professor and blogger Mitchel, who wrote abundantly on healthcare reform, told me that his blogging on the topic was for clarifying the point that free market is susceptible to the risk of monopoly and cannot solve all problems. For him, "anyone that tells me that this is working out well, that the market competition ended up well, is just not telling the truth". Public theology writer and blogger Vincent, who wrote on gun control and gun violence said that his blogging was for arguing against the NRA chairman Wayne LaPierre, who considered that the real issue lying behind the Newtown tragedy was the American culture, rather than gun violence, and we need to control violence movies and video games, rather than control assault weapons. For Vincent, LaPierre was merely confounding the long-term problem with the immediate and important problem that American people needed to solve, while "refused to admit the obvious

fact” and chose to be “blind to human cost”. For these bloggers, as their *Daily Kos* counterparts, their efforts to tell the truth or counter falsehood through blogging were considered compatible with their liberal political ideological stance on the issues.

Moreover, when these bloggers evaluated professional journalism, their criticism was also reminiscent of that from *Daily Kos* bloggers. They accused mainstream media of their “pursuit of perfect objectivity” that fell prey to false equivalence. They complained that professional journalists’ emphasis on balance and neutrality were essentially “about commercial concerns ... because advertisers do not want to associate with specific ideology”. For them, mainstream media’s emphasis on balance and neutrality were getting to the extent of having “the fear for being called liberal” and thus not being aggressive enough in calling out “lies and inaccuracies” from the conservative side.

In addition, these bloggers also resembled their *Daily Kos* counterparts in their emphasis on factuality and the practices for getting facts right. Although they did not follow the standards of neutrality and balance that they were critical about, they tried to enlist their practices of doing extensive research and verifying the cited online information, as well as their various types of academic training or professional expertise to show that they were taking blogging seriously and they attached great importance to the collection of factual information. “It has to be information based. It has to be factual based.” College professor and blogger Matthew said, “I don’t think I’ve ever written a blog where I haven’t done the research. I don’t think I’ve ever written a blog where I haven’t read stuff, not just as evidence to back up what I’m saying, but to really discover the truth”.

However, what was unique about them is that all the blogger interviewees emphasized that despite their political ideological stance, they did not see themselves as activists and their

writing was not for political activism. That was the main differentiation between them and the political bloggers at purely citizen journalistic websites such as *Daily Kos*. Instead, their efforts in blogging was for what I may summarize as a civic intellectual interest in engaging in the political discussion, as we can see in the following examples.

College professor and blogger Matthew said, “*the Huffington Post* might be a liberal leaning site. But it wasn’t a hockey arena and everybody’s screaming at the top of their lungs. I’m not putting down *Daily Kos*. But I feel like that (the need for political activism) is been put into the mission and cast that way.” In his opinion, compared to *Daily Kos*, “*the Huffington Post* model is more interested in the role of the press in a democracy”, by which he referred to “having a public discussion on issues that would allow a democracy to function”, rather than creating “an echo chamber of angry people yelling.”

Similarly, public theology writer and blogger Vincent said that he could recognize the difference in content when he read blogs from both *the Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos*. “At the *Daily Kos*, I find myself more emotionally invested in what is being said than intellectually invested. That’s when I have red flags go off.” For him, because of the quality-based editorial curation, the content on *the Huffington Post* made him feel more “intellectually invested”.

So, for both Matthew and Vincent, *the Huffington Post* made a platform for intellectually invested, reasoned discussion about issues. Two more examples could showcase how this unique position served to shape how they represented social reality on the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate. First, let’s look at advertising professional and blogger Jacob’s writing on gun control legislation. Similar with other blogger interviewees, Jacob tried to differentiate his engagement in blogging from political activism. “I am definitely a liberal. There are definitely liberal policy positions that I’m strongly in favor of. But I haven’t really thought of

myself as a liberal activist.” Then when I asked what made him want to write blogs on politics, he said,

In my writing, I am trying to establish a certain baseline for how political discussions should be had. The baseline should be that we have certain beliefs, and there are certain fundamental principles about how a democracy should be structured. Your particular views on specific policies should not change the fact that there are these fundamental principles as the baseline.

As we talked more in the interview, he told me that, in his opinion, one of the fundamental principles was that “money should not be a corrupting force in politics”. He said, “there should not be a political system that is hugely influenced by flocks of money flowing into specific policy making procedures”. Driven by the hope to establish this baseline in the gun debate, he wrote a blog to criticize how Michael Bloomberg spent over two million dollars of super PAC money to support a pro-gun-control politician in the election for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives for Illinois, even though Jacob himself actually supported the gun control legislation. Speaking of this blog and his pro-gun-control stance, he said, “Something you agree with shouldn’t change your mind about the influence of money. I agree completely with what Bloomberg is trying to do (for gun control legislation), but the fact that essentially it’s just two sides throwing money at candidates and trying to see who can buy the election more successfully is not to me a successful implementation of democracy”.

Secondly, let’s look at medical doctor and blogger Brian’s writing on healthcare reform. Different from the other blogger interviewees, Brian was right leaning politically. Concerning healthcare, he maintained that healthcare was the responsibility for each individual. In his opinion, people needed to acknowledge the inequalities of healthcare benefits and relies mainly on the capitalist market, rather than the bureaucracy, to solve for problems of the healthcare system. But meanwhile, similar to the other blogger interviewees, he also tried to emphasize his

civic intellectual interest in blogging, rather than political activism. In his own words, the purpose of his blogging was “not politicizing”, but “to get people to have the information and throw out the questions (about healthcare) that we need to answer, not giving them my answers”. In October 2009, shortly after the intense national debate on healthcare reform during summer of that year, he wrote a piece criticizing the lack of coherent principles in the U.S. healthcare system, asking people to think about the principles of healthcare, because he thought “to have sustainable affordable high-quality healthcare, we first need to agree on principles and then create a coherent system based on them”. In September 2011, he wrote another blog to criticize the increased national healthcare spending, pointing out several potential areas for cost control. He said, “the question is not cutting costs or cutting spending. The question should be, where is the money going? Why are we overspending?” In these writings, what he hoped to achieve was to get people to think about the problem in the healthcare system rather than politicizing.

From all these examples, we can see that these blogger interviewees claimed they were not activists, and they also referred to some pieces they have written to demonstrate how their blogging was intended to highlight important questions or contemplate over baselines, rather than for activist purposes. Whether or not they were actually engaging in political activism may not be important here. What is meaningful about their discourse is the demonstration of a rhetorical attempt to emphasize the civic intellectual engagement in political discussion and distance themselves from the blogging that serves the purpose of political activism. As we can see from the examples of blogs from Jacob and Brian, this value position could offer some space for the expression of opinions not necessarily consistent with liberal ideology, and for political discussions going beyond the liberal vs. conservative partisan divide.

Refusing to be neutral as mainstream media. Now, shifting the focus to the boundary-work by professional journalists at *the Huffington Post*. When the professional journalist interviewees talked about their journalistic work, they resembled their counterparts of *the Washington Post* in highlighting the pursuit of fairness, but meanwhile they refused to be neutral. Different from *the Washington Post* journalists, they were explicit about their own stances with regards to healthcare reform and gun control debate, and wrote in line with their stances.

Let's first look at the example of *the Huffington Post* reporter Henry and his coverage of healthcare reform. Henry, who was in his late 20s at the time of interview, was a journalism major back in college. Following several other jobs of news reporting for local newspapers and magazines, he worked as a political reporter for *the Huffington Post*, based in Washington D.C. When I asked him to describe his daily routines of work, the first things that he mentioned were his practice of original reporting by interviewing people, and his verification procedure, which resembled the practices of journalists at *the Washington Post*. In his everyday reportorial work, he needed to "talk to people and approach people", which still felt "awkward" for him. But he believed that "if what they're doing needs to be exposed in a way, then that's the only way to do it". An important part of his work was to cover the Washington politics. When he had developed a conclusion from reading government reports or analyzing government data, he would "talk to or at least email with Democrats and Republicans on the hill, and give them the opportunity to say 'That's wrong'". He considered it important to be fair in his reporting. For example, with part of his reporting focused on the employment issue, he often needed to interview employers, employees and the unemployed. He would make sure that he talked with all the relevant sides to give them a say in his story. This was also similar with how *the Washington Post* journalists emphasized the standard of fairness in their work.

Despite these similarities, however, Henry was very critical of how professional journalists at mainstream media sought to suspend their opinions in reporting. Bringing up the case of the coverage of waterboarding, he said, “The government started saying, ‘It’s not torture’, and newspapers started going along with that, and calling it ‘enhanced interrogation’. That reflects an attempt to suspend your opinion. But really you’re just being ridiculous.” Then he continued, “What we strive to avoid more than some legacy outlets like *the New York Times* is balance and neutrality”. Using his own coverage of the employment issue as an example, he talked about how he avoided being neutral in his reporting.

The perspective that I bring to it more than the legacy outlets is that I’m writing about working people and the human dignity of working people and I think, in some senses, writing for the dignity of working people ... People will say, ‘Oh, that’s liberal’ but I am not going to cry about it.

From these quotes, we can see how this reporter tried to demarcate his journalistic work from that of professional journalist at the “legacy outlets”. For him, the difference between his approach to objectivity and that of his counterparts at legacy outlets were two-fold, what to “write about” and who to “write for”. He not only wanted to offer a different perspective on social reality by writing about the working people and their struggle, but also sought to support the voice of these people by writing for their dignity. Compared to professional journalists of *the Washington Post* as previously mentioned, this stood for a deeper level of engagement with the issue under coverage and the people involved in the issue. He was also clearly conscious of the ideological color of “writing for the dignity of working people”. But unlike *the Washington Post* journalists, he admitted it explicitly. Actually, “suspending one’s opinion” was exactly what he wanted to avoid in his work. Citing Jacob Rosen’s (2003), he said “Jacob Rosen called it the concept of ‘the view from nowhere’. There’s no such a thing as perfect objectivity”.

His healthcare reform coverage could further demonstrate how his work was guided by his approach to objectivity. “At that time, I was doing a lot of stories about individual people dealing with employment and healthcare problems”, he recalled his coverage during the healthcare reform in 2009-2010. For example, in September 2009, he wrote a story about the frustrating experienced of a 58-year-old unemployed man who tried to buy healthcare but was denied his eligibility because of a minor illness. He said, by writing stories like this, he could “bring the voice of the unemployed into political stories”, that is, not only writing about but also writing for the unemployed people in their struggle to get healthcare. Toward the end of the interview, when he was asked to define what journalism is for in his words, he concluded, “in terms of my work, the struggle of working people is the truth ... Sometimes the truth is simpler than people realize. Being direct is a better way to get to the truth”.

With regard to the gun control debate coverage by professional journalists at *the Huffington Post*, I did not get to interview a news reporter from this platform, but I had the opportunity to talk with its senior columnist, Mia. My interview with Mia did not go deep into how she conducted the gun coverage and how she evaluated his own coverage. But even the limited data from the interview could still show that her approach to objectivity resembled Henry’s in several places. Mia was a veteran journalist, formerly working at *the New York Times*. When we talked about her approach to objectivity, she still emphasized the training she received from *the New York Times* and highlighted the importance of the standard of fairness. In her opinion, the social reality that journalists needed to represent was highly complex, and journalism is an “excellent fit” for understanding the “many shades of grey” in social reality. In her writing at *the Huffington Post*, she was still “constantly bringing in all sorts of and levels of opinions”. For example, regarding the gun issue, she thought that “to say of those who are

fighting all gun control that they are crazy, that gun owners equal insane, is a non-starter for the conversation”. In one of her columns “When Parents Disagree Over Guns at Home” published on December 26, 2012, she talked about the dilemma in a family where one parent believed owning a gun kept the children safe and the other parent believed it threatened the family, making it an open-ended question to invite further conversations from readers.

But meanwhile, when I asked about her opinion on gun, she was unlike *the Washington Post* journalists, being comfortable to admit that she was anti-gun. She said, “I have a social media trails that goes back years. My opinions are fairly clear”. Even when we concede that column writing could give more leverage for a journalist to express opinions, this upfront admission from Mia about her anti-gun attitude still made a clear contrast with what we heard from the interviewees of *the Washington Post* blog columnists, who showed the consistent tendency of avoiding talking about their opinions on issues. This explicitness about her opinions was also reflected in some of her other writings on the gun issues. For example, in her column “Gun Control is a parenting issue”, published on December 14, 2012 right after the Newtown tragedy, she wrote with sadness and anger, “White House spokesman Jacob Carney says today is not the day to talk about gun control. I disagree. That’s all we should talk about today.”

In sum, when we listen to how Mia talked about journalism and read her writing on gun, we can see that for her, as similar with Henry, the claim and practice of abiding by the standard of fairness could co-exist with the upfront admission of one’s own stance on issues and the practice of writing in line with the stance. While this pattern is based on the interviews of two journalists of *the Huffington Post*, it could be further confirmed through triangulation against secondary materials about how Arianna Huffington herself talked about how she hoped to add to the understanding of objectivity through journalism on this platform. In an interview with

Nieman Journalism Lab (Ellis, 2012), she said that for *the Huffington Post* journalists, her “editorial policy” was that “where truth is ascertainable”, journalists should not “pretend that truth is supposed to be found in the middle”. She emphasized that “to be able to see clearly what truth lies on one side or the other ... is not to abandon objectivity”. What she opposed, similar with what Henry said, was professional journalists’ “view from nowhere” approach to suspend their opinion and assume a neutral position on all issues (Ellis, 2012; Newbury, 2016). But despite the criticism of suspending one’s opinion in news reporting and the standard of neutrality, she claimed, in her article about the future of journalism, that the future of journalism still needs to have the place for the commitment to “the best practices of traditional journalism”, including “fairness and accuracy” (Huffington, 2013).

To summarize, *the Huffington Post*’s bloggers and professional journalists’ narrative of doing journalism in a new way shows their attempt to occupy the semi-professional location of the field as differentiated from professional and citizen journalism. Corresponding to this location, they also tried to carve out a semi-professional space of journalism as constituted of their unique approach to objectivity and the epistemic position as implied in the approach, which guided their journalistic work. The unique approach to objectivity was constructed discursively in a process that could be broken down to three components.

First, similar with their counterparts at *the Washington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, these practitioners at *the Huffington Post* claimed their journalistic work involved the utilization of specific standards, practices, and expertise for the pursuit of objectivity. The bloggers on the platform emphasized the standard of factuality and their efforts of individual research. The professional journalists on the platform stressed the practice of original reporting and the standard of fairness.

Secondly, *the Huffington Post* bloggers' boundary-work also involved their appraisal of the problem in the approach by their counterparts on purely citizen journalistic websites such as *Daily Kos*. For them, the activism-oriented approach of *Daily Kos* bloggers ran the risk of making an ideological "echo chamber of angry people". Whereas on their platform, they wanted to blog on policy topics out of the civic intellectual interest, based on the consideration that their reasoned exchange of information and opinions could contribute more to public debate and even go beyond ideological division. The appraisal of citizen journalism served as the basis for their attempt of highlighting the core value in their unique approach to objectivity.

Thirdly, *the Huffington Post* professional journalists' boundary-work also involved their evaluation of the approach by their counterparts at mainstream media. They criticized "the view from nowhere" in mainstream media. To avoid this problem, they refused to pretend "truth is supposed to be found in the middle". Instead, they would admit and even advocate their stances on issues under coverage. Here, the appraisal of mainstream media also served as the basis for highlighting the core value in their approach to objectivity.

The core values as highlighted by these bloggers and professional journalists at *the Huffington Post* point to a unique epistemic position adopted by these practitioners at their semi-professional location of the field. This epistemic position differed from political bloggers who blurred the boundary between journalism and activism, and also from mainstream media's journalists who suspended opinions in their professional capacity. In this unique epistemic position, journalists could be a civic, reasoned observer with a voice – bloggers could write on policy issues out of a civic intellectual interest unrelated to political activism, and news reporters could commit to the standards of fairness and factuality, but still have an attitude.

In the process of constructing the approach to objectivity and establishing the epistemic position, these practitioners of *the Huffington Post* were also trying to claim journalistic authority. They staked the claim to epistemic authority by emphasizing the standards, practices and expertise involved in their pursuit of objectivity. They also further justified the authority through the narrative about how their new way of doing journalism was based on the appraisal of problems in both professional and citizen journalism. Their approach to objectivity was intended as the amendment of those problems, and therefore, a more legitimate approach.

Summary of the Chapter

In sum, what the journalists of the four different media outlets said concerning their own approach to objectivity and their peers' approach was, in general, their discursive boundary-work that attributed selected qualities for journalism in its three aspects: the vision of journalism, the journalistic account of social reality, and the role of journalists. The three aspects were more or less touched on in the discourse by journalists of all the outlets, but their focuses differed by their different locations along the professional-citizen journalistic spectrum.

Political bloggers of the two citizen journalistic websites were highly focused on the account of social reality. For them, some important aspects of social reality were not getting enough attention from the public. For the *Daily Kos* bloggers, it was due to the right-wing influences of muddling the truth and manipulating public perception, and the professional news media's failure as commercially driven organizations always chasing the market interest. For the *RedState* bloggers, it was because political elites and the public were oblivious to the real conservatives' message from the grassroots, and professional journalists were only trying to hide their liberal media bias underneath the seemingly neutral reporting. For all the bloggers, the participation in citizen journalism was for advocating the aspects of social reality that mattered to

them, and for taking the control over truth from professional news media to themselves. For this reason, they considered themselves playing the dualistic role of citizen journalists and activists. They also talked about their standards, practices and expertise involved in blogging, but it was still for showing that their representation of social reality, although from their political ideological perspective, was nonetheless valid and credible.

Professional journalists of *the Washington Post*, in contrast, was more focused on the vision of journalism. For them, journalistic work needed to be conducted by suspending one's opinion in news reporting, and by following the standards of fairness and factuality. It needed to rely on journalists' expertise, developed from professional experience and concentration on a particular beat. It was also predicated upon the undergirding transcendent value of journalists' democratic obligation. For them, it was the commitment to these professional values and standards that made someone a journalist, and guided by the commitment, journalists should provide the public with an account about various relevant sides of the issues, rather than speaking to only some people with particular political leanings. They hoped citizen journalists to abide by these values and standards, contributing more to a robust civic debate.

Bloggers and professional journalists of *the Huffington Post* were focused on the vision of journalism and the role of journalists. They were trying to differentiate themselves and their ways of doing journalistic work from political bloggers on purely citizen journalistic websites such as *Daily Kos*, and also from professional journalists of mainstream media. For them, a blogger could write on political issues out of a civic intellectual interest, unrelated to political activism. A professional journalist could represent social reality in their professional capacity but refusing to be neutral. In this discourse, journalists could assume the role of a civic reasoned observer with a voice, who can "write for" their belief, but keep a distance form partisan fight.

Through the discourse about objectivity that attributed different qualities to journalism, these practitioners staked their respective claims to journalistic authority. All the journalists were claiming the epistemic authority of their journalistic work, by enlisting a set of standards, expertise and practices involved in their pursuit of objectivity. They placed emphasis on different standards. Bloggers of *Daily Kos*, *RedState* and *the Huffington Post* all stressed the standard of factuality but criticized mainstream media's pursuit of neutrality and balance. The *RedState* bloggers in particular stressed the standard of transparency, which for them was related to the quality of honesty as differentiated from the dishonesty of mainstream media. Professional journalists of *the Huffington Post* emphasized fairness, while refused to be neutral and balanced as their mainstream media counterparts. Some professional journalists of *the Washington Post* placed more emphasis on fairness than balance, due to the concern over false equivalence. Regardless of the variation, all the journalists were resorting to the emphasis on their standards, expertise and practices to show that their representation of social reality deserved belief.

The discourse also contained some narratives through which these practitioners made sense of the meaning of their journalistic work, and further justify their journalistic authority. For political bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, it was through the narrative about professional journalism's failures. For professional journalists of *the Washington Post*, it was through the narrative about their professional expertise and journalists' democratic commitment. For blogger and professional journalists of *the Huffington Post*, it was through the narrative about doing journalism in a new way, based on the appraisal of problems in both professional and citizen journalism.

Taken together, the results of this chapter can also help us better understand the results from Chapter 4. The varied manifestation of objectivity in the content of issue coverage by these

practitioners was indeed related to their different understandings of objectivity. For journalists of *the Washington Post*, objectivity meant a fair representation of facts relating to various relevant sides of issues. For the practitioners of *Daily Kos*, *RedState*, and *the Huffington Post*, objectivity meant giving visibility to the underrepresented social reality, and rectifying the problems in the professional approach to objectivity. The contrast was shown in the content analysis results, such as the patterns about news balance, the width of range of news topics, and structural balance in opinion representations. But, to really make the connection between the varied manifestation of objectivity in content and the different understandings of objectivity in discourse, we are assuming that in the journalistic practices for the issue coverage by the practitioners of different media outlets, they were indeed putting the different approaches to objectivity as they claimed into action. Was that really the case? The next Chapter was intended to answer the question.

Chapter 6

Fluidity of Objectivity in Action:

Practices and Forces of the Journalistic Field

In Chapter 4, I have examined the varied manifestation of objectivity in the content of issue coverage from the four media outlets differently located in the journalistic field. The patterns seem to suggest that practitioners from these outlets follow different approaches to objectivity. Then in Chapter 5, I have presented the voices of these practitioners on how they expressed and contested various facets of objectivity. I showed that the practitioners indeed claimed to follow their respective approach to objectivity and they articulated their approach with criticisms of the approaches by others. In these contestations, the boundary of journalism appeared to be a blurry realm where multiple visions of journalism claimed for journalistic authority. Now, this leads to another question. Did the different approaches to objectivity as claimed by these professional journalists and bloggers get enacted in their journalistic practices? In Chapter 6, I will resort to the analysis of interview data, secondary materials and in-depth reading of issue coverage to answer this question.

In general, the results will show that these practitioners of the media outlets differently located in the journalistic field tried to “accomplish” (Dingwall, 1976) their different approaches to objectivity by resorting to different ways of conducting and organizing their journalistic practices. These different ways of doing journalism also demonstrated some uncertainty under the contradicting influences of autonomy and heteronomy in the journalistic field (Couldry, 2003). Journalism as a craft is in the midst of change. How it operates as “an empirical discipline” (Gans, 2004) and how its undergirding normative framework is constituted are both being “fluid,” to borrow Bauman’s (2013) term. Bauman (2013) used “liquid modernity” as a

metaphor for social life in transition to a more disintegrated and unstable stage of modernity. There is no longer any “solid” system of norms and basis of authority, but multiple sources of norms and authority, leaving social life in a constant state of change like liquid. Journalism, a “partner” in creating the liquid modern life, is also a manifestation of the liquidity of social configuration itself (Deuze, 2007). With the players that vary in professional status, political ideology and media technology co-existing and competing in the field, journalism is in a state of fluidity. While professionalism provides a shared understanding of acceptable practices (Carlson, 2017), these practices are getting challenged, changed, and reconfigured. As will be shown by the results in this chapter, the variegated journalistic practices adopted by these players has proved to run far beyond what is prescribed by the professional approach, supporting the accomplishment of different understandings of objectivity.

Overall, findings in this chapter are along two lines. First, journalistic practices were in the state of fluidity, with practitioners of the outlets differently located in the field resorting to different practices for the accomplishment of different approaches to objectivity. *The Washington Post* journalists are, in Robinson’s (2006) apt words, “careful to play the postmodern game” (p. 79). In the online enterprise of the *Washington Post* blog, its journalists were trying some new attempts outside of their conventions, while at the same time adapting blogging to standards and routines in their professional approach. By contrast, the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* were aggressive in remaking journalistic practice for the dualistic purpose of journalism and activism. Their journalism was intended to call their community of ideological likeminded to action, often via the coordination of online citizen groups. Lastly, *the Huffington Post* journalists sought to hybridize the practices from the professional approach and

the citizen journalistic approach to maintain a civic intellectual environment on its blogging platform and articulate ordinary citizens' voices in its news reporting operation.

Secondly, the fluidity of journalistic practices was related to the field mechanism involving locations, resources and external influences. Corresponding to the different locations of these media outlets in the field, the different amounts and forms of resources available for them enabled them to conduct and organize practices for the accomplishment of their different approaches to objectivity. But their different locations also involved different heteronomous influences that the practitioners were subject to. These influences from market, political elites and civil society compromised their autonomy in journalistic practices, leading to practices that were inconsistent with the approaches they claim. The contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy gave further uncertainty to the fluid state of journalistic practices.

Let's start from the results for the research question on journalistic practices, RQ2a. How did the journalistic practitioners conduct and organize journalistic activities for the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control issues? How did their activities relate to their pursuit of objectivity as they understand? Table 6.1 contains the main findings about the distinct ways of conducting and organizing journalistic practices involved in the issue coverage by journalists of these outlets differently located in the field. Here, *Daily Kos* and *RedState* are placed in the same category due to substantial similarity in practices between these two cases, despite opposite ideological leanings of the two citizen journalistic outlets. Before we dive in the findings, two limitations of data should be noted. First, I was not able to acquire the access for ethnographic observations of their journalistic practices directly. The results were thus based on journalists' recall in interviews, secondary materials on individual practices and newsroom operations within these outlets, and in-depth reading of the articles for illustration of journalistic practices.

Secondly, the interviews were conducted several years later than the times of issue coverage. Most interviewees did not have a complete recall of specific experiences, considerations and anecdotes during the issue coverage, but rather offered general description of activities involved therein. Because of the two limitations, I do not aim to paint a full picture of all activities involved in the issue coverage by these journalists. Instead, I will mainly describe the journalistic activities that these journalists conducted to enact objectivity as they discursively claimed, noting the differences of practices between the media outlets differently located in the field.

Table 6.1

Journalistic practices for the enactment of their different approaches to objectivity at Daily Kos and RedState, the Washington Post, and the Huffington Post

Media outlet(s)	Journalistic practices
<i>The Washington Post</i>	Original reporting on various relevant sides of the issues; newsroom coordination through the highly organized beat system in the coverage of issues; complementing horserace news with explanatory reporting on the substance of issues and long-term data-based investigation; persistence of professional practices on the blog, along with some innovations.
<i>Daily Kos & RedState</i>	Individual practices of collecting information from various channels; relying on information from partisan media to promote political ideology; using call-to-action messages for purpose of political activism; self-initiated group collaboration in content production.
<i>The Huffington Post</i>	[Bloggers] Individual practices of information collection by accessing mainstream and partisan media; comment moderation and editorial curation that help create a civil and intellectual environment of exchange. [Professional journalists] Some efforts of original reporting; newsroom collaboration among beats; utilizing its network of bloggers and readers to find sources among ordinary citizens and organize collective information collection by citizens.

Performing Objectivity in the Newspaper and the Professionally Run Blog

Chapter 5 already showed that *the Washington Post* journalists considered their pursuit of objectivity as a civil moral obligation. They emphasized the standards of factuality and fairness, deeming it important to collect facts relating to various relevant sides of an issue so that they could make a fair assessment of reality. They stressed getting facts right and making in-depth explanation about facts, attaching importance to professional expertise needed for the purposes. Here, further analysis show that these elements in the professional approach to objectivity as they discursively claimed were indeed reflected in their journalistic practices. I will present the results in three parts. First, the newspaper journalists relied on efforts of original reporting and collaboration via the beat system to collect facts relating to various relevant sides of the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate. Secondly, they complemented horse-race news with attempts of in-depth explanation, including explanatory reporting on policy substance and implication as well as data-driven investigative reporting. Thirdly, on *the Washington Post* blog, journalists made some innovations in the means of reporting. But overall, they were still trying to adapt blogging to the professional approach to objectivity, as reflected in the same emphasis on original reporting, collaboration in the beat system and in-depth explanation in the blog.

Original reporting and the beat system. The emphasis on the standards of factuality and fairness was reflected in the newspaper journalists' efforts of original reporting on healthcare reform and gun control debate. They relied on original reporting, the "iron core" of objective news work (Jones, 2009, p. 189), to collect facts on various relevant sides of the issues with fairness, and act as authoritative eyewitnesses reporting on the sites of news events for readers across the country (Zelizer, 2007). Here, let's take their news coverage of gun control debate right after the Newtown tragedy for example. This example was picked for two reasons. Unlike

for the healthcare reform, the Newtown tragedy was a breaking event, so journalists could not plan for original reporting ahead of time. It also took place in Newtown, Connecticut, not close to the Washington D.C., the area of which the newspaper's reporting is focused on. Both factors made it an example where it was more difficult for the newspaper to summon efforts in original reporting relying on its reportorial team. But as we will see, even in this example, this newspaper made immediate and extensive efforts of original reporting to cover various relevant sides of the tragedy as well as the initiation of gun control debate.

The tragedy occurred on Friday, December 14, 2012. On that day and over the following weekends, *the Washington Post's* news coverage was largely focused on what happened in the tragedy. Its journalists reported on who the murderer was, what weapons he used, the grieving by victims' families and community members, and the heroic deeds by school staff, in addition to several pieces about the reactions of politicians and gun control advocates.

As soon as on the following Monday, while some of its news articles continued to focus on the tragedy and profile victims, the newspaper expanded its coverage promptly to include a wide range of aspects with regards to the tragedy, the underlying gun violence problem and the start of gun control debate, and meanwhile, demonstrated the attempt for fairness in its representation of different voices involved in the debate. Following the previous reporting on gun control advocates' reaction to the tragedy, its journalists now reported on gun owners' reaction as well. With President Obama having delivered a speech on the tragedy on Sunday night, they reported on the speech, as well as responses from government officials and congress members, including those from both parties. They looked further into how officials and congress members said about the tragedy, placing focus on politicians backed up by National Rifle Association (NRA). In addition, to place the issue in a local context, they examined the issue of

gun violence in the D.C. area and how D.C. area schools prepared for school shooting possibilities. The efforts of news reporting on these aspects occurred all on the same day.

It should be noted that in some of these news articles, journalists aggregated information from other media, such as *the Associated Press*, *ABC News*, *CNN* and *Wall Street Journal*. But most articles were based on original reporting by journalists who collected information through first-hand observation and interviews. Oftentimes, they made it clear to readers that their coverage was based on original reporting. In the writing, they indicated their on-site presence and interviewing efforts through specifying the location in dateline, giving direct quotations and identifying interviewees' backgrounds, describing scenes, details and even ambience from their observation, and sometimes, adding directly in the story that *the Washington Post* did a certain interview, with some information about how the interview was conducted. These cues in writing, as Zelizer (2007) pointed out, helped its journalists to establish the authority as credible storytellers reporting on the sites for their readers.

In the above example, we can see how the newspaper resorted to original reporting to collect facts on various relevant aspects of the issue in pursuit of factuality and fairness. The emphasis on original reporting was not just manifested in this example alone. It was noted in *the Washington Post* newspaper's news coverage for gun control debate and health care reform throughout different periods of these issues. Moreover, such efforts of original reporting involved not only individual practices by these journalists, but also the newsroom coordination through its beat system. It was through the newsroom coordination that the efforts of original reporting became distributed, orchestrated and structured, which allowed the journalists to construct their "web of facticity" (Tuchman, 1978, 1980), representing what they deemed as the important aspects of social reality for the public.

It was not fresh knowledge that as one of the nation's most respected newspapers, *the Washington Post* relies on its sophisticated beat system to collect information systematically. Although I do not have access to a complete organizational chart about its beat system, we can get a general idea about it from secondary materials. Becker, Lowrey, Claussen and Anderson (2000)'s study revealed the typical beat structure in large newspapers, which often contained the beats of court, police, schools, government, and hospitals. For *the Washington Post* with focus on the D.C. politics, a large reporting staff are assigned accordingly to the "location beats" (Gans, 2004, p. 131) of the Capitol Hill and the White House so that it can converge resource and efforts for a detailed depiction of political procedures at federal government and congress. The newspaper has also developed some subject beats (Thornton, 2006), such as health, science, environment, and national security. In March 2009, right before the initiation of healthcare reform, the newspaper made a major attempt to pool its resources in health, science and environment, making all reporters on these subjects to report to a single editor (Russell, 2009). Overall, with the combination of locational beats (e.g., Capitol Hill and the White House) and subject beats (e.g., health), the newspaper makes it possible for its journalists to conduct routine activities of information collection at certain locations, interact regularly with certain sources, and develop beat expertise, which all help assure a predictable and reliable supply of news for the newspaper (Gans, 2004; Sigal, 1973).

With the beat system, *the Washington Post* newspaper's coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate turned out to be highly organized efforts among journalists on different beats. Let's start from healthcare reform coverage. I had the opportunity to ask the former ombudsman Luke and the business reporter Mike about how the coverage was organized. Based on what they said, the newspaper's core team of reporters were comprised of journalists who

were experts in reporting the subjects of health, healthcare system and health insurance. For example, throughout the different stages of healthcare reform, we could read the coverage by its healthcare expert Ceci Connolly, who kept track of the deal between politicians and healthcare industries and explained the implications for readers in a series of articles, such as “Obama Proposes \$634 Billion Fund for Health Care; Aids Call Money a ‘Down Payment’ Toward Universal-Coverage Efforts”, “House-Care Plan would Add Surtax on Wealthy”, and “Insurance Dispute Heats Up Before Vote; Industry Group, White House Spar Over Premiums”. Besides the core team of experts on healthcare subjects, the newspaper also assigned a team of journalists who specialized in the political coverage of the White House, the Capitol Hill and government administration to report on the procedures of legislation and political negotiation. “They would meet weekly and generate stories almost daily as this debate wound its way through”, said Mike. In addition, the newspaper also brought in more reporters whose beats were related to the healthcare reform, such as Mike with his expertise on business reporting. These journalists participated in the healthcare reform coverage to help cover policy debates from their respective beats. For example, in Mike’s case, he contributed several pieces to explain the influence of healthcare reform on businesses, employers and employees. For these descriptions, we can see how the newspaper’s sophisticated beat system was useful for the orchestration of journalists’ reporting efforts in order to cover various important aspects of healthcare reform.

Similar newsroom collaboration was observed for gun control debate coverage as well. When the Newtown tragedy occurred, Emily was in her third week of working in the newspaper website as a new graduate. Although she was not deeply involved in the newspaper coverage of the issue, she could still recall the collaboration in the newsroom:

That was my third week on the job. They got a bunch of reporters together very quick. It was a combination of some people on the national desk and a couple other people who were sort of floating around. They had lists of names and phone numbers of students at the school. All of us were given a list of numbers to call and see if we could get through to the families to see if they knew anything. After that, there was also a newsroom-wide effort to write short profiles of all the victims.

After the “newsroom-wide” collaboration upon the occurrence of the tragedy, the newspaper soon brought in its strong team of political reporters on the beats of White House and Capitol Hill and subject experts on the beats of government policy and national security to cover the gun legislative procedure. For example, its White House Bureau Chief, Philip Rucker, contributed the pieces on major policy making moves from President Obama and his White House staff. Its congress reporter, Ed O’Keefe, described the political negotiations among congress members and lobbyists. National security expert, Peter Finn, contributed the pieces that focused on the role of National Rifle Association (NRA) in gun politics. Without the collaboration among different beats, it was hard to imagine how the newspaper could pull together the extensive efforts of original reporting on various relevant sides of the issue as we have described before.

To summarize, *the Washington Post* newspaper journalists’ pursuit of factuality and fairness in the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate was accomplished through their extensive efforts of original reporting, and the coordination of such efforts through its sophisticated beat system. These practices allowed them to make first-hand observation from the sites, make a fair assessment for various relevant aspects of social reality, and distribute efforts for capturing important information from key location and subject beats. Up next, we will see that they also tried to make in-depth explanation about facts, as they discursively claimed.

Complementing horse-race news with in-depth explanation. *The Washington Post* journalists also claimed to not only get facts right but also offer in-depth explanation about facts.

But in-depth explanation is not an easy goal to fulfill in practice. News stories are often “cued by the appearance of dramatic news events” (Lawrence, 2000, p. 9), such as the Newtown tragedy. But in event-driven news, the immediacy of reporting can compromise the depth of explanation. For political procedures such as healthcare reform and gun control legislation, a main way of news coverage is the horse-race news (Iyengar, Norporth & Hahn, 2004), which focuses on “battles between politicians, their strategic motivations for increasing public support, and their positions at the polls” (Zoizner, 2018, p. 2). But the horse-race coverage can be “long on the horserace and short on substance” (Patterson, 2016, p. 26), which can even cause decrease in audiences’ substance knowledge about political issues (Zoizner, 2018). So, how did *the Washington Post* journalists offer in-depth explanation about the issues? It was found that in the newspaper’s news coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate, its journalists offered in-depth explanation about the issues through explanatory reporting on policies/proposals, and through data-driven investigative reporting. Although its coverage of the issues was still focused on horse-race news, these two types of reporting allowed readers to understand policy substance, implications, and the underlying social mechanism for the issues.

Healthcare reform was a long, twisty process with many political maneuvers. It was true that the coverage by *the Washington Post* was emphatic on the horse-race aspect of the process, such as the battle between politicians and political groups who supported or opposed the reform, the political strategies they adopted, and the fluctuation of public support for them as reflected in polling results. Although I did not examine the proportion of horse-race coverage in my content analysis, some similar analysis conducted by the newspaper itself could help illustrate this point. In August 2009, its own team examined the A-section stories on healthcare reform from the recent two months, and found that among about 80 stories, “all but a dozen focused on” the

horse-race aspect (Alexander, 2009). In the interview, the former ombudsman Luke confirmed this pattern to me as well. But meanwhile, he emphasized that despite the predominance of horse-race coverage, the newspaper also made efforts to explain the substance and implications of various health bills to readers, which he considered was important for the fulfillment of journalists' democratic obligation of contributing to a robust civic discourse.

Such attempts of explanatory reporting on healthcare policy substance and implications can indeed be found throughout the process of healthcare reform. Here are several examples of explanatory reporting in the key stages of the policy making process. August 2009 was the month of healthcare reform townhalls across the country. On August 12, the newspaper's chief correspondent in national politics, Dan Balz, wrote the article entitled "What They're Really Arguing About". He unpacked the debate among politicians and the public, highlighted the central tension around whether federal government were assuming too much control over economy, and explaining why that was a central concern for the public. September 2009 saw the release of important healthcare bill drafts from Senate and House committees. Upon the release of the drafts, its healthcare system expert, Ceci Connolly, wrote a piece entitled "8 Questions About Health-Care Reform". She used laymen's language to answer how the reform, according to these drafts, would affect people, businesses and economy. In October 2009, the political battle around healthcare reform zoomed in onto the problem of cost control, especially in relation to the public option. In that month, the newspaper organized a debate among top healthcare experts from the nation and published the excerpts of debate in its A-section under the title, "What Experts Say about Controlling Spending". In January 2010, the congress was about to rush into the final stage of votes over the bills. To make sense of the complicated bills for readers, the newspaper published an article "Building a final health bill from Columns A and B",

breaking down the main pros and cons for both the House bill and the Senate bill. In these examples, we can see that *the Washington Post* journalists' explanatory coverage went beyond simply reporting on the horse-race, but fruitfully focused on the policy substance, implications and alternatives with regard to healthcare reform, trying to engage readers with the complicated legislation process throughout all the stages.

Compared to healthcare reform, gun control legislation was a shorter process, and the gun law proposals were also relatively straightforward. In *the Washington Post* newspaper's coverage of gun control debate, we can see similar patterns that the overall coverage was emphatic on horserace, but some journalists still resorted to explanatory reporting to interpret the substance and implications of gun control law proposals to readers. I would not go through specific examples here, due to the similarity with the above examples from healthcare reform coverage. What should be noted about the gun control debate coverage is that, besides the explanatory reporting on policy substance, the newspaper also attempted to offer in-depth explanation through long-term data-based investigative reporting that examined the social forces lying behind the gun violence issue and gun politics.

Investigative journalist Ed was among the authors of two such investigative pieces. In "How the NRA exerts influence over Congress", he and his team revealed the connection between National Rifle Association's (NRA) donations and ratings for Congress members, and these Congress members' election results of losing or winning. In "Gun deaths shaped by race in America", they examined the patterns of gun death along the lines of suicides vs. homicides, black vs. white, and rural vs. urban, and in relation to the distribution of gun ownership in the country. Both pieces offered readers the in-depth explanation on the issue, helping people better understand the nuances of gun violence issue in America and the powerful influences of the gun

lobby organization on politics. In the interview, I mentioned these pieces against the backdrop of the gun control debate, and asked Ed what made them select the topics and how they carried out his investigation at that moment. As it turned out, both pieces involved long-term efforts of data collection and analysis. For instance, speaking of the investigation on NRA, he told me,

I did a lot of the data gathering for that before the 2010 November elections. The candidate ratings were on the NRA website. I had to join the NRA to get access to that information ... With the data, I did a prior story that I had done with another investigative reporter, James Grimaldi. This (the 2013 article) is an update.

While it was after the Newtown tragedy that he thought of updating the earlier piece, Dan emphasized that his data collection and analysis were not pegged to the particular event, but a long-term process started much earlier.

Similarly, regarding his investigation about gun deaths, although he wrote up the story in March 2013, the month of Congress sessions on gun bills, his efforts of data investigation started two decades ago during 1990s. When he worked at *the Miami Herald*, he worked on a project of collecting data on gun deaths, using the medical examiner logs from Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) every month to build a database. But *the Miami Herald* lost interest in the project later on. But back then, he already noted some patterns around gun deaths as explained in the 2013 story. Afterwards, he kept on building the database by other means, such as re-aggregating his data with data from the Harvard University's Suicide Prevention Resource Center. When he decided to write up the investigatory piece in 2013, what he did was to further flesh out the story through refining his analysis, highlighting main patterns, and conducting interviews to develop human stories around data patterns. For Ed, data-based investigative journalism involved long-term efforts of getting access to data, aggregating data, recognizing patterns, and building up one's expertise in the subject under analysis. "You couldn't just jump

in and do data analysis on whatever the subject of the day is.” Based on Ed’s explanation, we can see that the practices of in-depth explanation involved in the data-driven investigatory reporting were different from the afore-mentioned explanatory reporting on policy substance. A major part of his work was based on continued efforts of information collection and analysis, and such efforts were driven by data more than by certain breaking events or legislative procedure. It was the continued, long-term process of data investigation that made it possible for journalists to look beneath the surface of data, revealing the working of social forces behind specific issues.

To summarize, *the Washington Post* newspaper journalists also resorted to explanatory reporting on policy substances and long-term data-driven investigatory reporting on social mechanism of the issues in their attempts of offering in-depth explanation for readers. So far, we have looked at how the newspaper journalists accomplished their approach to objectivity in practices. In next part, we will focus on *the Washington Post* blog journalists.

Adapting blogging to professional standards and routines. In Chapter 5, the analysis on discursive contestation over objectivity did not reveal substantial difference between *the Washington Post* newspaper journalists and its blog journalists. Reporters, editors and external columnists on *the Washington Post* blog placed similar emphasis on the values, standards and practices stressed by their newspaper counterparts. But the examination of journalistic practices involved in the issue coverage on the blog shows that these online journalists’ practices featured more fluidity than the newspaper journalists’ practices. The blog platform became the site where these journalists experimented with practices unbounded by professional conventions, incorporating the new way of information collection and the novel content to be taken as news.

First, on the blog platform, content aggregation, rather than original reporting, became the main way of information collection. As mentioned in Chapter 4, content aggregation in the

form of citing information from news agencies has always been part of the professional news routines. But the utilization of third-party content through interlinking, citing and rewriting in online journalism (Anderson, 2013), the practice enabled by the Internet technology, was not as conventional for mainstream media. Widely used by citizen journalists and online media such as *the Huffington Post*, it was accused by some professional journalists as a robbery of original reporting (The New Republic Editors, 2011). However, on *the Washington Post* blog platform, many blogs, such as *the Fix*, *Post Politics*, *She the People*, were mainly relying on the aggregated content, via linking to online information, for the coverage of political issues. In their coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate, the aggregated information was often from the websites of mainstream media outlets, public opinions polls, government websites, and online political ads. It was not rare for journalists on these blogs to write entire pieces of news analysis based on aggregated information, synthesizing what they cited from multiple online sources and explaining the substance of issues and policies for readers. For example, *the Fix* contributed a series of articles explaining the gun control debate to readers, such as “Putting gun violence in context – in 1 amazing chart”, “Why the gun debate is so intractable”, and “Everything you need to know about the Senate’s gun bills”. All these pieces were not based on original reporting, but based on information aggregated from *the Economist*, *ABC News* and Senate committees’ websites. Such examples show that these journalists were actively adopting unconventional practices to facilitate journalistic production on the online platform.

Secondly, on the blog platform, journalists also incorporated new content to be taken as news. For example, Glenn Kessler’s *Fact Checker* was a column completely dedicated to political fact checking. In his fact-checking around gun control debate, the triangulation process was made transparent to readers by showing the links to evidence, and the fact-checking result

was presented in an engaging way of putting misinformation to “the Pinocchio Test” and showing the verdict by the number of Pinocchio images. Doug Feaver’s *dot.comments* was a blog reporting only on readers’ comments. In his posts on readers’ comments for *the Washington Post*’s healthcare reform stories, he summarized readers’ reaction to the stories themselves as well as policy subjects involved therein. Roxanne Roberts and Amy Argetsinger’s *Reliable Source* was a blog about “gossip from inside the Beltway and beyond”. In their posts, the lighter, fun information about political figures were shared with readers to add a human-interest touch to serious political debates. In these online ventures, although not each of them turned out to be successful, journalists not only tried to broaden the range of content that could be considered as news, but also sought to make journalism more transparent, engaging and inclusive, in contrast to traditional journalism that resembles a one-way “lecture” to readers (Marchionni, 2013).

The above examples show that *the Washington Post* blog journalists were actively experimenting with new practices of doing journalism. However, if we looked further into these examples, we can see that despite the new practices, these journalists were still trying to adapt blogging to professional standards and routines in their professional approach to objectivity. The emphasis on the standards of fairness and balance, the pursuit of factuality via original reporting, and newsroom collaboration via the beat system could still be seen at *the Washington Post* blog.

First, the emphasis on fairness and balance can be observed in the attempts of writing blog posts on various relevant sides of the issues and making sure to present conflicting voices within the blog posts. For example, if we read *the Fix*’s coverage of gun control debate in March 2013, the month right before the Congress voting sessions on gun bill, we can see how its writers tried to make a fair assessment of political figures and public opinion. In “President Obama’s moral appeal on guns”, the focus was on how the President asked Congress members to “put

aside political concerns” and “vote their consciences”. In “NRA head: A ‘violent rapist deserves to face a good woman with a gun’”, the focus was the gun lobby’s criticism of gun control legislation, based on their self-defense argument. In “Post-Newtown support for gun control fades quickly”, the focus presented the latest public opinion polls results on gun control in comparison to historical trends. Such an ensemble of posts indeed showed an attempt for fairness, as *the Fix* writer and editor Jared claimed in Chapter 5 results. In addition, if we read *dot.comments* posts on readers’ comments, we can see an attempt for balanced representation of conflicting voices in the comments. For example, “Pulling the Plug on ‘public option’” looked at readers’ comments for a controversial editorial that said, “public option needs to disappear”. It included the comments from readers who thought “the Post was right” vs. readers who held the editorial was “an idiotic contribution”. It also included the comments from readers who claimed, “Why do liberals think that there is such a thing as a free lunch?” vs. readers who refuted, “Why do so many Republican rank-and-file folks hate themselves so much?”

Secondly, even though content aggregation was a main way of information collection on the blog, we can still see a persistence on original reporting in many blogs posts. For example, while online fact-checking is mainly a “link-driven analysis” of information (Graves, 2016, p. 17), Glenn Kessler still relied on his interview with the government spokesman in his *Fact Checker* piece on “John Kerry’s claim that foreign students are ‘scared’ of U.S. gun violence”, and the interview with parents in Sidwell Friends School in his fact checking on National Rifle Association’s (NRA) attack ad about armed security for President Obama’s kids in school. Moreover, if we read the posts on *Congress Briefing* and *Post Politics*, we can find that a great number of these posts were still based on original reporting. Some of them were short pieces that their newspaper colleagues sent back from government news conferences and briefs, writing

specifically for *the Washington Post* blog. Some of them were the blog journalists' synthesis and analysis that were based on and linked to news articles written by their newspaper colleagues. From these examples, we can see that although the blog journalists adopted content aggregation as a main way of information collection, original reporting by themselves or their newspaper colleagues still played an important role for their pursuit of factuality in the journalistic blog.

Lastly, similar to the newspaper, *the Washington Post* blog teams also developed their own beat system, which allowed them to organize the collaboration in news gathering. Take *the Fix* team for example. In the interview with *the Fix* writer and editor Jared, he told me that as the editor of this blog, he "managed a team of seven members". It included "Chris Cillizza who is the founder of the blog, five reporters including himself, and one video person who creates original videos for the team". In the team, Chris Cillizza the blog founder was the only one who "has more latitude" to "opine on political debates of the day", using "his authoritative voice on politics in America" to "offer his take on the issues". The rest of the team focused on writing news analyses that were "not judgmental" and "focused on just the facts". The five reporters were respectively assigned to four different beats: 1) Congress, 2) political data, 3) political media and their coverage of political issues, and 4) race, gender and immigration issues. This beat system within *the Fix*, although not as sophisticated as that of the overall newspaper, allowed the team to function as a small-size newsroom itself. They relied on quick meetings and regular online chats via a software called "Slack" to determine everyone's topical selections and coordinate in their coverage. The allocation of blog journalists to different beats in *the Fix* was not an exception in *the Washington Post* blog. Emily, another online journalist I interviewed, confirmed that "teams of bloggers and reporters are all dedicated to specific beats". She herself started off as a general assignment reporter at *the Washington Post* blog, reporting to the

“continuous news desk” that was responsible for “covering breaking news” and “farming their work to different blogs”. Soon afterwards, with her growing interest and experience in writing about social media, she was assigned to focus on “Internet culture”, writing about content on different social media platforms and how people on the Internet “deal with controversial issues”. For example, with regards to the Newtown tragedy, she wrote, from her particular beat, a piece about how “the world responds to Sandy Hook” by aggregating content from Twitter users around the world and the Weibo users from China.

To summarize, *the Washington Post* blog journalists were experimenting with some new practices on the blog platform, but meanwhile they still tried to enact the key elements involved in the professional approach to objectivity, attempting to make a balanced and fair representation of social reality, using information collected from original reporting, and relying on their beat system for purpose of capturing the aspects of reality that they deemed as important. While blogging as a form of writing often means the sharing of personal perspectives and the freedom of opinion expression for citizen journalists, it is, for these professional journalists, a new terrain of journalism where they needed to balance fresh possibilities and normative prescriptions from their professional norm. As Robinson (2006) said in her study on journalistic blogs operated by professional news media, these journalists were “careful to play the postmodern game” (p. 79). It suggests that professional conventions can be a force of inertia preventing these journalists from adopting new practices more aggressively. But on the other hand, it also means that through the practices by journalistic practitioners, some elements in the professional approach to objectivity, such as fairness, original reporting, and the organization of news work through the beat system, could remain relevant to the new media technology environment.

Remaking Journalistic Practices in the Mode of Activist Journalism

In Chapter 5, we have talked about how the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* blurred the boundary of journalism and political activism by emphasizing that their pursuit of objectivity and the need for political activism were compatible. Here, further analysis will show how they put the discursive claim into action through their journalistic practices. In the practices, they did not follow professional standards (i.e., fairness and balance) or routines (news work through beat system). They accomplished the amalgamation of the pursuit of objectivity to the need for political activism through three unique ways of conducting/organizing journalistic activities: 1) collecting information from a wide range of channels, but with a focus on partisan media in line with their ideological leanings; 2) including call-to-action messages in blog posts so as to make citizen journalism an invitation for online ideological communities to act together; 3) relying on online ideological communities to conduct self-initiated collaboration in content production.

Collecting information from partisan media. For the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, their coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate mainly relied on their own individual activities of information collection. All the interviewees from these two media outlets devised their own ways of collecting information on a regular basis.

For example, *RedState* frontpage writer Todd said that he normally collected information from three channels: Twitter, “big-players” media in the U.S., and foreign media. Twitter allowed him to feel the pulse of what the important topics of current political debate were, or “what people is actually buzzing around” in his own words. By “big-players”, he referred to mainstream media such as *CNN* and *ABC*, and also *FOX News*, emphasizing the financial resources that these powerful media organizations had available for news gathering by large reportorial teams and bureaus. He checked these “big-players” for factual information on issues

and events he would write about. He called such information the “data” for his blogging, given his professional background of working full-time as a writer in the tech industry. Although he used mainstream media for information, he often disagreed with mainstream media’s perspectives of reporting, and thus hoped to “analyze the data with an angle they don’t have”. The main way for him to get his new angle was through reading/watching foreign media, such as “the British press or the French press”. He consumed these foreign media outlets with the specific intention of “finding the things that American media didn’t cover”. For Todd, checking all the above-mentioned media sources was a daily routine, which allowed him to have enough information for sustaining his output of around 30 blog posts a week.

Daily Kos frontpage writer Rowan made no less efforts in the information collection for his weekly media aggregation column “Sunday Talk”. He said that he would “continuously read online and bookmark links across the week”, accumulating around 200-300 links a week. Only by doing so, he could have enough content to put into his weekly column. As he emphasized to me, he not only read mainstream media, but also paid great attention to some media outlets that featured “political slant” as well as “quality of journalism work”. An example was *Talking Points Memo*. For him, it was a “respectable” liberal media website that had “won some major journalism awards and broken some very big stories”. The importance of *Talking Points Memo* for his information collection is clearly manifested in his posts on healthcare reform, where he cited from and linked to many articles from the website.

Compared to these frontpage writers, the ordinary bloggers/diarists of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* may not spend as much time on information collection, but they also developed their own ways for gathering information on a regular basis. For example, *RedState* blogger Zack would regularly watch/read mainstream media such as *CNN* and *the Economist*, but meanwhile

relied more on conservative media outlets such as *Breitbart.com* or *hotair.com*. *Daily Kos* blogger Taylor, with a particular interest in blogging on gun laws and policies, would pay attention to the posts written by other *Daily Kos* bloggers on gun-relating topics, and then continue to research gun laws and policies under debate. From both *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, there were also several bloggers who told me that they had set up RSS reader so that they could receive updates from a wide range of information channels including mainstream media, partisan media, and government agencies, tracking information from them on a continued basis. Some bloggers with academic research backgrounds also regularly searched for the latest academic research findings that related to the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate.

When we look at the above-mentioned information collection activities, what deserves attention is that partisan media, including the blogging websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* themselves, constituted an important component of information channels for most of the interviewees. They consumed the content from these partisan media outlets and used the content for blogging. Reading their blogs on healthcare reform and gun control debate, one will find it very common that bloggers of *RedState* cited *the Rush Limbaugh show*, *Fox News*, *the Drudge Report*, or *Breitbart.com*, while bloggers of *Daily Kos* often cited *MSNBC*, *the Huffington Post*, *Talking Points Memo*, *Mother Jones*, or *ThinkProgress.org*. The content from these partisan media allowed these bloggers to digest information with regard to specific issues from their respective ideological perspectives. Citing from and linking to these websites, they could also present the information in the ways that fit their liberal/conservative stance.

Take a blog post on gun control debate, “Will Congress end up with a failing grade?”, by *Daily Kos* blogger with the online pseudonym “Jamess” for example. In this post, he started with *the New York Times* data investigation of how the National Rifle Association (NRA) graded the

Congress members by their records of voting on gun rights. He then cited and linked to an article from *ThinkProgress.org*, explaining why liberals should care about the information from *the New York Times* by highlighting a question raised by that article's author, "What's more important? Doing whatever it takes to get a 'A' grade from the gun lobby ... or giving parents some peace of mind when they drop their child off for first grade?" With this quote, "James" got to post a further question to readers at *Daily Kos* at the end of his post – what they, as liberals, should do, if they want to grade politicians by their standards in the upcoming election.

Another example is a blog post on healthcare reform by *RedState* blogger with the online pseudonym "Streiff". Writing about Vice President Biden's townhall speech on a proposal for healthcare reform, he cited a news report on the speech by *the Washington Post*. He also cited some related articles on the speech from *the Drudge Report*, and from the conservative online magazine *The American Spectator*. Based on the articles from the conservative media outlets, he pointed out that Biden was confusing and self-contradictory in the core message of the speech, which, as he summarized, was that "we have to spend money to keep from going bankrupt". Comparing the articles from conservative media to the report by *the Washington Post*, he also criticized the liberal media bias in that conservative media outlets revealed the problem in Biden's speech, whereas mainstream media chose to ignore the point.

In both examples, the core factual information was still cited from mainstream media, but the content from partisan media played an important role of offering an ideological lens for the bloggers to understand and present the factual information in the ways as consistent with their ideological stances. It was the opinion articles from partisan media that allowed them to reinterpret the core facts and use them as the basis for promoting liberal/conservative political

agenda (i.e., countering NRA, and advocating for stronger liberal influences in election for liberals; opposing healthcare reform, and countering liberal media bias for conservatives).

Calling the community to action. In many posts on *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, the presentation of facts and opinions on the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate was followed with some call-to-action messages. Based on my reading, the call-to-action messages fall into two categories: those intended to mobilize online community members for specific acts of political participation, and those intended to mobilize people for further information collection activities. Whether for political participation or information collection, such call-to-action messages allowed the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* to utilize information for the need of political activism. By including such messages in posts, they were engaged in not only the practices of presenting facts and opinions in line with their ideological stance, but also inviting and organizing online community members to partake in the course of actions as needed for influencing policy making on the issues.

Let's start from the messages that mobilized specific acts of political participation. In many posts, the authors would present information to highlight the exigency for certain political actions and call online community members to take actions accordingly. For example, *RedState* blogger, with the online pseudonym "Kfobbs", published a blog on gun control debate, entitled "Will you support your state and sheriff that defy Obama Gun Control Orders". In this post, he first shared the information about President Obama's executive actions and legislative proposals on gun control. Then he talked about some local law enforcement officials' decision to oppose the White House's proposals. Following all the information, he emphasized, "This is your opportunity to stand up and acknowledge that a nation that fought a War of Independence to be free from tyranny of an imperial elite will not bow on bended knee to a 21st century version of

that now residing in the White House”. He continued to ask his readers to “send the nation a clear concise message: ‘We will stand and fight!’” by organizing petitions in local counties to request your local sheriffs or legislators to oppose the gun control proposals.

Similarly, Daily Kos bloggers, with the online pseudonym “Gavodotcom”, published a post entitled “Lieberman will filibuster” for purpose of saving healthcare reform from filibuster. In this post, the author aggregated news information from five different media outlets, all about the same topic that the independent senator Joe Lieberman had decided to filibuster healthcare bills, and wrote to his readers, “Some of us knew it was coming ... Pay him off. Do what you have to do.”. By the end of the post, he asked readers to “keep the pressure up on him” by calling the Senator’s Office.

In both examples, factual information was presented to serve as the basis for highlighting the need for political actions and mobilizing the acts of political participation. Most of the blog posts with call-to-action messages fall into this category, presenting information and calling for various types of acts of political participation, including voting, petitions, boycotts, calls, attending specific political events, or simply spreading the urgent information online and offline for the mobilization of more people.

In some other blog posts, however, the actions of interest were not specific acts of political participation, but activities of further information collection. The authors would present some information relating to certain political agenda to start with, and then called on online community members to collect more related information.

For example, *Daily Kos* blogger, with online pseudonym “LilithGardner”, wrote a post entitled “NRA propaganda at the *Daily Kos*” to analyze the National Rifle Association (NRA)’s

talking point that state-level gun control bills were only “obvious blue state wins”, rather than legislation with bipartisan support. For purpose of countering the talking point, she presented the information that some of the state-level gun control bills were in fact passed with bipartisan support in GOP-controlled states. Meanwhile, she also pointed out that some of the state-level gun rights bills were getting passed under the “corrupt influence” of American Legal Exchange Council (ALEC). Then, she asked her readers to dig deeper into the influence of ALEC on gun legislation. She wrote, “Pick a recently passed gun law in an ALEC-controlled state legislature and take its origins back to an ALEC model bill. Follow the votes. Follow the money. Write about it in comments and diaries.”

Similarly, *Daily Kos* blogger, with the online pseudonym “Slinkerwink”, wrote a post about the healthcare reform, entitled “The ‘fact’ baby finally got insured”. He/she told the story about the family of a baby who could not get health insurance coverage from the insurance company due to the alleged reason of overweight. He/she argued for the necessity of keeping the public option in healthcare reform to solve the problem of the current healthcare system. By the end of the post, the author asked readers to share the similar “insurance horror stories” that they had experienced or had heard of.

In these two examples, the authors not only shared information but also mobilized further information collection activities. It should be noted that the information collection activities that they intended to mobilize were not of purely informational interest, but still served the purpose of promoting their political agenda, such as revealing the influence of the conservative political group ALEC or advocating the public option.

This category of call-to-action messages that mobilized information collection activities did not include as many posts as the first category of call-to-action messages that mobilized

specific facts of political participation. But it points to a less obvious aspect of these bloggers' journalistic practices, that is, their practices were not simply the efforts of individual bloggers sitting in their living rooms and writing by themselves, but also, in some cases, collaborations among the ideologically likeminded bloggers and readers. The above examples from "LilithGardner" and "Slinkerwink" were only the tip of iceberg where such collaborations got manifested in the messages that explicitly called for such collaborations. As we will see in the next part, the collaboration component was also important for these *Daily Kos* and *RedState* bloggers to accomplish their approach to objectivity in practice.

Self-initiated collaboration in online ideological groups. As some bloggers revealed in the interviews, the collaboration among them and other ideological likeminded people in different online groups was integral to their content production, which constituted yet another important way for them to enact their pursuit of objectivity as amalgamated to the need for political activism. The technologically mediated weak ties among these people, most of whom knew each other only by online pseudonyms, nonetheless functioned to enable and maintain effective collaboration. Such collaboration was also initiated by these bloggers themselves, without the involvement of blog editors on these platforms.

Let's start from the collaboration process for *Daily Kos* bloggers. *Daily Kos*, except being a platform for bloggers to publish their posts, is also an online community as constituted of a myriad of groups that are organized by bloggers themselves around the same topics of interest or certain political activism goals. For example, with regard to gun control debate, there are such groups as "Shut Down the NRA", "Repeal or Amend the Second Amendment (RASA)", "VAGV: Veterans Against Gun Violence", and "Firearms Law and Policy". With regard to healthcare reform, there are the groups of "Healthcare Reform – We've Only Just Begun",

“Single Payer: The Fight for Medicare for All”, “Uninsured in America”, and so on. These groups were usually started by one or more bloggers, who then invited even more online community members with shared interest to join in. Based on interviews and the reading of blog posts from these groups, these groups functioned to facilitate bloggers’ content production both internally for group members and externally for bloggers outside of the groups.

First, for *Daily Kos* bloggers who did not belong to these groups, the writings from these groups served as a basis of information, opinion and activism messages that helped them to develop their further writing. They could cite from it, discuss around it, and relay the activism messages. Some of the most influential *Daily Kos* posts on healthcare reform and gun control debate, such as “Health insurance industry CEO salary survey, stay calm for this” by “Nyceve”, and “NRA propaganda at the *Daily Kos*” by “LilithGardner”, were first published in their groups, and then widely read, commented and cited by other bloggers. In this sense, these pieces played a role of setting agenda for the wider *Daily Kos* community, cueing the non-member bloggers to think and write about the same issues, adding in related information and opinions.

Secondly, for bloggers who were the members, these groups functioned to help with their topical selection and revision. Before writing, they could pitch ideas to other members for suggestions, which was especially helpful for new bloggers not familiar with the platform. After publishing a piece, they could engage with ongoing revisions, based on members’ feedback. In my interviews, both frontpage writers and ordinary bloggers told me that their writings benefited a lot from their group members’ input before and after publication. They also emphasized that group members’ input did not work like any strict editorial policies or standards that professional journalists needed to follow, but most often featured a constructive tone. Their groups members would support their topical choices or offer suggestions to help sharpen their original arguments.

In general, these online groups formulated the core teams of contributors of information, opinions and activism messages regarding specific issues for the *Daily Kos* community, and a circle of fellow writers with similar interest giving each other feedback and support among their members. But the collaboration in these groups went beyond these. The ties of memberships in these groups also turned out to be crucial for binding the bloggers together to work together in collecting, processing and presenting information in their coverage of issues. Here are two examples from their gun coverage.

During March 9-12, 2013, closely following the Senate hearings of testimony from Sandy Hook victims' family members, altogether 26 professional and amateurish cyclists held a ride from Newtown to Washington D.C. to support gun control legislation. They called themselves the Team 26 in memory of 26 lives lost in the tragedy. One of the team's support crew, Peter Olson, was also a member of "Shut Down the NRA" group in *Daily Kos*. Initiated by Peter and organized by another group member "Greg the Plumber", members from several gun control-relating groups in *Daily Kos* joined together to collectively run a three-day "blogathon" to cover the ride. Each day, Peter in the support crew sent back information as an embedded blogger traveling with the ride. "Tytalus" wrote a morning brief to start the coverage of the day. "LilithGardner" continued with a "Meet the riders" post, collecting information from the activity's website and all the riders' Facebook profiles. "Glorificus" ended each day's coverage with an evening wrap-up. The three-day blogathon became both a source of information about the ride and a major rallying call for supporting gun control for the whole *Daily Kos* community.

In August 2013, three months after the failure of gun control legislation in Congress, college researcher and *Daily Kos* blogger Taylor decided to form another gun control-relating group "Firearms Law and Policy". From the very start, the group was built for collaboration – in

the founder's words, it was "for those who want to collaborate as we move forward to understand which restrictions are permitted and which are likely to fail on the next SCOTUS review of gun law". Collaboration occurred here in various ways. Group members could publish their analysis of the history and the current state of gun law, inviting discussion by all members. They could also keep track of gun legislative moves from different states, and shared updates with members. Their collaboration served the purpose of contributing to members' intellectual understanding on gun laws and policies, but in the long run, it was still intended for gun control advocacy. As the group mission put it, "to advocate effectively for repeal or passage of firearms legislation, we must first know and understand current law and policy, and how both are implemented where we live". For instance, under a post that analyzed the history of background check law in the Brady Act, the author also organized readers to discuss and offer tips for universal background checks to be possible. In this sense, their collaboration in researching gun laws and policies served the essential goal of intellectually preparing them for the need of political advocacy for gun control.

The above examples showed how online groups in the *Daily Kos* community allowed its bloggers to engage in different forms of collaboration, from offering inspiration and feedback to each other, to working collectively as a unity for the coverage of events/issues. Compared to the *Daily Kos*, *RedState* is of a much smaller size, which makes it difficult for bloggers to formulate similar groups and exert influences as in the *Daily Kos* groups. It is not surprising that, examining the *RedState* blog posts and secondary materials, I have not found the existence of similar *RedState* groups. But, based on the description from interviewees, *RedState* bloggers were also engaged in some forms of collaboration in content production.

First, based on the interviews with *RedState* editor Ethan and the frontpage writer Todd, frontpage writers of *RedState* were engaged with some “self-directed coordination”. They set up their Google group, using its email list and calendar to inform each other on what they would write about and what times they planned to post their writings. On the occurrence of a breaking event such as the Newtown tragedy, they would resort to the online communication to “decide how to attack it from different angles and avoid redundancy”. Secondly, based on the interview with college professor and blogger Paul, although there were no similar online groups on *RedState* as those in the *Daily Kos* community, *RedState* bloggers could be involved in some groups of online conservatives outside *RedState*, engaging in collaboration in content production through these groups. Take Paul’s blogging for example. When he wrote on healthcare reform, he used three email listservs, with 30-50 people per listserv, all of whom opposed the healthcare reform. They communicated everyday with each other using the email listservs. Although they did not strictly coordinate what they planned to write about, they would communicate with each other via email dialogues such as “‘What do you think of this? It’s a dumb idea’. Or ‘it’s great idea!’ Or ‘wait a minute. You are missing the point of this’”. Paul’s blog post that challenged the constitutionality of individual mandate was partly informed by the communication in these online conservatives’ email listservs. From these examples, we can see that although *RedState* is of a smaller scale than *Daily Kos* and does not have similar groups around specific topics or activism goals, its frontpage writers and ordinary bloggers were still engaged in some collaboration through email correspondence among themselves, or through the listservs with online conservatives outside *RedState*. They still shared information, provided feedback, and coordinated writings on the same topic or event, which essentially served the purpose of advocating their political ideological stance.

To summarize, the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* did not just engage in the discursive boundary-work to blur the boundary between journalism and activism. They also put their approach to objectivity into action through their journalistic practices involved in the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate. While professional norms and routines give rise to the “professional logic” that justified professional journalists’ authority in doing the journalistic work (Lewis, 2012), these bloggers’ practices demonstrated that they did not necessarily follow the professional logic in their practices. Different from the journalists of *the Washington Post*, they did not follow the standards of fairness and balance. Instead, they relied on content from partisan media to interpret facts about the issues from their respective ideological lenses and they used the information to highlight the exigency for political action and call on online community members to take actions accordingly. Unlike professional journalists, they did not have the beat system to support collaboration in news production. But with the weak ties among members in various online ideological groups, in and outside the blogging platforms, they could still collaborate in content production in various ways. Being de-professionalized and de-institutionalized (Atton, 2009), their practices were a fundamental remaking of journalistic practices by professional journalists, as guided by their different approach to objectivity. In this approach, the pursuit of factuality and the need for political activism were not incompatible, but could live with each other in these citizen journalists’ discourse as well as practice.

Hybridizing Citizen and Professional Journalistic Approaches in Practices

In Chapter 5, we have talked about how *the Huffington Post* journalists resorted to the discursive boundary-work to differentiate their unique approach to objectivity from both the professional approach by journalists of mainstream media, and the citizen journalistic approach by political bloggers. We found that *the Huffington Post* bloggers emphasized a civic intellectual

interest in blogging unrelated to political activism, and its professional journalists stressed fairness and original reporting but at the same time refused to be neutral.

Here, we will look at how these claims were accomplished in practice. The analysis of their practices involved in the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate shows that in line with their discourse, their journalistic practices were a hybridization of elements from both citizen and professional journalistic approaches while not totally the same with either of them. I will present three overall patterns about their practices: 1) the creation of a civil intellectual environment for bloggers due to editorial curation; 2) its professional news reporters' persistence on original reporting and newsroom collaboration via the beat system; 3) its professional journalists' utilization of "eyes and ears" from *the Huffington Post*'s wide network of bloggers and readers for purpose of doing journalism with an attitude.

Creating a civil intellectual environment for blogging. Let's start from bloggers of *the Huffington Post*. Similar with the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, *the Huffington Post* bloggers relied mainly on their own individual efforts to collect information by accessing information from mainstream media and partisan media. Since most of them were left leaning, the partisan media that they paid attention to included many of those used by *Daily Kos* bloggers, such as *MSNBC*, *Talking Points Memo*, *Daily Kos* and *the Huffington Post* itself. These liberal media outlets offered the information for them to cite from and link to, allowing them to support arguments in line with their political ideological leaning. However, unlike bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, *the Huffington Post* bloggers did not engage in the self-initiated collaboration in content production for their coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate. Some bloggers interviewees mentioned that they would chat with friends/co-workers, online or offline,

for the development of ideas before writing. But besides that, their content production on the issues was mostly carried out on an individual basis.

The other main difference about *the Huffington Post* bloggers, in comparison to bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, was the involvement of editorial curation in their blogging. It turns out that, while *the Huffington Post* bloggers emphasized a civic intellectual interest in blogging as mentioned in Chapter 5, it was the editorial curation that helped create the online environment needed for that purpose. Specifically, results show that at *the Huffington Post*'s blogging platform, editorial curation played the role of setting the civil, intellectual tone of discussion through comment moderation and quality-based selection of blog posts.

First, according to Kiss's (2008) interview with Arianna Huffington, *the Huffington Post* employed a large team of comment moderators and introduced standards in its comment policy for purpose of maintaining civility on the platform. There were "30 moderators who work from home as independent contractors", whose responsibility was to moderate the comments for blogs and news stories to "create a civil environment for discussion" (Kiss, 2008). Its comment policy (The Huffington Post, 2020) required everyone to "be polite" in comments. "Any rudeness, insults, hate, hostility, and negativity" in comments would be removed. Authors of such comments would be excluded from future commenting. With the comment moderation policy and team in place, it allowed bloggers to exchange ideas out of their civic intellectual interest. In my interviews, compared to *Daily Kos* and *RedState* bloggers, bloggers of *the Huffington Post* made much fewer complaints about trolling from commenters. This could be a manifestation of the effect of comment moderation in maintaining civility for the blogging platform.

Secondly, *the Huffington Post* blog editors' quality-based selection of blogs posts also contributed to the creation of a civil environment of discussion for bloggers. According to

secondary materials from its blog editors who talked about blogging (The Huffington Post, 2008), and from its bloggers who talked about publication experiences (planningplaytime.com, 2015; Gillman, 2014), *the Huffington Post* used various specific standards to judge of quality of blogging, ranging from originality of opinion and inclusion of personal perspectives, to some very detailed requirements for grammatical correctness and the reader-friendly 600-800 words' length of posts. From the interview results presented in Chapter 5, we also had a general idea that such quality-based selection of posts provided space for the publication of well thought out pieces of writing, including some from conservative bloggers. Interestingly, based on my reading of *the Huffington Post*'s blog posts on healthcare reform and gun control debate, it was found that with all the quality standards, a great number of blog posts by intellectuals came to be selected, offering in-depth thinking about the issues and setting the tone for discussions in the similar intellectual vein. Here, let's use the blog posts on gun control debate published shortly after the Newtown tragedy for example.

During December 14 – 22, 2012, there were a total of 826 pieces of blog posts, news stories and columns published about the issue of gun control debate. In my content analysis, a random sample of 50 pieces was drawn from it, among which 24 pieces were blog posts. The authors of these posts, similar to those who blogged at *Daily Kos* or *RedState*, came from all works of life. They were college students, schoolteachers, reverend, lawyer, mayor, and so on. Yet a pattern that did not exist in the blog coverage by *Daily Kos* or *RedState* during the same period was that a substantial portion of these posts were contributed by college professors and published authors, whose posts carried the post-tragedy discussion beyond the scope of emotional responses, revealing the complexity of issue in many aspects. In these posts, we can read about college president and public health expert Susan Scrimshaw's opinion that lying

behind the tragedy was the neglect of mental illness issue by the society (Scrimshaw, 2012). We can read about journalism professor Barbara Kelley's worry that public support for gun control might fade soon after the tragedy, based on prior research in public opinions (Kelley, 2012). Also, published author and senior fellow of *Media Matters for America* Eric Boehlert called for news media to cover the school shooting not as an isolated case, but in relation to the context of gun violence issue in America (Boehlert, 2012). Political theorist Benjamin Barber criticized President Obama's speech for lacking a powerful anti-gun violence message (Barber, 2012). Law professor Clarence Jones reminded people that, in the gun control debate, more attention should be paid to gun lobbying influences on policy and the underlying racial issue for gun violence (Jones, 2012). In all these posts, the authors utilized their expertise in a wide range of fields to offer a reasoned, in-depth discussion on the tragedy and the gun issue. At the moment when other bloggers mainly grieved for victims, expressed anger and showed support through blogging, these posts were helpful for bringing scholarly expertise and research findings into the post-tragedy debate, and moving the discussion toward consideration of the deeper challenges for upcoming gun legislation and in American society.

In retrospective, we do not know exactly how these pieces were selected for publications. It was likely that some of these authors were specifically invited by *the Huffington Post* editors to write blogs on the issue. It was also possible that some of them submitted blogs just as other bloggers, and their writings was chosen for quality. No matter which was the case, an inference from the amount of such intellectual authors and the depth of their writing over the issue was that some quality-based editorial curation was at work to enable the publication of these pieces.

While comment moderation helped create a civil environment for discussion, then the existence

of these blog posts showed that quality-based selection of posts was meaningful for contributing to the intellectually driven, reasoned debate among bloggers on the issues they wrote about.

To summarize, while *the Huffington Post* bloggers resembled their *Daily Kos* or *RedState* counterparts in their reliance on individual efforts of collecting information from different media channels including partisan media, it was the involvement of editorial curation in their blogging that served to facilitate the accomplishment of their civic intellectual interest in blogging that was unrelated to political activism. It helped maintain civility in comments and enhanced intellectually driven discussion among bloggers, contributing to the creation of a civil, intellectual environment of discussion on *the Huffington Post*'s blogging platform.

Original reporting and the beat system. Moving the focus to professional journalists at *the Huffington Post*, let's first pay attention to two aspects of their practices that resembled the practices by their counterparts at *the Washington Post*: original reporting, and newsroom collaboration via the beat system.

Although the output of professional journalists at *the Huffington Post* was mainly content aggregation pieces, they still conducted some original reporting in their coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate. Take their coverage of healthcare reform during August 2009, when healthcare reform townhalls took place across the country. The majority of news and column articles on healthcare reform during this period were aggregation pieces, relying on third-party information from other news media to offer news updates, analysis and opinions. For instance, in a piece entitled "Public Option Essential to Health Care Reform", the author summarized "a strongly worded editorial defending the public option" published in *the Denver Post*. Or, in a piece entitled "Healthcare FLASHBACKS", the author cited a news article by *the New York Times*, using it as the basis for analyzing Obama's change of attitude toward

pharmaceutical industry lobbyists. But apart from the content aggregation pieces, there were still some news articles that used original reporting. For example, in “Health Care Discussed At Fundraiser For GOP Senators on Finance Committee” (Delaney, 2009), the reporter wrote:

HuffPost visited a Thursday morning breakfast fundraiser at Charlie Palmer Steak for Finance Committee member Sen Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), featuring ‘special guest’ Chuck Grassley. Standing by the door at the start of the event, Grassley declined to say who might be attending. ‘You’ll have to ask Senator Roberts’, he said before walking inside. ... HuffPost was robbed of its chance to ask Sen. Roberts about the guest list. This reporter and colleague Laura Dean had two exits covered as we waited for breakfast to wrap up. But the senators found a third way out ...

From this excerpt of the story, we can see that the reporter not only conducted original reporting, but also gave a detailed account of their efforts involved in the reporting. In the other pieces that used original reporting, we can also see reporters highlighted their reporting procedures in the writing like this. It shows that when they conducted original reporting, they indeed operated in similar ways as *the Washington Post* journalists – they visited the sites, witnessed the events, and interviewed people, and they also offered cues about these reporting procedures in their writing so as to establish the authority as credible storytellers reporting from the sites for readers.

The other aspect where *the Huffington Post* reporters were similar with *the Washington Post* journalists was the newsroom collaboration via the beat system. *The Huffington Post* also developed a beat system. Although it was less formalized compared to *the Washington Post*, the beat system still allowed for some degree of newsroom collaboration in the coverage of issues. Let’s take a look at how the interviewed political reporter, Henry, worked with his colleagues in *the Huffington Post* Washington D.C. bureau as an illustration of the collaboration.

According to Henry, the internal hierarchy within *the Huffington Post* newsrooms was flatter compared to legacy media outlets such as *the Washington Post*. Although the newsroom

staff occupied different positions such as editors, senior columnists, senior reporters, columnists, and reporters, each member of the newsroom was usually free to determine what they wanted to cover, without the need to get approval from editors or senior staff first. He said, “It’s a culture where it’s not as much orders being given. Everyone is working together with a common goal of just doing good work and good stories.” But still some beat allocation was in place so that everyone could have a main area of subjects to cover. Within the Washington D.C. bureau where Henry worked, there was a simple beat system. Ryan Grim was the bureau chief. Sam Stein covered the Congress and government. Henry himself covered economic news, with a focus on the impacts of economy on people. So, economic issues such as unemployment and poverty were considered the subjects within his beat.

Given the beat allocation in the D.C. bureau, they could collaborate to cover the same issues with different focuses. Take their news coverage of healthcare reform during August 2009, the month of healthcare reform townhalls, for example. The political correspondent, Sam Stein, could focus on government officials’ responses to the proposal, reporting on how Greenspan criticized Obama’s approach to healthcare reform for being unable to address the financial crisis in the health care system (Stein, 2009). At the same time, Henry could focus on ordinary people’s economic concern related to healthcare reform, reporting on how a father of three children felt frustrated about the possibility of losing public option when Obama tried to seek a compromise with Republicans (Delaney, 2009). Reporting from their respective beats, their coverage put together could allow readers to better understand the healthcare reform as a policy making process involving political elites, and a public debate involving ordinary citizens.

What happened in *the Huffington Post* D.C. bureau was not an exception. According to secondary materials (Deford, 2015; *The Huffington Post*, 2008) and the interview with senior

columnist Mia, *the Huffington Post* newsroom was organized into some main subject beats, or “verticals”. Its team of reporters, columnists and editors were specifically assigned to cover a specific vertical, which could be politics, economy, science, media, or women/parenting. According to Mia, when she joined *the Huffington Post*, she was assigned to work on the “parenting vertical”, focusing on the topics of “life, work and family”. Thus when the Newtown tragedy occurred, she contributed to the coverage of the gun issue from her perspective on the parenting vertical, as the other journalists did from their respective verticals.

In sum, results in this part show that practices by *the Huffington Post*'s professional journalists for the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate featured some components of professional routines similar to *the Washington Post* journalists. They conducted original reporting and organized newsroom collaboration via a beat system in similar ways as their mainstream media counterparts. But as we will see in the next part, their practices also featured the incorporation of a citizen journalistic component, which allowed them to offer the journalistic coverage on issues with a point of view.

Finding “eyes and ears” in the network of readers and bloggers. Despite the above-mentioned similarities with *the Washington Post* journalists, *the Huffington Post*'s professional journalists featured a major unique place in their information collection practices. They devised the ways of incorporating the input of readers and bloggers to news reporting: searching actively for citizen sources from their broad network of readers, or organizing collective information gathering by citizens themselves as their “eyes and ears”. These unique information collection practices helped them to cover the issues from the grassroots perspective, allowing them to work in their capacity as professional journalists while still convey their point of view in reporting.

First, let's look at how they searched for citizen sources in news reporting. Reading their original reporting pieces on healthcare reform and gun control debate, one would notice that by the end of many stories, there was a one-line question that asked readers for information: "Do you have information you want to share with HuffPost? Here is how." Clicking into it, readers could find the email address for sharing their knowledge and stories with *the Huffington Post*. The question could be more specific about what information the reporters were looking for, such as "Got a weird health insurance story?", and the email would also be the reporters' own working emails. According to the interviewed political reporter Henry, this was an important way for him and his colleagues to find sources and collect information for further reporting. Let's see how it worked for one of his stories,

At that time, I was doing a lot of stories about individual people dealing with health insurance problems. An important thing as you think was how I get in touch with all of these people. They emailed me because we put in the stories: 'Hey, are you having a problem with such-and-such? Are you trying to get health insurance? Email me.' And then I will email them, interview them, and also do background check and verify whatever we can before doing the story. Everybody has email. Even homeless people these days have email. ... That is something that is definitely different about *the Huffington Post*. It always has been from the time I've been here.

In his quote, two points are worth noting. One, this sourcing practice was a routine *in the Huffington Post* newsroom. Its reporters used this way to tap into its network of readers, looking for real-world people and their stories with regards to the issues they cover. For Henry, this practice helped him find out people who had problems with the healthcare system, which supported his series of news reporting on healthcare reform from ordinary people's perspective. Two, given this practice, Henry's goal of "advocating for the dignity of working people", as mentioned in Chapter 5, and his capacity as a professional news reporter were compatible. As he emphasized in the above quote, he was telling real-life stories and he verified all the facts. In

other words, he was not lowering the professional standards, even though he was writing the story to convey his stance of supporting the dignity of working people.

Secondly, let's look at the other unique information collection practice by *the Huffington Post* journalists. Sometimes, they would go beyond leaving an email in the story and waiting for readers to contact them, but actively organize citizens participants to collectively gather information for their news reporting. As inspired by the successful "Off-the-bus" project of collective campaign coverage by citizen journalists, *the Huffington Post* introduced a so-called "generative feature" in 2009, otherwise known as "eyes and ears" (Michel, 2009; The Huffington Post, 2011). With this feature, its citizen journalism editors would assign specific information gathering tasks for *the Huffington Post* bloggers and readers. All participants would need to sign up and make submissions of the length around 50-100 words. Then, editors would use the submissions for story ideas and assign them to their reporters for further reporting. "Eyes and ears" turned out to be successful for the coverage of healthcare reform, but the feature gradually lost its popularity in 2011 as no more updates could be observed since then. Thus, I will use the "eyes and ears" projects in the healthcare reform coverage for purpose of illustration.

During healthcare reform, *the Huffington Post* assigned a series of "eyes and ears" tasks for purpose of gathering information via its network of readers and bloggers. In August 2009, it asked its bloggers and readers to collectively investigate the House healthcare bill. In September 2009, it asked people to report townhall meetings across different places in U.S. In October 2009 and March 2010, it also cooperated twice with the citizen journalism website blog.newstrust.net, asking people to find and rate media coverage on healthcare reform for selecting the best healthcare stories. The submissions for these tasks were used by *the Huffington Post* for further reporting (Palevsky, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2010), with some submissions selected

for publications on its blogging platform as well (Dennis, 2009; Estes, 2009). More interestingly, looking into the description of the tasks, one would find that these tasks were intended to gather information from a certain grassroots liberal perspective, the perspective of countering the right-wing influences and meanwhile watchdogging political elites. The task for investigating the House bill asked participants to “keep an eye on legislators and lobbyists”, “read through the bill” for “what does the congress hope you’re missing”, investigate into “potential red flags” and highlight “problematic line items”. The task for gathering information from townhall meetings asked participants to record the substance of policy debates and also pay particular attention to tea party protests. The task for healthcare news rating asked participants to include content from liberal news websites such as Think Progress and some factchecking pieces on the tea party talking points. From all these examples, we can see that the “eyes and ears” feature was a citizen journalistic tool for *the Huffington Post* to collect information on healthcare reform from an explicitly liberal perspective. This was in line with how their professional journalists discursively claimed for refusing to be neutral in their approach to objectivity. Lastly, it should be noted that even though some “eyes and ears” submissions were selected as blog posts for publication, the collective information gathering was organized by *the Huffington Post*’s professional journalists, rather than initiated by citizens themselves. This is a main difference from the self-initiated collective information gathering by bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* as mentioned previously.

To summarize, the results with regards to *the Huffington Post* journalists’ practices show that their practices were a hybridization of elements from professional and citizen journalism. Like journalists at *the Washington Post*, professional journalists at *the Huffington Post* offered some coverage of issues through original reporting and collaboration via the beat system. But they also incorporated a citizen journalistic component in news reporting, through the practices

of sourcing among readers and organizing collective information gathering by citizens. Like the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, its bloggers relied on their individual efforts to access information from various information channels, including partisan media. But their blogging and commenting were also curated by editors, which helped maintain a civil intellectual environment for blogging. Overall, for both bloggers and professional journalists at *the Huffington Post*, it was through the hybridization of professional and citizen journalistic practices that their unique approaches to objectivity could be accomplished, allowing them to follow their civic intellectual interest in blogging or to work as a professional journalist with a point of view on issues.

Up until now, I have presented the results about how journalistic practitioners from the outlets differently located in the field conducted and organized their journalistic activities to cover healthcare reform and gun control debate. The results revealed the fluidity of journalistic practices for the coverage of the issues. There was no single, “solid” way of doing journalism, but a variegated, “liquid” picture of journalistic practices in changing. Journalists of *the Washington Post* were experimenting the new way of information collection and novel content of news, while also adapting blogging to professional standards and routines. Political bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* engaged in a fundamental remaking of journalistic practices, doing journalism without following the main professional standards and routines such as fairness, balance and collaboration via the beat system. They relied on partisan media information to interpret facts from their ideological lenses, used blogging to call for political action, and leveraged weak ties in online groups for collaboration in content production. Bloggers and professional journalists of *the Huffington Post* followed neither the approach of professional journalism nor that of citizen journalism. They tried to hybridize the elements from both approaches, combining blogging with editorial curation, and incorporating bloggers and readers’

input into the process of news reporting. In the variegated picture of practices, the normative prescriptions of professional norms could no longer define how journalistic work should be conducted. Instead, practitioners of the outlets differently located in the field did journalism in different ways, thereby accomplishing their different approaches to objectivity as they claimed.

Up next, I will look at the field mechanism lying behind the practitioners' different ways of accomplishing objectivity, by presenting the results on the main resources and the heteronomous influences involved in their journalistic production. Depending on their locations in the field, these practitioners had different resources available, allowing them to enact their approaches to objectivity. They were also susceptible to different heteronomous influences, preventing them from enacting objectivity as they claimed should be. The analysis of resources and heteronomous influences can help us understand the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy in the field, revealing further uncertainty in the fluid picture of journalism.

Resources and Heteronomous Influences

In Chapter 2, based on prior research on journalism and the field theory (Benson, 2013; Bourdieu, 1984), I have summarized a framework about field locations and structural relationships for professional and citizen journalism in the journalistic field (Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2). In that framework, the journalistic field is situated in between the fields of politics and economy, and the civil society, playing the role of the intermediary between the political and economic system, and citizens and civic associations in the civil society. Within the journalistic field, professional journalism is located toward the heteronomous pole, close to politics and market. Occupying this location, professional news media and journalists have access to a great amount of economic capital from market operation, social connections with authoritative sources, and cultural credentials in their professional status. But it also makes them susceptible to

heteronomous influences from market and politics. By comparison, citizen journalism is located toward the autonomous pole, close to the civil society while away from the political and economic system. Occupying this location, it has access to the extensive networked social capital in the loose connections between citizen journalistic practitioners. It is also more autonomous from the influences of politics and market, although it is also susceptible to some heteronomous influences from citizens and civic associations in civil society. In the framework, both professional and citizen journalism are under the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy, which play out in different ways depending on their field locations.

This framework presented in Chapter 2 is built on prior research. In the context of my research, more questions need to be answered for the understanding of the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy lying behind the journalists' different ways of accomplishing objectivity. For these journalists from the outlets differently located in the field, when they talked about the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate, what resources did they consider as important for the issue coverage? Did they feel any heteronomous influences, and if so, what were the influences? How did these different resources and influences affect the autonomy and heteronomy in the accomplishment of objectivity by the journalists? In this part, the results will help us formulate some understanding with regards to these questions.

Table 6.2 shows the resources available for journalistic production and the heteronomous influences on it, as mentioned by journalists from *the Washington Post*, the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, and the semi-professional outlet *the Huffington Post*. Overall, all of them were doing their journalistic work under the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy. While the different resources available to them facilitated the accomplishment of their respective approaches to objectivity as they claimed, the heteronomous

influences nonetheless prevented them from doing journalism as they thought should be. I will present the results in the sequence of 1) the resources available to and the heteronomous influences for journalists of *the Washington Post*, which is located close to market and politics; 2) the resources and heteronomous influences mentioned by political bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, with the focus on the double edge of networked social capital among the bloggers; 3) the resources and heteronomous influences for bloggers and professional journalists of *the Huffington Post*, with the focus on the benefit and problem from the commercial operation of this semi-professional outlet. Due to the sensitivity of discussions on heteronomous influences, some interviewees asked for confidentiality. Thus, besides using pseudonyms, I will also not offer background information for these interviewees to avoid giving out identifying information.

Table 6.2

Resources and heteronomous influences for journalists at Daily Kos and RedState, the Washington Post, and the Huffington Post

Media outlet(s)	Resources available	Heteronomous influences
<i>The Washington Post</i>	Large amount of financial resource in support of newsroom operation; access to government official sources.	Influence of political elites that led to overuse of anonymous sources; financial pressure that led to focus of news on the Washington D.C.; impact of market and financial pressure on horse-race coverage.
<i>Daily Kos & RedState</i>	Personal investment of time and efforts; networked social capital in online liberal/conservative communities; some financial resource for website operation.	In-group pressure for opinion expression due to partisan divides.
<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Financial resources in support of the newsroom operations; networked social capital in the online network of the Huffington Post bloggers & readers.	Commercial influence shown in the “click-bait” journalism.

When journalism is located close to market and politics. From the field perspective, compared to the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* and the semi-professional outlet of *the Huffington Post*, the professional news media outlet of *the Washington Post* is located more toward the heteronomous pole of the journalistic field, being closer to the fields of politics and economy. Headquartered in the Washington D.C., the newspaper is known for its strong political reporting, especially its coverage of policy making procedures in D.C. During the periods of healthcare reform and gun control debate coverage (2009-2013), it was a public company owned by the Graham family and operated with revenue from advertisements and subscriptions. Given its field location vis-à-vis politics and market, it was not surprising that its journalists considered two types of resources as important to their issue coverage: their access to government official sources, and the financial resource available for their journalistic work. These resources allowed them to cover the two issues effectively and in-depth, fulfilling their obligation of informing the public debate as they claimed. But its journalists also felt the heteronomous influences from political elites and market, which compromised their ability to hold politicians accountable, and constrained their range and depth of reporting.

First, let's look at these journalists' access to government official sources, and the related heteronomous influences from political elites. The access to government official sources was important to their coverage of policy issues such as healthcare reform and gun legislation, as shown by previously mentioned content analysis results and the interviewees' explanation. In Chapter 4, we already talked about the predominance of elected official sources in their issue coverage. Such sources were used in more than 70% of *the Washington Post's* news articles on gun control debate, and more than 80% of its news articles on healthcare reform. It was an integral part of these journalists' daily routines to use government official sources for collecting

and verifying information in political reporting. According to business reporter and White House correspondent Mike, their coverage of policy issues demanded them to attend government news conferences and briefings, and conduct interviews with officials on a regular basis. The editor and writer of political analysis blog *the Fix*, Jared, also said that he often needed to contact members of the Congress for information verification. In Mike's words, the access to government official sources allowed them to be able to "query the officials", "get responses from them", and "triangulation information that you might pick up from people on the hill and from public statements", thereby reporting on policy making procedures effectively and accurately.

However, sometimes, the access to government official sources were not granted without conditions. According to the Ombudsman Luke, government officials often agreed to offer responses and even leaked materials on the condition of staying anonymous. The use of anonymous sources has not been a fresh topic in journalism. It is helpful for speeding up the coverage of breaking events and facilitating investigative journalism, but it can also make journalists fail to hold the sources accountable for what they said (Christie, 2014). In *the Washington Post's* coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate, it was not rare that journalists would quote "a senior administration official", rather than naming the source, for purpose of confidentiality. This compromised their ability to hold government officials accountable. But as Luke said, major players in journalism, including *the Washington Post*, continued to use anonymous official sources for the benefit of access to their information, especially the leaked documents. Luke did not totally dismiss the necessity of this practice, but for him, the use of anonymous government sources was "flagrant" at *the Washington Post*:

They say, 'A White House source told me this', without in anyway qualifying the quality of that source. I, as a sophisticated reader and knowing about Washington, I think, 'Well, who is that White House source? Is that the janitor? Is that a lower level secretary? On

the other hand, is it the Vice President?’ I don’t know. Readers deserve to have the source defined. Readers deserve having the news organization tell them why they granted anonymity. I wrote four columns, each one of them critical of the excessive use of anonymous sources. And in my opinion, it only got worse.

In his opinion, journalists themselves were partly to blame for the abuse of anonymous government sources. He criticized “the culture of anonymity that many journalists in Washington like to use anonymous sources because it makes it appear that they’re really on the inside”. But meanwhile, he emphasized that “the culture of anonymity” was also created by political elites who attempted to “control the message” and did not “want to be held accountable by name”. Business reporter and White House correspondent Mike echoed this point. For him, the political elites’ control of message, as reflected in the frustrating practice of using anonymous official sources, had become worse from one administration to the next. He said,

I covered three years of the Bush presidency and I was thinking it’s going to somehow be a more open White House (Note: with Obama as the President). It really was, for me at least, a more closed White House. You always felt like you’re at the mercy of them, what they choose to share with you. They would almost never give you stuff unless it was self-serving. ... It was just an incremental excruciating difficult process.

Such complaints from Luke and Mike were also heard from other journalists. An article in *Columbia Journalism Review* made a similar criticism about the information control during the Obama administration, citing *the New York Times* journalist Dean Sanger who said, “This is the most closed, control freak administration I’ve ever covered” (Simon, 2015). Given the overbearing power of political elites in controlling information for the press, journalists had to resort to the use of anonymous sources, especially when they did not try to push back.

Secondly, let’s look at the financial resource available for *the Washington Post* journalists, and the related heteronomous influence from the market. In the interviews, some of the journalists directly emphasized the importance of financial support for the newsroom. For

them, it was important that the newspaper could afford to support explanatory reporting, long-term data-driven investigation, or a team of online staff solely responsible for screening out profane comments on its website. Quality journalism could be expensive to produce. In the Ombudsman Luke's words, it "takes money" and "takes staff". Without directly commenting on the size of financial support for *the Washington Post* newsroom, he used *the New York Times* as an example instead, "A quality news organization like *the New York Times*, their newsroom budget is about 330 million dollars. That's a huge number. Someone has to pay for a journalist to be able to take three months, work on a project and make depth reporting".

These journalists also pointed to the importance of financial support to newsroom in an indirect way by talking about the benefit of Jeff Bezos's 2013 purchase of the newspaper. For example, *the Washington Post* website editor, Greg, said "Mr. Bezos has brought some money into the business that it needed". Or as the Ombudsman Luke said, "It helps to have an owner who has lots of money". These comments are to be understood in the context of the financial difficulty for *the Washington Post* during the periods of their healthcare reform and gun control debate coverage. As typical for the newspaper industry in general, *the Washington Post* suffered shrinking profits in its painful transition to the Internet era, when online platforms took a lion's share from advertising revenue for print media (Gunther, 2007). During 2009-2012, for purpose of downsizing, the newspaper closed some of its local bureaus, streamlined editing desks, and cut reporting staff by offering buyout (Mufson, 2012; Pijanowski, 2009; Prexton, 2011). Speaking of the newspaper's situation during the healthcare reform coverage, the Ombudsman Luke said, "the first year I was there (*Note*: 2009), I believe they lost 40 million dollars. That certainly affects coverage." Here, we can see that the importance of financial support to the

newsroom was also manifested in the fact that when the basis of advertising revenue was no longer solid, its journalists could feel the negative influence in their coverage.

Specifically, the influence was reflected in the narrowing of reportorial focus and the predominance of horserace news. To save profits, the publisher Katharine Weymouth adjusted the newspaper strategy by focusing its news reporting more on the Washington D.C. to serve the local market, a strategy of “about Washington and for the Washingtonians”. An interviewee told me, “It is a reflection of the nature of the news business. Focusing more intensely on Washington was aimed at keeping us financially viable and focused on readers who were departing from us and cancelling their subscription.” For the journalistic coverage, this could mean a narrower emphasis on political elites in D.C. One of the interviewees, the writer and editor of *the Fix*, Jared, pointed to this influence in an indirect way through the comparison of his coverage before and after Jeff Bezos’s purchase of the newspaper. He said,

The Fix used to write about individual House and Senate races on a regular basis. That’s something more of a niche thing that maybe the political elite in Washington are interested in. We don’t spend a whole lot of time doing that now. We are now certainly catering toward a broader audience of people who may not be as inclined to read about an individual House or Senate race these days. We are much more interested in the policy debates that are happening in Congress.

From Jared’s description, we can see that at the time when the newspaper tried to keep local readers/subscribers and stay financially viable, it led to a narrowed focus of *the Fix*’s political coverage on congressional races, without being able to afford a broader coverage of the more substantive congressional policy debates that the public are concerned about. Moreover, the need to cater to the local market not only affected the newspaper’s scope of coverage, but also affected how it covered political issues. According to the ombudsman Luke, the predominance of horserace news was another consequence of trying to cater to the local market. He said,

I don't know how much time you spent in Washington. But if you meet someone for the first time in Washington, if they are in all connected with public policy, they will try to figure out very quickly whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, a Conservative or a Liberal. It's just their mindset is naturally that way. With such a large readership in Washington that is in the political setting, I think and probably somewhat understand a lot of their coverage was that way. But in my opinion, it was too much that way.

From his perspective, the predominance of horserace news was partly related to the newspaper's need to attract the local readership with their horserace "mindset". This understanding resonated with prior research on horserace news (Hopmann & Strömbäck, 2010), which showed it as a market-driven option that could eliciting greater interest from readers, with its focus on the game-like, sensationalistic side of politics. Although Luke could "understand" this option, he was at the same time highly critical of this tendency in newsroom and, in his Ombudsman's role, urged the newsroom for more explanatory reporting on policy substances.

To summarize, the results show that, as suggested by the previous framework of locations in the journalistic field, there were the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy at the field location occupied by *the Washington Post*. At the newspaper's location close to politics and market, the available resources made it possible for its journalists to conduct journalistic work in some of the ways as indicated by their approach to objectivity, whereas the heteronomous influences of political elites and market also constrained them from accomplishing it. On the one hand, they enjoyed the access to government official sources and the rich store of financial resource, even during a period of business challenge. The resources enabled them to cover policy making processes with accuracy, efficiency, and depth of explanation. But on the other, the field location made them susceptible to political elites' informational control and the pressure to cater to local market needs, compromising their ability to offer in-depth explanation for the public and hold politicians accountable for the information they provide.

The double-edge of networked social capital. Citizen journalistic websites, as shown by the framework of locations in the journalistic field, are located toward the autonomous pole of the field, being farther away from influences from political elites and market and relying on the networked social capital among citizen journalistic practitioners for sustained content output. But this location does not mean an exemption from heteronomous influences. The results about *Daily Kos* and *RedState* show that this location in the field also involved the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy for political bloggers at these outlets. The loose connections among ideological likeminded people motivated their efforts of blogging and enabled collaboration in content production, but such connections also brought the bloggers the pressure from different political fractions among liberals/conservatives, constraining their expression of opinions.

First, in line with prior research on blogging (Lowery, 2006), journalistic production by bloggers at *Daily Kos* and *RedState* indeed involved limited economic resource, but mainly relied upon their personal investment of time and efforts. Most of the interviewed bloggers did not mention the factor of money or financial support as important for their blogging. Only the *RedState* editor Ethan and the *Daily Kos* frontpage writer Rowan brought up this factor in the interviews. Based on their explanation and secondary materials (Daily Kos, 2006, 2020; RedState, 2020), at the times of the interviews (2017-2018), *Daily Kos* had three editors, 21 staff writers, and three featured front-page writers from its community, while *RedState* staff was a much smaller size, with only two editors, and 10 front-page writers. Financial resource, mainly coming from advertising revenue and also from online community members' donations, was needed only for paying the editors, staff writers, and some of the front-page writers, and for supporting technological operation of the websites. Most bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*

were unpaid. Financial resource did not play a substantial role in the journalistic practices by the large networks of unpaid frontpage writers and ordinary bloggers.

But most of the interviewees placed great emphasis on the time and efforts they put into blogging. *RedState* blogger Scott said, when he concentrated on blogging, he worked “from six in the morning to eleven at night”. As revealed by their explanation, being a blogger involved more than just the activity of writing. It involved collecting information regularly from different media channels, as explained previously in this chapter. It also involved reading and commenting on other community members’ posts to stay engaged and responsive. For some bloggers, it also meant managing multiple personal blogs at the same time. Besides blogging, most of them also needed to work full-time jobs. *Daily Kos* blogger and university researcher Taylor told me, “This is all volunteer work. It takes time away from my family and the rest of my life.” More than one blogger had once considered giving up on blogging because they could not afford the time. *Daily Kos* blogger and web developer Robert started to work on his long-term project of collecting and analyzing Affordable Care Act enrollment data in October 2013, but it became such a conflict with his business and personal life. “It’s eating up a lot of my time. I’d lost business because of it. I had gotten shingles because of it. I was almost ready to let it go, but I had so many people who were trying to get me to keep it going”. For these quotes and examples, we can see that for these bloggers, the personal investment of time and efforts was key to their sustained involvement in journalistic production.

Secondly, the networked social capital in the form of loose connections among the online community members was another main resource for their journalistic production. Benkler (2006) has explained the implication of a vast online network of free information and content producers for citizen journalists’ content production. According to him, when we consider such a network

of bloggers altogether on the whole, it is capable of yielding information and opinions on a regular basis and with sustainable influences, without having to rely on organizational support as in the case of professional news media. This is true for *Daily Kos* and *RedState*. The coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate by both the outlets was contributed by their network of frontpage writers and ordinary bloggers. Although each blogger may have their constraints of time, information, expertise and interest, all the bloggers put together allowed for a continued flow of output on the issues. Benkler's point is indeed applicable to the cases under study.

But above and beyond that, for the bloggers of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, the networked social capital also played the function of helping enable their collaboration in content production and motivate their continued engagement in blogging. In the previous part on these bloggers' journalistic practices, we have already discussed how the loose ties between members of online ideological groups within and outside these platforms, who shared interest in the same topics or some goals of political activism, allowed the bloggers to share information, provide mutual feedback and jointly cover an issue/event through self-initiated teamwork. Of course, not all the bloggers belonged to such groups. But even for the other bloggers, the ties with ideological likeminded people on the same platform could exert a psychological effect of making them feel connected, supported and motivated. In the interviews, many bloggers called the blogging platforms their "community". They found a community here, because they had spent years writing on this platform and developed friendships, or because they found the platform a place where they could get their voices heard. *RedState* blogger and college professor Steve said that this conservative blogging platform became the place where he would always like to float his opinions on law and policy, because of the friendly audiences here, who were unlike his professor colleagues in college. As these bloggers considered the blogging platforms their

“community”, they also defined their blogging as a contribution for the community. Blogging was a way for themselves to “provide a space that community members enjoy coming to” and “give back to the community”. In the interview, *Daily Kos* front-page writer Rowan shared an anecdote with me. For several times, he did not post his weekly column as usual. Then some *Daily Kos* members, or “Kossacks” as called in the *Daily Kos* community, sent him emails, asking him “Are you all right? You didn’t post this week. I hope nothing’s wrong with you”. Such examples show that the loose ties among bloggers and readers on the same platform actually gave rise to a communal feeling, which functioned as an important factor to motivate their blogging and keep them on the platform.

Thirdly, despite the above-mentioned beneficial effect of networked social capital in the blogging communities, the connections could also exert negative influences on blogging, leading to self-censorship and constraining the bloggers’ expression of opinions.

From Jamieson and Cappella’s (2008) research on conservative media, we have known that conservative media outlets such as *Fox News* and *the Rush Limbaugh Show* utilized a discourse of in-group and out-group to define the insular interpretive communities of conservative audiences with polarized opinions. Here, the results show that, at the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, there was a similar process of the online blogging communities exerting the in-group pressure on bloggers. As it turned out, both the liberal community at *Daily Kos* and the conservative community at *RedState* contained further political fractions, where some partisan ideology and political candidate were more popular than others. For those who did not stand with the popular side, the pressure could be exerted through trolling from other community members or feedback from editors, leading to self-censorship. Here are two examples.

In *Daily Kos*, according to some interviewees, the expression of their support for some controversial candidates, such as Hilary Clinton, could draw attacks. A blogger said that since people tended to pick sides among candidates, to blog in support of the less favorable candidates could get the author into some stupid mess in dealing with vile comments. Another blogger shared with me his own experience with trolling after he wrote a blog post in defense of Hilary Clinton, which made him stop writing as a front-page writer for *Daily Kos*. He said,

People would attack me. They would say, ‘Oh, you shouldn’t say this because you shouldn’t be so aggressive in defense of Hilary.’ It hindered me a little bit. The split in the partisanship of the membership that I was seeing in the primaries. A lot of my readers supported Sanders and even though I supported Clinton, I didn’t want to pick them off. I would try to offer the lighter side for my readers, regardless of which side they’re on.

Similarly, a blogger at *RedState* told me that he once got into trouble for expressing an unpopular opinion in the online conservative community. Claiming to be a conservative with libertarian leaning opinions, he wrote a piece criticizing the loss of civil society under the Patriot Act after the 911 attack. But many readers and some editors did not appreciate his criticism that a republican President was responsible for denying people the constitutional rights. Although the editors did not take down the piece, he said he could feel disapproval from the editors’ feedback. In result, these bloggers who felt the pressure developed some ways of self-censorship for publishing in these platforms. The *Daily Kos* blogger, after his unpleasant experience with trolling, set up a smaller-scale group blog outside of *Daily Kos*, with several friends with similar political opinion. He stopped publishing the pieces that might draw attack from other bloggers or readers in *Daily Kos*, and chose to publish them in his own group blog. The *RedState* blogger said that he simply refrained from publishing any libertarian leaning opinions at *RedState*.

To summarize, the results about *Daily Kos and RedState* show that the field location of these citizen journalistic websites could also involve the contradicting forces of autonomy and

heteronomy for bloggers' journalistic production. These citizen journalistic websites were located at the overlap between the journalistic field and the wide, open network of citizens and civic associations in the civil society. These websites were at the same time the platforms of citizen journalism, and the communities of online liberal/conservative activists. The bloggers on these websites played the dualistic role of being a citizen journalist and meanwhile an active participant in civic associations as defined by different political ideologies and activism goals. Their connections with other members in such civic associations constituted the network social capital that motivated and supported their blogging efforts, allowing them to engage in sustained content production without necessarily relying on large amount of advertising revenues. In this sense, the networked social capital facilitated the bloggers' freedom in journalistic production, exempting them from the influence of market. But at the same time, as shown in the above examples, the membership in the civic associations also led to the in-group pressure that censored some minority opinions. In this sense, the connections also constrained the bloggers' freedom in expression, creating the insular echo chambers where some voices were silenced.

The benefit and risk of commercialization for *the Huffington Post*. As a semi-professional outlet that combines blogging and professional journalism, *the Huffington Post*'s field location is in the middle zone between citizen journalistic media and professional news media. On one side, with the great number of liberal bloggers on this platform, it features a partial overlap with the broad network of citizens and civic associations in the civil society, as similar with the citizen journalistic websites of *Daily Kos* or *RedState*. On the other side, due to its reliance on commercial operation to support its blogging platform and its team of professional journalists, it is also located as proximate to the field of economy, as similar with the

professional news media of *the Washington Post*. So, given this location, what resources were deemed important by its practitioners and what heteronomous influences were existent for them?

The results show that, just as the political bloggers at *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, bloggers of *the Huffington Post* also stressed that their investment of personal time and efforts was the key resource that supported their blogging. Their writings on healthcare reform and gun control debate were the output of their extensive, sustained research on these issues, which took time away from their daily work, study, family or retirement life. But besides this point, there were two main patterns that deserve attention. First, in the case of *the Huffington Post*, the networked social capital in the connections among bloggers and readers was greatly emphasized by its professional journalists as a main resource for their journalistic production. Second, *the Huffington Post*'s commercial operation, driven by the pursuit of website traffic, brought a huge amount of financial resource in support of its content production, but it also led to the problematic utilization of click-bait news that concerned practitioners on the platform.

First, the social capital in the broad network of *the Huffington Post* bloggers and readers was considered an important resource that enabled the practices by its professional journalists. For example, when its professional reporter Henry tried to explain why the newsroom routine of finding sources among readers could be possible for *the Huffington Post*, he said,

The key advantage is that the Internet is the public square right now, and *the Huffington Post* is right in the middle of the Internet. We are huge on the Internet. So when I have wanted to reach people like I was saying earlier (Note: people who have had frustrating experiences with healthcare insurance), I could just get them to email me. I have felt like people have just been at my fingertips and we are right in the middle of that. That has been a tremendous advantage of being at the Huffington Post.

This quote highlighted two conditions for the networked social capital to facilitate his reporting. One, there needed to be an expansive network of people, bloggers and readers, who constituted

the online “public square”. Two, *the Huffington Post* needed to occupy a central position in the network, being “right in the middle” and “huge” in presence and thus being able to have access to information embedded in the network as if it was at its journalists’ “fingertips”. Similarly, when its citizen journalism editor Amanda Michel (2009) explained why *the Huffington Post* could rely on the projects like “Eyes and Ears” to mobilize bloggers and readers for collective information gathering, she said, “our network included doctors, lawyers, professors, students, data crunchers and so on, and the skill sets available to us – when it came to gathering and analyzing information – could match or surpass those found in many newsrooms”. From these quotes, we can see that, in the case of *the Huffington Post*, when numerous bloggers and readers were loosely connected with one another via the same platform, the platform itself could tap into the network, leveraging the connections to get sources or to gather information.

The other important resource involved in the journalistic production at *the Huffington Post* was the large amount of financial resource available for the platform. *The Huffington Post* was an interesting case in terms of financial resource. On the one hand, it has not realized substantial profitability, based on secondary materials (Segal, 2015) and confirmed by the interviewed journalists. But on the other hand, its great performance in website traffic (Olmstead, Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2010) has convinced investors, including some of the world’s largest investor groups such as Softbank, inject money into the platform. During the period of its healthcare reform and gun control debate coverage, it was rarely short of financial support. In 2008, the platform received 25 million dollars’ investment from venture capital firm Oak (www.adweek.com, 2008). In 2009, Arianna Huffington secured the fund of 1.75 million dollars for the hiring of editors and reporters specifically for its Investigative Journalism initiative (Huffington, 2009). In 2011, the platform was purchased by the American Online (AOL) Inc.,

with the deal of 315 million dollars (Peters & Kopytoff, 2011). It was described, in a *Columbia Journalism Review* article, as a move that provided “Money! Money and resources” to the platform’s operation (Kirchner, 2011).

The abundant financial support allowed *the Huffington Post* to be able to support its team of journalistic staff, facilitating the afore-mentioned journalistic practices of original reporting by its reporters, editorial curation on blogs, and comment moderation for the platform. The financial support also meant some palpable benefit of reducing the chores involved in its professional journalists and bloggers’ content production. For example, when the senior columnist Mia compared her experience of blogging at *the Huffington Post* to her former experience of writing for *the New York Times* blog, she commented that at *the Huffington Post*, she could concentrate more on her own writing when the platform could afford a team of editorial staff to manage other writers on the vertical, saving her time from that part of the work. The *Daily Kos* blogger Ron, who had once written for *the Huffington Post*, admitted that *the Huffington Post*’s team provided bloggers with more technical help, such as helping him add video/audio to his blog posts.

While investors saw the monetization potential in millions of users that the Huffington Post was able to reach, the attempt of maintaining the website traffic could nonetheless conflict with the quality of journalism. On the one hand, *the Huffington Post* claimed to be committed to the best of traditional journalism, as mentioned before. But on the other hand, its pursuit of website traffic necessitated the production of clickbait news. Wu (2017), in his book “The Attention Merchant”, said that *the Huffington Post* founders were “masters of attention capture”, who “pioneered what would become known as clickbait: sensationally headlined articles, paired with provocative picture – a bikini-clad celebrity was always good (‘Watch Naked Heidi Klum in Seal’s New Video’).”

In my interviews, both its professional journalists and bloggers shared their concern over clickbait news on this platform. Senior columnist Mia recounted a case of clickbait news from the coverage of healthcare reform. It was an article about how the French healthcare system helped new mothers with newborn care, screening them for postpartum depression and teaching them the Kegel exercises to strengthen muscles. Then the editor decided to put a “clickbaity” headline on it – “Why French Women Don’t Pee When They Laugh”. Mia said, “It went crazy viral! Same story. It’s the same story. How do I feel about that? I don’t know. We’ve found a way to get people to read things. But sometimes we don’t love what it is they want to read.” Here, Mia’s attitude was ambiguous. As a veteran journalist, she understood the importance of getting readers interested in news. But meanwhile, she was not a fan of such clickbait news. Later in the interview, when we discussed her understanding of journalism, she pointed out in particular that “the BuzzFeed type of reporting”, that is, the creation of viral clickbait content by offering a list or adding interesting videos, was not considered journalism for her. Similar to Mia, a blogger interviewee, who was also a long-time reader of the website, told me that he was concerned about how *the Huffington Post*’s news offerings tended to “be moving toward clickbaity kinds of things” and “doing it more and more as BuzzFeed”. From these quotes, we can see how the platform’s commercially driven pursuit of website traffic could compromise the quality of journalism and raise concerns from its journalists.

To summarize, the results about *the Huffington Post* show that as a semi-professional outlet located in between citizen journalistic websites and professional news media, it also faced the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy in its journalistic production. Its commercially driven pursuit of website traffic made it a highly popular hub of information and attracted huge financial investment. Without the financial resource, it was much less likely to

support all the practices for the accomplishment of objectivity as understood by its journalists. But the pursuit of website traffic also compromised their goal of committing to the best of traditional journalism, as reflected in the production of clickbait news.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presents interviewing evidence to show the fluidity of journalistic practices involved in the practitioners' accomplishment of their respective approaches to objectivity. There is no single, solid way of doing journalism for news outlets differently located in the journalistic field, but a variegated, fluid picture of different ways of doing journalism by practitioners who work at the outlets different located in the field and had different understandings of objectivity. *The Washington Post* journalists were experimenting with some new practices on its journalistic blogging platform, although still within the bounds of their professional approach to objectivity. *Daily Kos* and *RedState* bloggers were remaking the practices of information collection and presentation to make their journalism speak for their political ideology and serve the goal of activism. Practitioners at *the Huffington Post* were hybridizing different elements from both professional and citizen journalism to allow for blogging with a civic intellectual interest, and journalism with an attitude.

This chapter also looks at the resources available for these practitioners and the heteronomous influences they were susceptible to, revealing the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy lying behind their journalistic practices. It turns out that corresponding to the different field locations occupied by these outlets, there were different resources that facilitated their journalistic work, as well as various heteronomous influences that constrained them from doing journalism as they thought should be. Political elites' information control and market needs hindered *the Washington Post* journalists' fulfillment of their

understanding of objectivity. In-group pressures due to political factions within the online communities of *Daily Kos* and *RedState* hampered the full expression of opinions. At *the Huffington Post*, the pursuit of website traffic necessitated clickbait news that its journalists were not proud of, compromising the commitment to the best of traditional journalism as its founders claimed.

The dialectical forces of autonomy and heteronomy add further uncertainty for the already fluid picture of journalistic practices, because of two reasons. First, the heteronomous influences were related to the political system, the market condition, and the dynamics of public opinion and political movement in the civil society. The changes outside of the journalistic field, such as the new Presidential administration's information policy, or new developments in grassroots liberal/conservative politics, will bring contingency and risk to the picture of journalistic practice as described in this chapter. Second, the fact that these practitioners talked about the heteronomous influences shows that they were conscious of the problems and some of them wanted to make changes. As *the Washington Post* ombudsman Luke emphasized in the interview, in many cases, the journalists should push back. But, will they push back? The uncertainty also resides with these practitioners' choices going forward.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Discussion

After the long journey of empirical inquiries that involve the analysis of the news media coverage of two policy issues and the in-depth interviews of practitioners who were involved in the production of the contents across four media outlets, I hope to integrate all the empirical observations presented in Chapters 4-6, and bring the discussion to a more general theoretical level on the contestations over journalistic objectivity in the changing conditions. Thus, in this Chapter, I will first synthesize the key findings about the contestation over objectivity by journalists of the different media outlets. Then, I will discuss the implications of findings for the theoretical understanding of journalistic objectivity, and for the real-world role of journalism in the so-called “post-truth” era. Lastly, I will talk about the method limitations of this research and offer suggestion for future research.

Re-articulating Objectivity in the Contestation

Borrowing Stuart Hall’s concept of “articulation”, I would understand the contestation over objectivity, as depicted in the findings, as a process of these journalists’ “re-articulating” the approach to objectivity for their journalistic work at different locations in the journalistic field. From Hall’s perspective (Grossberg, 1986; Slack, 1996), an ideology is not a given entity, but gets constructed in a process of articulation, the word that carries the dual meanings of expression and linkage. An ideology is expressed, reproduced and negotiated through the joining of distinct elements in discourse, and the joining of discourse, practice and social forces in specific social context. Likewise, this research shows that objectivity is not a fixed doctrine as recorded in journalism textbooks. Instead, the professional and citizen journalists at the media

outlets differently located in the journalistic field, in their struggle for journalistic authority, were re-articulating objectivity by connecting/disconnecting objectivity elements in different ways, supporting their different understandings of journalism and their competing authority claims. The different approaches to objectivity articulated in discourse was also joined to their journalistic practices in specific contexts of issue coverage, leading to the creation of different content and different depictions of social reality in the content. These practices were also the articulation of the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy in journalism.

In a nutshell, the results in this research can be synthesized into six parts of main findings about the contestation as a process of these journalists “re-articulating” objectivity in their journalistic work. They were respectively about the meanings of objectivity as re-articulated by the journalists through connecting/disconnecting objectivity elements in different ways, their practices for the accomplishment of objectivity, the varied manifestation of objectivity in the content of issue coverage, and the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy.

1) Objectivity grounded in providing shared factual knowledge for diverse opinions.

For the journalists at *the Washington Post*, objectivity is grounded in providing shared factual knowledge for people with diverse opinions. Paving and solidifying such a ground is the democratic obligation of journalism. It also demands professional expertise. In the contestation, they not only defended their professional vision of journalism by emphasizing the importance of suspending opinions in reporting and the standards of fairness and factuality, but also highlighted its connections with journalists’ professional expertise and democratic obligation. For them, it was the expertise accumulated from the experiences of specialized reporting within media organizations that enabled them to get facts right and make in-depth explanations about facts. It was the democratic obligation that necessitated making a fair representation of facts that spoke to

everyone. These claims were an important basis of their journalistic authority vis-à-vis citizen journalists. For them, citizen journalism was still ailed by not following the standards of fairness and factuality, the lack of expertise, and insufficient contribution to civic debate.

2) Objectivity grounded in political activism of producing principled substantiation of factual reality. For the political bloggers at *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, objectivity is grounded in political activism of producing principled substantiation of factual reality. The construction of factual reality, in Bourdieu's (1989) expression, expresses the symbolic struggle between "the production and imposition of the legitimate vision of social world" (p. 22), and the attempts to oppose/negotiate/transform the imposed vision by following different principles of vision. These political bloggers' contestation over objectivity contained the attempts to negotiate the imposed vision of the world by professional news media by following a different principle. They tried to blur the boundary of journalism and political activism, seeing their pursuit of objectivity as compatible with the purpose of political activism. They emphasized the standards of factuality and transparency, but disconnected objectivity with the professional journalistic standards of balance and neutrality. For them, the opinion-suspending pursuit of objectivity by professional journalists was either a commercially driven option of false equivalence, or a dishonest attempt to hide the liberal bias. Due to such failures of professional journalism, some important aspects of social reality that mattered to themselves as liberals/conservatives were not getting enough attention. Their participation in journalism was for advocating these aspects of social reality so that they could counter the right-wing truth eroding influences, or get the "real" conservatives' message out. Their narrative around professional journalism's failures was a main justification of their journalistic authority – while professional journalists failed to represent social reality, it was justifiable for them to take part in journalism and take the control over truth to themselves.

3) Objectivity obtained in reasoned engagement of citizens as civic observers with a voice. For the bloggers and professional journalists at *the Huffington Post*, objectivity can be obtained in their reasoned engagement as civic observers with a voice. Its bloggers disconnected their pursuit of objectivity from political activism, and instead highlighted a civic intellectual interest in blogging, because for them, blogging for political activism created ideological echo chambers filled with irrational arguments. Its professional journalists followed the standards of factuality and fairness, but meanwhile they refused to be neutral and hoped to write for what they believed in, because for them the pursuit of neutrality and balance at mainstream media only obscured facts. For these journalistic practitioners at *the Huffington Post*, their unique understanding of objectivity was based on their appraisal of the problems in both professional and citizen journalism, and their epistemic authority was established through making sense of their different approach as an amendment of these problems. Their contestation over objectivity, in this sense, showed their attempt to carve out a semi-professional space of journalism where they could conduct journalism by following their own values and standards, combining blogging and traditional journalism, but unlike either of them.

4) Fluidity of journalistic practices both within and across the different visions of objectivity. The three different approaches to objectivity as articulated in the discourse were accomplished in highly fluid journalistic practices by these journalists. *The Washington Post* journalists experimented with unconventional news content and means of information collection in their journalistic blog. But meanwhile, at both the newspaper and the blog, they were still committed to professional standards and routines, even for the new practices that they were trying out. The political bloggers at *Daily Kos* and *RedState* were remaking journalistic practices to facilitate political activism. They used factual information to support call-to-action messages,

cited partisan media to help interpreting facts from their liberal/conservative perspective, and collaborated with the ideological likeminded to collect information and write blogs. For both the bloggers and the professional journalists at *the Huffington Post*, the accomplishment of their objectivity approach took the combined efforts from the two sides. It was comment moderation by the staff and quality-based editorial curation that created a civil intellectual environment for blogging. It was the network of readers/bloggers that helped with professional journalists' information collection, allowing them to report news from the citizens' point of view. In general, there was no single, solid way of doing journalism, but a variegated, fluid picture of different ways of doing journalism by the practitioners who had different understandings of objectivity.

5) **Varied manifestations of objectivity in the content of issue coverage.** With the fluid practices that put the different understandings of objectivity into action, it was not surprising that some characteristics in these journalists' respective approaches to objectivity were getting manifested in the content of their coverage on the policy issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate. Compared to media outlets located toward the citizen journalistic side, the issue coverage by *the Washington Post* was more focused on news than opinions. Its news coverage was more reliant on elected official sources, and about a wider range of topics. Its opinions were a fairer representation of opinions from both sides of the issues. Compared to media outlets located toward the professional side, the issue coverage by *Daily Kos* and *RedState* was more focused on opinions than the purely informational "newsy" blogs. Their "newsy" blogs were more focused on the topics that mattered to the citizens, such as the issue of gun violence, and public debate and advocacy in healthcare reform. Their opinions were sharply aligned with their political ideological leanings. *The Huffington Post's* issue coverage, in consistency with its semi-professional status, showed some contrast with both *the Washington Post* and the two political

blogging websites. Compared to *Daily Kos* or *RedState*, the issue coverage by *the Huffington Post* was more focused on news than opinions. Its opinion representation was also less polarized. Compared to *the Washington Post*, then, its opinion representation was more favorable to healthcare reform and gun control, showing an explicit liberal leaning. In healthcare reform coverage, its news coverage was also less balanced than *the Washington Post*.

6) The contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy in the accomplishment of objectivity. These journalists' accomplishment of objectivity as they differently understood was also the articulation of the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy in the journalistic field. In Bourdieu's (1984, 1993, 1999) field theory, the field is a network of relations between different locations, and each location is defined by a particular configuration of forces that enable or constrain the action of individuals, groups and organizations occupying the location. Members in the journalistic field face the contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy as well (Benson, 2013; Couldry, 2003). In my research, at the different locations of the journalistic field, the forces of autonomy and heteronomy played out differently in the journalists' accomplishment of objectivity. For *the Washington Post* which was located toward the heteronomous pole of the field, its journalists enjoyed substantial financial support and access to official sources, which enabled them to cover policy issues with accuracy, efficiency and depth of explanation. But meanwhile, politicians' information control and the need of catering to local market needs constrained them from holding political elites accountable and offering coverage with the breadth and explanation as needed by the general public. For *Daily Kos* and *RedState*, which was located farther away from the political and economic system and closer to the civil society, the networked social capital in the online communities of liberals/conservatives was a double-edged sword. It motivated their blogging efforts and allowed for collaboration in content

production. But it also introduced the in-group pressure hindering the expression of some political opinions. For *the Huffington Post*, located at the semi-professional location in between mainstream media and citizen journalistic websites, commercial operation brought abundant financial support for newsroom operation, but its pursuit of website traffic led to the heavy use of sensational click-bait news. In general, the tension of these forces brought further uncertainty to the accomplishment of objectivity by these journalists, because more risks or hopes would be related to the ways they choose to interact with these forces, and to the changing dynamics in and outside of the journalistic field.

In sum, in the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists, what Lewis (2012) called the “professional logic” in journalism, the control over journalistic work that comes from professional norms and professional practices, was not longer the single solid foundation of authority. All the journalists tried to stake their claim to epistemic authority by talking about the set of objectivity-relating values, standards, expertise and practices in their journalistic work, which constituted their different approaches to objectivity. The epistemic ideal of objectivity (Lichtenberg, 1991) was re-articulated into multiple different ways of doing journalism. Objectivity could be professional journalists’ pursuit for factuality and fairness, relying on their professional expertise and with undergirding democratic obligation. It could also be a citizen journalistic pursuit for advocating the liberal/conservative perspective of social reality that professional news media failed to represent. It could further be a joint pursuit by bloggers and professional journalists to attain objectivity as reasoned civic observers with a voice, which was intended to amend the problems in professional and citizen journalism. The different approaches to objectivity supported their competing claims for journalistic authority, helping the journalists to reinforce their respective field locations. The different approaches were

also accomplished in highly fluid practices by these journalists in their coverage of the issues of healthcare reform and gun control debate, and manifested in the content of issue coverage with contrasting characteristics and different depictions of social reality. The contradicting forces of autonomy and heteronomy in the journalistic field brought further uncertainty to the overall picture of differentiation and fluidity.

Besides the main findings, there are also some nuanced findings in the results. First, although my focus was on the contestation in relation to professional status of media outlets and journalists, my selection of cases also allowed for some comparisons by the variation in issues, political ideology and media technology, which also related to some interesting dynamics in the contestation. Secondly, apart from the aspect of power struggle, there was also a less obvious aspect of critical reflection to their contestation. These nuanced findings were also important for our understanding of the re-articulation of objectivity in the contestation.

Issue contrast, political ideology and media technology. The dynamics of the contestation over objectivity can be further complicated by the variations of issues (healthcare reform vs. gun control debate), political ideology (having a political ideological leaning or not; liberal vs. conservative), and media technology (traditional media vs. digital media platforms). In general, the results show that the journalists' practice and discourse for the re-articulation of objectivity could be different, depending on the specific context of issue under coverage, the media outlet's ideological leaning, and the technological basis.

Issue contrast. Compared to the issue of healthcare reform, the issue of gun control debate constituted a very unique context where the journalists performed their approaches to objectivity differently, and conservative bloggers challenged the professional approach more harshly. Specifically, *the Washington Post's* gun coverage tended to follow its objectivity

standards to a lesser extent. Compared to its coverage on healthcare reform, its news coverage was less balanced, and its opinion representation was more reliant on personal anecdotes/observations for evidence. Moreover, opinion polarization was more pronounced on the gun issue. The opinion representation on the gun issue by *Daily Kos*, *RedState* and *the Huffington Post* was more sharply aligned with their left vs. right division, compared to their opinions on healthcare reform. Even *the Washington Post* showed more favorability toward the liberal side in its opinion representation on the gun issue than on healthcare reform. Furthermore, the challenge toward professional news media's approach to objectivity by *RedState* bloggers was much stronger on the gun issue than on healthcare reform. For them, gun control debate was one of the worst cases for liberal media bias, while healthcare reform was treated with more fairness by professional news media. Altogether, the moral cultural war issue of gun control debate did not seem to fit into the "sphere of legitimate controversy" (Hallin, 1989). It was characterized by a lesser extent of the pursuit of balance, a stronger tendency for journalists to articulate personal experiences and stances, and a greater distrust in professional news media.

Political ideology. There was some similarity in how objectivity was re-articulated by journalists at the outlets with a political ideological leaning. The journalists at the outlets having an ideological leaning (*the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState*) were all critical of professional news media's pursuit of neutrality and balance. They all tried to disconnect their pursuit objectivity from these professional standards, hoping to reveal the social reality from their ideological perspectives. But depending on whether the outlet was a liberal/conservative one, the journalists' specific critiques of professional journalism, their goals of journalism and their representations of opinions differed along the ideological line. Journalists at *the Huffington Post* and *Daily Kos* complained about professional news media's pursuit of balance and

neutrality as a commercially driven option that legitimated extreme opinions from conservatives, while those at *RedState* saw it as a dishonest attempt to disguise liberal media bias. Bloggers at *Daily Kos* hoped to use journalism to counter right-wing influences, while those at *RedState* intended to get the “real” conservatives’ message out. The liberal outlets were predominantly pro-gun control and favoring healthcare reform in opinions, whereas *RedState* was almost completely pro-gun rights and anti-healthcare reform in opinions. Altogether, journalists at the outlets with a political ideological leaning united in their challenge to professional journalists’ pursuit of balance and neutrality, but their specific political ideological leaning shaped their critique of professional journalism, their goals of journalism and their representation of opinions.

Media technology. The results give evidence for the technological affordance of news aggregation practice in the digital environment (Anderson, 2013). The practice of news aggregation was criticized by some professional journalists as a robbery from their efforts of original reporting, the “iron core” of objective news work (The New Republic Editors, 2011; Jones, 2009). But my research shows that, for both citizen and professional journalists at the digital platforms, this practice has become an important routine in their journalistic practices. Digital media platforms tended to utilize content aggregation in news coverage more than *the Washington Post* newspaper. Even when we controlled for professional status, *the Washington Post* blog was also more reliant on content aggregation in news coverage than the newspaper. Most journalist interviewees at *the Washington Post* blog used content aggregation as a main way of information collection, although they also stressed original reporting.

Critical reflection around factuality and public interest. Although the journalists were contesting objectivity mainly as a competition for journalistic authority (Carlson, 2017), these actors were not merely interested in the power struggle. There was also a less obvious aspect of

critical reflection to the contestation. It could be noted in how they evaluated the approaches to objectivity by their peers and justified their own approach. It could also be found in the several cases of self-criticisms where these journalists identified problems in journalistic practices at their own platform and even tried to make changes in them.

The aspect of critical reflection could be noted in how their own understandings of objectivity was based upon their critical evaluation of the approach to objectivity by other practitioners. In their contestation, we have heard the critique of professional journalism by journalists at *the Huffington Post*, *Daily Kos* and *RedState* that the emphasis on balance and neutrality obscured facts, and mainstream media's market-driven approach or liberal media bias led to the failure of depicting the aspects of social reality that mattered to them and other members of the public with similar ideological perspectives. They sought to amend or counteract such problems by doing journalism in different ways. We also have heard the criticism of citizen journalism by journalists at *the Washington Post* that citizen journalists often did not get facts right and represent facts fairly, failing to contribute to civic debate. They emphasized their professional expertise that supported their pursuit of factuality, and their democratic obligation undergirding the pursuit of fairness. They hoped citizen journalists to learn from their emphasis on professional expertise and democratic obligation. Amidst the mutual criticisms, these professional and citizen journalists were not simply picking faults in one another. They were considering the other practitioners' approach to objectivity in a critical way and making sense of their own approach as informed by the critical reflection. More importantly, these attempts of critical reflection were revolving around some shared questions around the meaning of journalistic objectivity in general. How should objectivity be accomplished to get facts right? What facts need to be represented, and how to represent the facts so that journalism can better

answer to the need of the public, serving the public interest? Depending on their different locations in the journalistic field, these professional and citizen journalists formulated different answers to these questions. But it is meaningful that the critical evaluation was around the shared questions on factuality and public interest. Their contestation involved the attempts to answer these questions differently, but it was not a disagreement over these questions in general.

The same set of questions also inspired some attempts of self-critical reflection from these journalists. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) pointed out that actors in the field had the potential to turn the reflective gaze back onto problems in their own practices. The “reflexivity” by journalistic practitioners, according to Ahva (2013), could be considered as comprised of three parts: their ability to identify problems in their own work, to redefine their ways of doing journalism, and to alter their course of action accordingly. By this definition, we can see that the journalists’ discourse and practice contained several cases of self-critical reflection. These cases were mentioned, but not elaborated in the results chapters. But here let’s consider them altogether with more focus.

At *RedState*, some bloggers expressed opposition to rumor-based criticisms on their platform such as the birther’s argument, when they talked about their standard of making criticisms based on facts. But they did not show the attempt of considering how to counter such rumors in their blogging. Nor did they do anything to dispel rumors on their platform.

At *the Washington Post*, in his explanations with regard to the heteronomous influences on journalism at the newspaper, the former ombudsman Luke criticized the newsroom’s overuse of anonymous official sources and the predominance of horserace news. In his opinion, these practices compromised journalists’ ability to hold politicians accountable for the information they provided, and to inform the public of policy substance. When he worked at *the Washington*

Post, he used his columns to point out these problems to the newsroom, suggesting journalists should push back against powerful sources and make more explanatory reporting for the public. But his suggestion did not lead to significant changes in newsroom practices.

At *Daily Kos*, the college researcher and blogger Taylor mentioned a change in her blogging practices when she explained the practices involved in gun coverage. After the failure of gun control legislation, she found that the public, including those on the liberal and conservative side, did not have enough understanding of the complicated domain of gun-relating law and policies. But at the same time, she also felt that what *Daily Kos* political bloggers normally did, with their focus on opinion expression and political activism, did not help solve the problem. So, she and other bloggers decided to research into gun law and policies by collaboration, and this idea led to action. They established their *Daily Kos* group “Firearms Law and Policy”. The group, although its essential purpose was still for supporting gun control, was focused on information sharing and collaborative research. They would even choose not to publish advocacy pieces in this group so as to maintain their focus on law and policy research.

The website developer and *Daily Kos* blogger Robert mentioned his transition from political blogging to data journalism, when he criticized the mainstream media’s hit-and-miss approach for healthcare reform coverage. After Obamacare was signed into law and people began enrolling into the Affordable Care Act (ACA), he found that people who opposed or supported healthcare reform were arguing heatedly over the development of nationwide ACA enrollment, but meanwhile neither federal government agencies nor mainstream media could provide the exact information. Similar with Taylor, he felt that blogging as an advocate of healthcare reform only added to the argument, without helping solve the problem. He decided to start a data journalistic project of aggregating and analyzing ACA enrollment data from different

state governments and local media organizations. His data analysis turned out to be useful for bipartisan audiences, being widely cited by healthcare reform supporters and critics alike.

In these cases, the journalists' reflexivity varied by degrees, likely due to their different willingness to change and/or constraints upon change at their specific field locations. Some only identified problems in the journalism at their outlets. Others took further steps to call for some change and even make it happen in their practices. But despite the varying degree of reflexivity, their self-critical reflections were driven by the afore-mentioned questions about how to better pursue factuality and serve public interest in journalism. Depending on their field locations, they did not respond to the questions in the same way, and some of them even did not get to formulate a response, as in the *RedState* cases. But their attempts of self-critical reflection highlighted the relevance and importance of the pursuit of factuality and public interest to these actors regardless of their differentiation in field location.

In sum, when we contemplate the less obvious aspect of critical reflection in the contestation, we can see that the questions around factuality and public interest invited critical reflection from these journalists. Despite the difference in their answers to the questions, their consideration of these shared questions made the contestation the reiteration of these questions, a continued reminder of these important objectivity-relating elements.

Conclusion of the paper. With the main findings and nuanced findings all put together, what do they tell us? They tell us that journalistic objectivity is not a fixed doctrine, but a living system that is open to contestation and it gains its new meanings from contestation. In the contestation over objectivity between professional and citizen journalists, objectivity was re-articulated in different ways by the journalistic practitioners at their outlets varying by professional status, political ideology and media technology, in the specific contexts of issues

under coverage. The ensemble of objectivity-relating values, standards, expertise and practices were connected/disconnected in different ways to support the competing journalistic authority claims by the different groups of journalists. Meanwhile, the key elements of factuality and public interest inspired critical reflection from these journalists around the shared questions about how to better pursue factuality and serve public interest in journalism. Although their answer differed, the reflection around the shared questions made the contestation a continued reminder of the importance of factuality and public interest for journalism. These elements remained the ideological core of objectivity that was reiterated in all the re-articulations.

Theoretical Implications: Journalistic Objectivity as a Living System

This research is meaningful for the understanding of the notion of journalistic objectivity and its relevance to the decentralized regime of journalistic work. The understanding informed by my findings could be summarized into two statements. First, journalistic objectivity is a living system that is open to constant re-articulations, from which it attains new meanings and maintains continued relevance to the rapidly changing journalistic field. Secondly, the re-articulations are predicated upon two core principles implied in the journalistic pursuit of objectivity, the respect for facts, and the commitment to public interest. I will further elaborate these two points through a dialogue with the literature on journalism and journalistic objectivity.

Journalistic objectivity in constant re-articulations. When journalism is changing rapidly to include different practitioners and new practices, is objectivity still relevant? Our answer to this question is closely related to how we understand the notion of journalistic authority itself. Some scholars understand objectivity as a system of professional standards and practices as codified in journalism's professionalization process, taught in journalism textbooks and writ large in media organizations' codes of ethics (Hampton, 2008; McQuail, 2010). This

understanding is often related to the opinions that objectivity is no longer applicable when new practices go beyond the bounds of traditional routines in objective reporting (Tong & Zuo, 2019), or when non-professional practitioners dispute professional standards (Weinberger, 2009).

There is a different line of understanding of objectivity as a constantly adaptive norm (Maras, 2013). From this perspective, the professional norm of objectivity itself is multifaceted, negotiated, and gradually adapted by journalistic practitioners to meet the different needs in journalism and challenges from society. In Chapter 2, we have reviewed the evolution of the professional norm in interpretive reporting, investigative journalism and news photography, which showed that professional journalists have been indeed capable of re-appraising and refreshing their understandings of objectivity in face of new challenges and possibilities. Moreover, from this perspective, the professional norm of objectivity is not the ending point. Objectivity cannot be reduced to codified and thus temporally static professional standards and practices, which stand for one of the ways by which journalistic practitioners can operationalize the epistemic ideal of objectivity in their work (Lichtenberg, 1991). Based on this understanding, objectivity can be made relevant to newly emergent participants and practices in journalism, even though they may go beyond the bounds of professional standards and practices.

My research contributes to the latter line of understanding and gives support to the continued relevance of objectivity in the journalistic field where professional and citizen journalists co-exist and compete. My findings show that journalistic objectivity is not something that practitioners of varying stripes can simply bypass. They must confront it in their practices. Professional journalists' understanding of objectivity was adaptive. They did not just read from their code of ethics about the standards and practices for objective reporting. In the face of challenges from non-professional participants in journalism, they placed great emphasis on

journalists' democratic obligation and on the professional expertise needed for journalistic work in their explanations of their objectivity standards. Non-professional and semi-professional journalists did not agree with professional approach to objectivity, but they still found objectivity relevant. They embraced their own ways of understanding objectivity, re-articulating the notion to justify their different visions of journalism and challenging the definition of journalism by professional journalists.

These findings resonate with what has been found in several recent studies concerning the discourse and practice by journalists with varying professional status. Vos and Thomas (2018) found that when professional journalists tried to shore up their journalistic authority in face of the challenge by non-professional participants and their competing journalistic claims, they were shifting discursively from the emphasis on professional procedures to “a full-throated embrace of journalism’s democratic role” that highlighted the public service aspect of journalism (p. 2006). Fahy (2018) found that when environmental journalists needed to deal with the uncertainty in covering the controversial issues such as climate change, they increasingly adopted the definition of objectivity that was emphatic upon their professional expertise in the field of environmental reporting, which allowed them to make the trained judgment on scientific interpretation. Just as demonstrated in my research, professional journalists in their studies were also engaged in the attempt to re-articulate objectivity in response to new problems/challenges.

Johnson and John III's (2017) survey and interview study of citizen journalists in the U.S. showed that although these journalists resorted to some practices as different from professional journalists, such as the heavy reliance on social media sources, they still considered objectivity as important to them, trying to present information “as objectively and as accurately as possible” for purpose of reinforcing credibility among audiences (p. 352). Burrows's (2018) study on the

indigenous media in Australia and several other countries revealed that journalists in these media outlets, in their attempt to deal with the accusations about bias in their news reporting, tried to “apply a modified version of objectivity” by emphasizing that they resort to fact-driven content to promote indigenous perspectives and prioritize indigenous voices. Similar with what I have found about journalists at *Daily Kos*, *RedState*, and *the Huffington Post*, the non-professional status or the advocacy stance of journalists does not mean the abandonment of objectivity.

Looking at these findings, it is not difficult to see that objectivity cannot be reduced to a static system of professional standards and practices. There is not a single doctrinal notion of objectivity, but multiple ways of understanding and accomplishing objectivity as re-articulated by journalists at different locations of the journalism field, no matter whether they are journalists at the powerful mainstream media, marginal players in the alternative community media, or citizen participants in journalism. With journalism being an “empirical discipline” (Gans, 2004, p. 39), these journalists were re-articulating objectivity in their own ways to make sense of their process of empirical inquiry into the reality, highlighting the values, standards and practices that go into the inquiry and help make the inquiry results trust-worthy. With the journalistic field being a site of power struggle (Bourdieu, 2005), they were also re-articulating objectivity to reinforce their authority claims and deal with authority challenges, legitimating their field existence. In the increasingly decentralized realm of journalistic work, amidst the unfolding power struggle between different types of practitioners, such re-articulations of objectivity will continue occurring. It is through the constant re-articulations that objectivity as an adaptive norm can “accommodate different perspectives” (Maras, 2013, p. 139), and stay continuously relevant to journalistic work and its practitioners.

The contestation and re-articulation of objectivity is an important component of the broader process of reshaping journalism that Carlson (2016) called “the meta-journalistic discourse” (p. 350). The meta-journalistic discourse, the discourse about journalism, is constructed by different groups of journalistic practitioners and non-journalistic actors such as scholars and government officials who utter expressions, in formal or informal occasions, about journalistic norms, practices, content and the conditions of their reception. It is through the meta-journalistic discourse that the boundary of journalism as well as the basis of legitimacy of journalistic work gets constructed and re-constructed, thereby being able to remain viable in face of changes and challenges.

The core principles in journalistic objectivity. Recognizing the constant re-articulation of objectivity by journalists does not mean that journalistic objectivity is an amorphous concept that can be bent for all purposes. In my research, the contestation over objectivity among the different groups of journalists still revolved around some shared questions relating to factuality and public interest: How should journalism be conducted to represent facts accurately and thoroughly? How can journalists serve public interest effectively? What facts need to be represented and how to represent them to better answer for the public needs? These journalists I interviewed had different answers to these questions. They might also have different definitions of facts and public interest. But despite the disagreements, their contestation was still predicated upon the acknowledgement of the importance of the two objectivity elements. Here, I will term them broadly as the two core principles that undergird journalistic objectivity as a constantly re-articulated notion: the respect for facts, and the commitment to public interest.

The two principles hearken back to the ethical philosophical origin of journalistic objectivity. According to Maras (2013), “journalistic objectivity has its roots in Western

enlightenment traditions of liberal philosophy and scientific investigation" (p. 201). Influenced by the tradition of scientific investigation, journalists' pursuit of objectivity was built upon the aspiration for knowledge unmarked by prejudice, and the belief that such knowledge could be attained on the ground of factual evidence and via the methods for inquiry and verification. Influenced by liberal philosophy, journalists' pursuit of objectivity also implied an ethical commitment to the public and democracy, to "the values ...such as freedom of speech and press on which the very craft of journalism is premised" (Hackett & Zhao, 1998, p. 144). The two aspects are interrelated. Reporting facts from a detached perspective is for maintaining the independence from power and supporting the free marketplace of ideas, both of which are essentially for the service of public interest (McQuail, 2010; Ward, 2009). Considering the ethical philosophical "roots" of journalistic objectivity can help us understand the importance of the two principles mentioned above. With the respect for facts, any pursuit of journalistic objectivity can be grounded on the epistemic basis of understanding social reality based on facts. With the commitment to public interest, the journalistic representation and interpretation of social reality based on facts is also endowed with the ethical obligation of answering for public demands and safeguarding public welfare.

In my research, these core principles could invite critical reflection from the journalists. They considered the questions with regard to factuality and public interest to appraise the problems in journalistic work by their peers and even themselves. In some cases, they even figured out the ways to make changes. This aspect was not only noted in my research, but also in several other examples. In the global fact-checking movement (Graves, 2018), professional journalists and non-professionals tried to fight misinformation more aggressively than conventional news reporting. They transformed the newsroom's internal fact-checking routines

into external fact-checking activities, informing the public of “their evidence-based analysis of the accuracy of a political claim, news report or other public text” (Graves & Amazeen, 2019, para. 2). Covering news in the conflict zones, foreign correspondents hoped to provide the public with a more truthful representation of reality that was less constrained by their embeddedness with the military. They resorted to transparency in informing readers about the limitation of their embedded perspective, and emotional investment in storytelling for showing the human side of the war stories (Kaddourah, 2017). The respect for facts and commitment to public interest inspired critical reflection from journalism scholars as well. Robinson and Culver (2019) found that the white-dominated media’s fact-driven, neutral reporting on racial issues was nonetheless characterized by the failure “to built trust, diversify their sourcing and tell the true stories of race” (p. 14). They called for the reflection about how to make journalism loyal to citizens and making journalistic pursuit of objectivity more active. In all these examples, critical reflection by journalists and journalism scholars occurred on the basis of the shared concerns about how to conduct journalism to better represent facts and better serve public interest. It is through the critical reflection around these concerns that these actors could open up the space for further possibilities in journalism.

In this sense, we may consider the two principles, the respect for facts and the commitment to public interest, as the two basic dimensions that define the “ideal type” of journalistic objectivity, borrowing the term from Freidson (2001) in his discussion of professionalism. As the “ideal type”, these principles constitute “a disciplined focus for the (journalistic, *added by author*) imagination when confronted by the variety of the world” (Freidson, 2001, p. 9). Journalistic objectivity is a living system. The standards and practices for the pursuit of objectivity have been and will be constantly contested, negotiated and reshaped,

given the increasing decentralization of journalism work, and increasing complexity of the social reality that needs to be understood. Acknowledging the importance of the core principles can help journalistic practitioners and scholars to find a normative anchor point in understanding the varied and fluid ways that journalistic objectivity is understood and practiced. It can allow them to make meaningful critical reflections about problems in the existing approaches to objectivity and push for further changes. Objectivity can be articulated in multiple forms, by various groups of journalists, and supporting different journalistic authority claims. But in essence, it still needs to stand for what it must take to make an accurate, thorough representation of facts about social reality and for the interest of the public.

Real-world Implications: Journalism in the Post-Truth Era

Findings from this dissertation research may also help us to approach what is called “post-truth” and the politico-cultural condition of “post-truth.” McIntyre (2018), in his book “Post-truth”, tried to unpack the phenomenon of post-truth politics to highlight the core problem and suggest his solution. For him, post-truth is a tendency that “facts can always be shaded, selected and presented within a political context that favors one interpretation of truth over another”, which has been carried to such an extreme extent that “those who care about the concept of truth ... feel that truth is under attack” (p. 6) . In this sense, post-truth is “not the abandonment of facts”, but “a corruption of the process by which facts are credibly gathered and reliably used to shape one’s beliefs about reality” (p. 11).

The most concerning part in the corruption of the society’s truth-producing process is that some political leaders resort to intentional lying to manipulate people “into believing something that we know to be untrue” (p. 8). Because of this, “post-truth amounts to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something

whether there is good evidence for it or not” (p. 13), and “the consequences can be world shattering” (p. 11). The so-called “Trumpspeak” and its influence on American society illustrate this core problem. So, what do we do? For McIntyre, the answer “is not to learn how to adjust to living in a world in which facts do not matter”, but to “always fight back against lies” (p. 154). Standing up for truth is not for convincing the liar, but for doing good for the people who are still not convinced yet.

McIntyre gets the core problem right, but his solution was not a complete one. Simply fighting back against lies alone is not enough for resisting the ideological supremacy imposed by “Trumpspeak”, as we can observe in the truth-defending efforts by journalists. When mainstream media called out the President’s lack of accuracy and honesty, “Trump’s administration simply cried ‘fake news’ and issued threats” (McNair, 2017, p. 1331). When fact-checker in prestigious news organizations tried to identify the different shades of information in political statements, various kinds of false assertions still persisted in demagogic rhetoric and public discourse (Montgomery, 2017; Vos & Thomas, 2018). So, in face of the political domination exercised through intentional lying, and the persistence of motivated reasoning in every citizen, what could be done by journalists? What is the role of journalism in the post-truth era? I hope to contribute some thoughts. Based on my findings and other related studies (Carlson, 2018; Craft, 2017; Farkas & Schou, 2019; McNair, 2017), I think that it will help if we can shift toward a reflexive and pluralist vision of journalism as a fact-seeking public undertaking, as explained below.

Journalism as a fact-seeking public undertaking. From Farkas and Schou’s (2019) perspective, the citizens who are susceptible to misinformation or even engaged in the circulation of untruths should not be dismissed as misinformed masses. There are meaningful public demands lying behind the post-truth tendency, which should be taken seriously. The authors

argue that post-truth politics grow out of the failure of the system of democracy, which undermines the voices of the people and ignores public demand. The disillusionment of democratic system is also reflected in the erosion of public trust in the market-driven mainstream media. The public no longer trust the gatekeeping by professional news reporters, editors, and media organizations. In my research, the distrust in these gatekeepers was pronounced in the discourse of citizen journalists' evaluation of professional journalists' work. They did not think that the aspect of social reality they cared about was represented by the mainstream media, due to the problems of commercialization or liberal media bias. The distrust like this seriously hinders professional journalists' ability to fight back against lies. This explains why even their aggressive efforts to expose misinformation did not achieve the expected effects on the public, as mentioned above. Therefore, I argue that in order to strengthen the public's commitment to and trust of verified factual knowledge, journalists need to do more than just fighting against lies. They also need to be more reflexive about the inherent incompleteness of social reality depicted by themselves and more pluralistic in their pursuit of facts so as to develop trust, or at least suspend disbelief from the public.

Journalism should be a reflexive, fact-seeking process, by which I mean that journalists should take "a self-critical stance through which they address their weakness and limitations" (Carlson, 2018, p. 1879), being always on the lookout for the facts that have not been fully represented in their work. In my research, *Daily Kos* bloggers criticized mainstream media for using a hit-and-miss approach in news coverage. It was hard for them to find information on Affordable Care Act enrollment or gun policy, when the legislation procedures on such issues were concluded. Would it be possible that the mainstream media can provide sustained coverage on these important issues, responding to the public's need for information even when such issues

are no longer on the top of political agenda? Also, in my research, *RedState* bloggers made the legitimate claim that *the Washington Post*'s news narrative about gun owners' reaction to the Newtown tragedy, although it tried to take gun owners' perspective, did not treat gun rights seriously. Would it be necessary that mainstream media reflect whether there is any embedded treatment of gun owners as "others" in their gun coverage? Have they done enough to make a dialogue with gun rights advocates, and represent their perspective of reality to the public? These questions deserve some consideration by mainstream media and their journalists. Just as McNair (2017) pointed out, "not all the accusations made against 'liberal' journalism by the alternative right, Fox News and Trump's supporters are false" (p. 1331). It is only by constant reflection and non-stop search for under-represented facts that journalism can rebuilt trust from the public.

Journalism should also shift toward a public undertaking of its work, engaging the public in their work, incorporating pluralistic perspectives, and developing partnership with the public. There are two main reasons why this is necessary. First, as emphasized previously, journalists have the ethical commitment to safeguard public interest. But if our goal is to truly protect public interest, we should not rely only on a group of professional journalists to define what public interest is (Farkas & Schou, 2019). Secondly, in the post-truth politics, the main threat to public interest is the ideological supremacy that demagogic leaders impose through intentional lying (McIntyre, 2018). News media alone do not have enough power to resist such political domination. News media's efforts need to be combined with individuals and associations in the public who have the willingness and ability to fight against lies. Therefore, the pluralistic vision of journalism is not limited to procedural transparency, multi-perspectival news, or greater racial/class/gender diversity in news workers, the proposals of which still focus on changes by professional journalists within media organizations. A pluralistic vision of journalism that is

useful for countering the post-truth tendency also means the collective efforts by professional journalists, non-professional journalists and non-journalists working together in certain forms. There should be more partnerships between professional and citizen journalists to conduct joint inquiries in social reality. News media should organize debates in communities, creating opportunities for the expression of and the debate between different ideas from citizens. Journalists should share authority with non-journalists engaged in fighting against lies, such as scientists, educators and experts from different domains.

Rethinking journalism in this reflexive, pluralistic vision does not mean the abandonment of objectivity. Instead, it might be what it must take to defend the two core principles in objectivity, the respect for facts and the commitment to public interest, in the post-truth era. Yes, it will mean a break from the detached perspective of reporting as implied in the professional norm of objectivity. It will mean that there will no longer be a clear separation of journalists with professional status from non-professionals. But in the era of post-truth and “Trumpspeak”, perhaps no one can afford to be detached and separated, if we still want to remain answerable to the objective reality.

Study Limitations

My research was a comparative case study that mainly relied on content analysis and interview for data collection. There are three main limitations in the methods employed that I need to inform readers of this research about. Knowing the limitations is helpful for building a clear understanding of the bounds of conclusions made in this research.

First, my media cases, while representing the variation in professional status of media outlets reasonably well, are less diverse in capturing the variation in political ideology and media

technology. This was necessitated by my focus on the relationship between professional status of media outlets and the approach to objectivity as held by practitioners at these outlets. But it does not allow for a thorough understanding of objectivity in relation to the other two variables, and interactions of these variables with media professional status. This research could not fully answer the questions about the contestation over objectivity between journalists using old media vs. new media, or those with opposing political ideological leanings. Some results, such as those about journalists at *the Washington Post* newspaper vs. its blog, or political bloggers at *Daily Kos* vs. *RedState*, offered a partial answer for those relationships. But there is more to be investigated. For example, what is the approach to objectivity by professional journalists working at partisan media such as MSNBC and Fox News? How about citizen journalists who use old media platforms?

Secondly, what was considered the new media technology in this research, blogging, is no longer “new” in year 2020. Social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat have gained more importance, both as the news consumption platforms for audiences and as the audience engagement tools for media organizations (Pew Research Center, 2018, 2019). These platforms are the technological frontlines where professional and citizen journalists are carrying out their contestation over objectivity nowadays. But the conclusions in this research may not be easily applied to the environment of social network sites. Further research needs to be conducted about objectivity and professional status in this environment.

Thirdly, the lack of access for ethnographic observations weakened the descriptive thickness in my analysis of the journalists’ different practices for the accomplishment of their approaches to objectivity. My analysis of practices was based on interview data, secondary materials and my reading of their writings for the issue coverage. I tried to dig deeper in

interviews for meaningful anecdotes, but the interviewees' recall of experiences from several years ago was most often in broad strokes. So I was able to capture some important patterns about their practices for the accomplishment of objectivity based on their recall, but the data did not support the in-depth understanding of how these patterns emerged in the ongoing process of topic selection, information collection, verification, analysis, and writing by the journalists as guided by their approach to objectivity, which could be better captured through ethnographic studies (Cottle, 2000). Their real-time performance of the patterns could be more complicated and contextual, which was not sufficiently revealed in my research.

Besides these limitations in my methodological choices and implementations, there is another limitation in how I utilized the study design to structure my data presentation. The strength of the comparative case study design is the combination of in-depth examination into cases, and systematic comparison of differences/similarities across cases. My presentation of data in results chapters was still, to some extent, bogged down in the descriptive details for each case, leaving the task of systematic comparison for the summary of each results chapter. This had to do with my lack of experience for handling a comparative case study of this scale. In retrospect, a better way to really take advantage of the study design is to reveal the patterns of comparison more directly in the narratives of data presentation.

Suggestion for Future Research

My research showed that the variation in political ideology was important for explaining the different re-articulations of objectivity in the journalists' contestation, but my examination of this aspect was not as thorough and in-depth as I would like it to be, due to the above-mentioned limitations. It would be fruitful for future search to build on this research and take a more in-depth look in this aspect. It is possible to do so by, for example, examining the contrasting

approaches to objectivity by professional journalists at mainstream media vs. partisan media, and partisan media organizations on the liberal vs. the conservative side. How do journalists at partisan media modify or even bend the notion of objectivity to justify their work? How do they make sense of their pursuit of facts and public interest in their work, especially when they cover controversial policy issues and represent dubious political statements from politicians? Future research on these questions can help us understand more about the challenges for journalistic objectivity in the post-truth era.

The other area that deserves more attention is the influence of newer media technologies on the pursuit of objectivity. The landscape of media technologies has become more diverse and complicated. Social networking tools such as Twitter and WeChat have turned into highly important platforms where professional journalists and non-professionals compete for the definition of journalism and that of social reality. How do they re-articulate objectivity in the online social milieu with the presence of demagogic leaders, conspiracy theorists, and the multitude of ordinary users susceptible to misinformation? How does technology itself, such as fact-filtering algorithms, affect autonomy/heteronomy in the field? More research is needed.

In addition, while I argue that journalism should be more reflexive about its limitations and more pluralistic through involving public participation in journalism and sharing authority with non-professionals, there is much uncertainty around how journalistic authority can be constructed if journalism becomes more reflexive and pluralistic. It is possible that reflexivity and pluralism “bring the paradox of journalistic authority into sharp relief”, when the problems in the professional approach to objectivity are laid bare to citizens (Graves, 2016, p. 116). It is also possible that reflexivity and pluralism can constitute the new basis of authority, when journalistic knowledge is constructed in an open inquiry and citizens are willing to suspend their

disbelief (Dzur, 2008; Schon, 1983). It will be meaningful to find out an answer by looking at real-world journalistic enterprises built around some vision of reflexivity or pluralism, examining the relationships and mechanism of journalistic authority in those cases.

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Appendix A

The timeline of health care reform events

November 4, 2008

Senator Barack Obama is elected president; during his campaign, he promises sweeping health care reform.

February 26, 2009

In the Fiscal Year 2010 budget proposals, President Obama proposes a \$634 billion reserve fund to cover part of the cost of health care reform over the next decade.

March 5, 2009

The White House holds a forum on health care reform that includes a wide array of Administration officials, prominent members of Congress, and representatives for insurance companies, patients, doctors, hospitals, and the pharmaceutical industry.

March 11, 2009

The major advocates in the health care industry sign onto a letter nominally supporting health care reform and offering some voluntary cost-cutting measures.

July 14, 2009

Three House committees – Energy and Commerce, Ways and Means, and Education and Labor – all agree on a single health care bill, the House Tri-Committee America's Affordable Health Choices Act, and announce plans to begin voting.

July 15, 2009

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee passes their version of health care reform legislation, the Affordable Health Choices Act.

July 17, 2009

Two House Committees – Ways and Means, and Education and Labor – approves the bill.

July 22, 2009

President Obama held a prime-time news conference to discuss his health care overhaul plan and rally public support for the plan. He sought to make the case to the public that the plan was essential for the long-term economic health of the country.

July 31, 2009

The last crucial panel, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, approves health bill.

August, 2009

During the August recess, members of Congress confront angry constituents at town halls.

August 16, 2009

President Obama signals his willingness to drop the public option.

September 9, 2009

President Obama addresses a joint session of Congress urging action on health care reform.

September 16, 2009

The Senate Finance Committee released their version of health care reform plan,

October 13, 2009

The Senate Finance Committee approves their version of health care reform, the America's Health Future Act.

November 7, 2009

The House passes health care legislation, the Affordable Health Care for America Act.

December 12, 2009

Senator Lieberman's unexpected opposition to the Senate bill leads Senator Reid to remove a buy-in to Medicare for those 55+ and the opt-out public option that had previously been included in the legislation.

December 24, 2009

The Senate passes their health care bill, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

January 13-14, 2010

President Obama, and top House and Senate Democrats held marathon negotiating session for two days, seeking accord on some revisions of the legislation.

January 19, 2010

Republican Scott Brown filled the Senate Seat long held by Senator Edward Kennedy. The Democrats will no longer control the 60 votes in the Senate needed to overcome filibusters when Mr. Brown is sworn in.

February 22, 2010

For the first time, President Obama releases a specific policy proposal for health care reform. His recommendation closely mirrors the Senate legislation.

March 3, 2010

President Obama gives a speech, calling for the Congress to set aside political gamesmanship and allow an "up or down vote" on the health care bill.

March 21, 2010

By a vote of 219 to 212, the House passes the Senate version of health care reform, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and the revision of the Senate legislation. It also passes the bill that revises the Senate legislation, the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act.

March 23, 2010

President Obama signs the first part of the health care legislation, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

March 25, 2010

The Senate passes the budget reconciliation measure, the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act, by a vote of 56 to 43. Procedural questions raised by Senate Republicans force the House to vote on the legislation again. It passes a second time, 220 to 207.

March 30, 2010

President Obama signs Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act into law.

Appendix B

Critical discourse moments in health care reform debate

Initiation

February 26-March 8, 2009

Agenda setting

July 14-19, 2009

Debate and discussion

August 1-31, 2009

September 9-13, 2009

October 13-18, 2009

November 7-15, 2009

December 24, 2009-January 3, 2010

February 22-28, 2010

March 3-7, 2010

Decision-making

March 21-April 4, 2010

Appendix C

The timeline of gun control events following Newtown school shooting

December 14, 2012

Adam Lanza shoots his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School, killing 20 students and six educators.

December 16, 2012

President Obama speaks at an interfaith memorial service at Newtown High School.

December 20, 2012

President Obama established a Task Force on Gun Violence under the leadership of Vice President Biden.

December 22, 2012

The last of the victims' funeral are held.

January 16, 2013

The White House released the document "Now is the Time: The President's Plan to Protect our Children and our Communities by Reducing Gun Violence", including 18 legislative proposals and 23 executive actions. The most salient legislative proposals include the requirement of "universal background checks", the increase of penalties for gun trafficking, the reinstatement and strengthening of the ban on military-style firearms and large-capacity magazines, and the increase of funding in improving school security.

February 12, 2013

President Obama calls for action on gun control in his State of the Union address.

March 7-14, 2013

In alignment with the Presidential plan, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary approved four gun control-related bills, Fix Gun Checks Act, Stop Illegal Trafficking in Firearms Act, Assault Weapons Ban, and School Safety Enhancement Act.

March 21, 2013

Senator Harry Reid introduced the Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act of 2013, which included the language of Fix Gun Checks Act, Stop Illegal Trafficking in Firearms Act, and School Safety Enhancement Act. The Assault Weapons Ban was not included.

April 16-17, 2013

The Senate considered the Safe Communities, Safe Schools Act of 2013. The Senate voted on nine amendments that addressed a wide array of gun control issues, including the amendments relating to three main parts of presidential gun control proposals: "universal background checks" (in the form of the "Machin-Toomey" amendment), the stricter penalties for gun trafficking, and the assault weapons ban (Senator Dianne Feinstein offered it as an amendment to the Act, after the introduction of the Act). These main amendments were all rejected. The Senate did not take a

final vote on the whole act, and it was not clear that the Senate will resume the consideration of it.

April 17, 2013

President Obama speaks about his determination to continue the fight for gun control after the Senate fails to pass proposed amendments.

Appendix D

Critical discourse moments in gun control debate

Initiation

December 14-December 22, 2012

Agenda setting

January 16-20, 2013

Debate and discussion

February 12-17, 2013

March 7-17, 2013

March 21-31, 2013

Decision-making

April 16-21, 2013

Appendix E

The search terms used in the search for the coverage of healthcare reform and gun control debate

Search terms for healthcare reform coverage:

"health care" OR "obamacare" OR "affordable care" OR "affordable health care" OR "affordable health" OR "health future" OR "HCR" OR "health care reform" OR "public option" OR "individual mandate" OR "health insurance" OR "medicaid" OR "medicare" OR "employer mandate"

Search terms for gun control debate coverage:

"gun control" OR "gun violence" OR "gun owner" OR "gun bill" OR "anti-gun" OR "sandy hook" OR "newtown" OR "manchin-toomey" OR "manchin and toomey" OR "manchin" OR "second amendment" OR "2nd amendment" OR "concealed-carry" OR "concealed carry" OR "background check"

Appendix F

The search tool(s) used for each media platform

Media platform	Search tool
<i>The Washington Post</i> newspaper	The LexisNexis database for <i>the Washington Post</i>
<i>The Washington Post</i> blog	Online archive for blogs at www.washingtonpost.com
<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Google search in the domain of www.huffingtonpost.com
<i>Daily Kos</i>	Google search in the domain of www.dailykos.com
<i>RedState</i>	Google search in the domain of www.redstate.com

Appendix G

The coding sheet for healthcare reform coverage

Please enter the Article # here. →

When you save the coding results for this article, please use the Article # as file name and save it into its corresponding folder.

Question 1. Based on your consideration of its content, which general type does this article belong to? Please use “/” sign to represent your choice in the following table.

[a] Opinion	[b] News (purely newsy blogs)	[c] Others

- If you choose [a], then go to answer the questions A1 to A6.
- If you choose [b], then go to answer the questions B1 to B4.
- If you choose [c], you do not need to answer the following coding questions.

Questions A1-A6 are only applicable to opinion articles.

A1. What is the *author's (editor's) main attitude toward health care reform (HCR)?*

Oppose HCR		Neutral/independent	
Support HCR		Not relevant or not clear	

A2. Regarding *the role of government* in HCR,

More gov intervention endangers free market & individual choice.		Not relevant	
It is necessary for helping uninsured & improving health care system.			

A3. Regarding the *economic implication of HCR*

HCR causes economic pressure. It is not well addressed in the bill.		Not relevant	
Economic repercussions are necessary and/or reasonable.			

A4. What is the author's attitude toward *public option*?

Oppose public option		Not relevant	
Support public option			

A5. Relating to *mutual attacks* between conservatives and liberals,

Liberals are to blame for their unjust roles in HCR.		Not relevant	
Conservatives are to blame for their unjust roles in HCR.			

A6. Does the author use the following types of information in this article?

Types of information	Yes	No
Direct/indirect quotes from elected officials		
Direct/indirect quotes from ordinary citizens		
Personal anecdote/observation from author or someone s/he know		
Public opinion polls		

Government documents		
Scholarly research		
Law & legal documents		

Questions B1 – B4 are only applicable to news articles.

B1. Which aspect of HCR politics does it focus on?

HCR legislation procedure	
Political fight & response	
Specific HCR policies and implications	
Public debate & advocacy	
Key individual players	
HCR influences on industry	
Media coverage of HCR	
Others	

B2. Does the author use the following types of information in this article?

Types of information	Yes	No
Direct/indirect quote from elected official sources		
Direct/indirect quote from ordinary citizen sources		

B3. Does the author resort to the following means of coverage?

Means of coverage	Yes	No
Including sources with conflicting views on healthcare reform and its policy components		
Talking about information collection/processing procedure or his/her own political stance (i.e., liberal/conservative)		
Using media sources other than his/her own media organization by quoting, interlinking or rewriting		

Appendix H

The coding sheet for gun control debate coverage

Please enter the Article # here. →

When you save the coding results for this article, please use the Article # as file name and save it into its corresponding folder.

Question 1. Based on your consideration of its content, which general type does this article belong to? Please use “/” sign to represent your choice in the following table.

[a] Opinion	[b] News (purely newsy blogs)	[c] Others

- If you choose [a], then go to answer the questions A1 to A6.
- If you choose [b], then go to answer the questions B1 to B4.
- If you choose [c], you do not need to answer the following coding questions.

Questions A1-A6 are only applicable to opinion articles.

In Questions A1-A5, you will be asked to characterize 1) whether this opinion article pertains to a certain topic, and 2) if it does, concerning that particular topic, which position it argues for.

A1. Gun control legislature is _____.

Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gun control legislature is government infringement on gun owners' fundamental freedom.	
Not relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gun control legislature is a necessary government measure to curb gun violence	

A2. The Newtown tragedy is primarily an issue of _____.

Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	School safety	
		Mental illness	
Not relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gun violence	
		Others	

A3. Gun right is _____.

Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gun right is a sacred right/freedom that cannot be violated.	
Not relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gun right should be rightly subject to moral/social/legal control.	

A4. National Rifles Association (NRA) and other gun lobby groups are _____.

Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	They are the guardians of gun right.	
Not relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	They are bad and irresponsible. They use money or spread fear to manipulate policy outcomes.	

A5. Relating to the mutual attacks between conservatives and liberals, _____.

Relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conservatives are irrational. Liberals are not;	
Not relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	Liberals are irrational. Conservatives are not.	

A6. Does the author use the following types of information in this article?

Types of information	Yes	No
Direct/indirect quotes from elected officials		
Direct/indirect quotes from ordinary citizens		
Personal experience/observation from author or someone s/he know		
Public opinion polls		
Government documents		
Scholarly research		
Law & legal documents		

Questions B1 – B4 are applicable to news articles.

B1. Which issue in the gun debate does the article focus on?

The Newtown tragedy and grieving	
Gun violence issue, which is not specific to Newtown tragedy	
Mental illness issue, which is not specific to Newtown tragedy	
School safety issue, which is not specific to Newtown tragedy	
Gun politics (i.e., gun legislature, lobbying & political/public debate on gun policies)	
Gun business	
Others	

B2. Does the author use the following types of information in this article?

Types of information	Yes	No
Direct/indirect quotes from elected official sources		
Direct/indirect quotes from ordinary citizen sources		

B3. Does the author resort to the following means of coverage?

Means of coverage	Yes	No
Including sources with conflicting views on gun control and its policy components		
Talking about information collection/processing procedure or his/her own political stance (i.e., liberal/conservative)		
Using media sources other than his/her own media organization by quoting, interlinking or rewriting		

Appendix I

The moderation guide used in the interviews with journalists

Key topics	Discussion points	Interview questions
<p>Part 1. Boundary-work involved in the contestation; epistemic authority.</p>	<p>General discussion around the issue coverage;</p>	<p>Looking back to your coverage of the issue, what was good about it? Could you elaborate that, using some of these articles for example? What could still be improved? Again, looking back to the issue coverage by your media platform, what was good, and what could still be improved?</p>
	<p>values, standards, routines, and other elements involved in the issue coverage; epistemic authority claims;</p>	<p>Regarding the coverage, what did you and your colleagues do that you think was helpful to make it credible and truthful? Why are these things helpful for making it credible and truthful? If we may talk about this more specifically, what standards do you normally abide by that you think are helpful to make it credible and truthful? When you use these standards, what do you normally do or try not to do? What do these standards matter?</p>
	<p>discussion on objectivity in relation to their work;</p>	<p>Objectivity is often considered an important professional norm in journalism. Do you think what you mentioned are about objectivity of reporting/writing? If yes, how so? If not, why is it not relevant here and what does objectivity mean to you?</p>
	<p>past experience of reading other journalists' work;</p>	<p>Speaking of journalists/bloggers at a certain platform, have you read what they wrote? Have you read anything they wrote on this issue? In general, what do you think of that?</p>
<p>evaluating other journalists' issue coverage.</p>	<p>Regarding their coverage on the issue, to what extent do you think it was credible and truthful? Why? What was good? What could be improved? If they could do it over again, what would be your suggestion about things that could have been done to make it more credible and truthful?</p>	

Part 2. Practices involved in issue coverage; key resources needed.

Efforts going into the issue coverage;

specific individual activities and group procedures;

resources needed for journalistic practices; different types of resources and impacts.

When we look at these articles, could you help me understand the efforts that made this possible?

Could you help me understand more? How did you determine the topic, collect and analyze information, get access to sources/channels, formulate the opinion, or develop the writing? Do you work with other journalists/bloggers/ editors? If so, what was the procedure like?

When we consider all the efforts, how did you/your organization manage to sustain such efforts? How did you/your organization get the funding, the access to sources, or connection with others? How did that affect your work? What else would you describe as useful resources that helped with your work? Why?

Part 3. Heteronomous influences on practices.

Pleasant vs. less pleasant aspects of working or writing on this platform;

concerns about sources, profit, misinformation, group pressure;

specific challenges for the outlets (financial difficulty, low profitability, trolling)

So far, what has been the most pleasant things about working/blogging on this platform? Are there any less pleasant aspects? Could you talk more? What are the impacts of these issues on your work/blogging?

Some journalists/bloggers complain about powerful sources, the need for profitability, misinformation online/offline or group pressure. Do you have some similar concerns in your work/writing?

Based on a certain article, your media platform had a certain challenge (i.e., financial difficulty for the Washington Post; low profitability for the Huffington Post; trolling for Daily Kos and RedState). Does that matter to you? How so? What is the impact on your work/blogging?

Appendix J

A news story by *the Washington Post* used in the interviews with *RedState* journalists

With gun issue in sharp focus, advocates are on the defensive

Frederick Kunkle, Dec. 17, 2012

The call came Friday night, as Americans were just beginning the struggle to make sense of one of the most horrific mass shootings in a long history of them.

The anonymous caller was angry, and he was looking for Philip Van Cleave, who heads the Virginia Citizens Defense League. He cursed Van Cleave for his pro-gun advocacy, challenged Van Cleave to sell his weapons, and called him a coward.

“You would have thought I had gone up there and done these horrible things,” said Van Cleave, who received the call in the midst of planning demonstrations at two Autozone stores to protest the firing of an employee who used his firearm to break up a robbery.

Those who support the Second Amendment say they feel just as horrified and numb as any other American after Friday’s massacre of kindergartners and other young children at a Connecticut school. But now, as the call for new gun-control laws increases, gun owners say they also feel under attack.

These are the people who see guns as an answer to the problem of violence, not the problem itself. They worry that their Second Amendment rights will be taken away. Challenged by those who see any gun as an instrument of destruction, they defend their belief that guns are beneficial. Harder still is to explain the allure of weapons like the .223-caliber Bushmaster, a military-style semiautomatic rifle that a some want banned.

“I could ask you why should anyone want a Ferrari?” Van Cleave said Sunday. “[Bushmasters] are absolutely a blast to shoot with. They’re fast. They’re accurate.”

And there’s no denying that their fearsome, combat-ready appearance adds to their appeal, he said.

“Guns are fun, and some of them are much more cool than others. It’s just like we have television sets that look cool, and others are much more boxy,” Van Cleave said.

Investigators say Adam Lanza used a .223-caliber Bushmaster to kill 27 people, including 20 children, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut.

But none can say why.

Lanza, 20, killed himself before police arrived. He was also carrying two 9mm semiautomatic handguns, including a Glock. The guns belonged to his mother, a gun collector who was slain in her home before the rampage began.

Before Connecticut became home to what, for now, is perhaps the most infamous mass murder in the country, the state was arguably the place where the mass production of repeating firearms was perfected. Samuel Colt set up shop in Hartford in the mid 1800s to produce a firearm whose revolving chambers would feed bullets at a then-unheard-of speed, and it was his company that later developed the forebear of Lanza's deadly rifle.

The Bushmaster is a civilian version of the M-16 military rifle and its descendants. The flash suppressors, designed to hide the muzzle flash from the enemy, have no practical use at the average shooting range, but they look fierce. Although not as powerful as many popular hunting rifles, such as the .30-06 caliber, whose bullet and cartridge are both larger, the weapon is made for high performance, with a large magazine and rapid rate of fire.

So is the Glock, a rapid-fire handgun whose sleek, modernistic design arose from its inventor's desire to protect Austrian soldiers from their own clumsiness.

Gaston Glock wanted to find a way to avoid accidental discharges when the handgun was dropped. It was designed for combat, with a large magazine, a light trigger and no external safety. Its molded black plastic frame flexes to absorb recoil.

When the Glock first appeared on the U.S. market, it was the pit bull of firearms. Gun-control advocates warned that the Glock would become terrorists' weapon of choice — the “hijacker's special,” as one newspaper put it — because its plastic body might slip past metal detectors.

But controversy also brought more attention than any marketing campaign ever could. Tupac Shakur rapped about the Glock by name (he would later be killed by one), and Hollywood glamorized the handgun in movies such as “Die Hard 2.”

“Weapons that were targeted and demonized by liberals and gun-control advocates took on this dark glamour,” said Paul M. Barrett, author of “Glock: The Rise of America's Gun.”

This time, the nation's grief is unlikely to pass quickly, and it's already stoked with anger at a culture that glamorizes firearms. Gun-rights advocates said they too feel disgust and sorrow at the violence that snuffed the lives of so many children. But to people whose lives have been saved or made more secure by the presence of a firearm, they also feel as if they are on the defensive.

“We're all horrified by this thing,” said John R. Lott, an economist whose book, “More Guns, Less Crime,” suggests that gun-control laws have had the unintended consequence of making mass shootings more likely. Referring to specific places, such as schools, Lott said, “The frustration a lot of people feel is what strikes me as most obvious: All these attacks in the U.S., and all of these attacks in Europe, except one, keep occurring where guns are banned.”

Gun-rights advocates say that, as horrible as this crime was, there does not appear to be a gun law that would have altered the equation, short of a weapons ban. Although a lot of attention has been focused on the Bushmaster, they argue that a prettier version of a semiautomatic rifle, such as a hunting rifle with a wooden stock and without the military-style features such as a flash suppressor, would be just as deadly.

Lott has also been receiving angry phone calls. Appearing on CNN, he was interrupted by host Piers Morgan, who demanded: “How many kids have to die before you guys say we want less guns, not more?”

But Lott said he is not a defender of the Second Amendment. He is not even a gun enthusiast. He was forbidden to have a BB gun as a child, and he and his wife would not let their children have toy guns. But Lott said the data do not lie: Since 1950, in every public mass shooting in which three or more people have died, the setting has in almost every case been one where guns are banned, such as schools.

But many gun-rights advocates were reluctant to be drawn into any discussion of their views so soon after the killings.

“This is a time of grieving. We need to respect these families,” Del. L. Scott Lingamfelter (R-Prince William), who led the effort to repeal Virginia’s pioneering law limiting handgun sales to one per month. “That’s all I have to say.”