



Journalistic Interventionism: Types, Professional, and Normative Conceptions

Doron Shultziner

To cite this article: Doron Shultziner (17 Mar 2025): Journalistic Interventionism: Types, Professional, and Normative Conceptions, Mass Communication and Society, DOI: [10.1080/15205436.2025.2478892](https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2025.2478892)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2025.2478892>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.



Published online: 17 Mar 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 833



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Journalistic Interventionism: Types, Professional, and Normative Conceptions

Doron Shultziner 

Head of the Politics & Communication Department, Jerusalem Multidisciplinary College, Jerusalem, Israel

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the phenomenon of journalistic interventionism among professional journalists. The paper conceptualizes what journalistic interventionism is based on several recent themes in the literature while proposing four types and dimensions of this phenomenon. The research explores how journalists professionally understand and define journalistic interventionism, how they normatively conceive of it, the types of interventions that they consider legitimate and illegitimate, and what they perceive as its possible drivers. During the interviews, journalists refer to the four types of interventionism, emphasizing the complementary, intentional, and motivational aspects behind it. They legitimize interventionism by the impossibility of complete objectivity, the nexus between journalistic interventionism and the mission of journalism, and the goal of giving voice to underrepresented groups and ideas. Journalists tend to agree with and normalize advocacy interventionism and reject partisan activism, although protest participation is also legitimized in certain contexts. Journalists attribute the motivation for interventionism to the mission of journalism, to opportunities and incentives on social media, and to professional ambitions, self-promotion and branding, and competition considerations. The conclusions discuss how journalistic interventionism relates to the scholarship on the malleability of journalistic roles, changes in journalism, and journalistic branding.

The Western democratic culture of journalism has been dominated by the hard-news paradigm (Esser & Umbricht, 2014). At the heart of this paradigm lies the concept of journalistic objectivity which consists of news routines that emphasize a detached observer (a dispassionate bystander) with a neutral point of view, reporting verified information and facts (and separating them from values), fairness, impartiality, a balance between competing views, and even the structure of reporting (Esser & Umbricht, 2014; Tuchman, 1972). This tradition of “objective journalism” (Donsbach, 2010, p. 39; Lichter, 2017, p. 403) is widely held and respected by journalists in most countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

While objective journalism remains an important ideal, social, economic, and technological changes have led to new forms of journalism and journalistic practices that both challenge and evolve alongside this doctrine. Nowadays, news outlets boast opinion shows in top-rating hours and opinion columns on the front page. Partisan shows on public and commercial news channels are common, and ideologically oriented outlets have surfaced and flourished in many democratic countries. In addition, the lines between journalism, advocacy, and activism have been blurred alongside public confusion and professional disagreements over what journalists should and should not do (Donsbach, 2010, p. 38; Ward, 2009, p. 297).

CONTACT Doron Shultziner  doronsh@jmc.ac.il  Department of the Politics & Communication, Jerusalem Multidisciplinary College, 37 Hanevi'im St., Jerusalem 9101001, Israel

© 2025 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

The purpose of this research is to advance our understanding of these changes by conceptualizing what journalistic interventionism (JI) is as well as its characteristics and types, and by exploring journalists' professional and normative perspectives of the phenomenon and its manifestations.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section reviews several bodies of literature that highlight the shift in journalism toward more interventionist practices. The Theoretical Construct section proposes a conceptual framework for JI, identifying four types of interventions, and introduces the research questions. The Data and Methods section outlines the interview questions posed to Israeli journalists working in professional news organizations and describes the methods of analysis. The Results section is organized according to the research questions, with separate analyses of journalists' professional and normative perspectives on JI, its legitimate and illegitimate forms, and their views on what motivates journalists to engage in interventionist practices. Finally, the Discussion section draws theoretical conclusions, linking the findings to the literature on the malleability of journalistic roles, the evolving nature of journalism, and the phenomenon of journalistic branding.

Varieties of journalistic interventionism: from advocacy to activism

Several bodies of literature and findings attest to changes in journalists' role conceptions and journalistic practices that depart from objective journalism and lead toward more advocate and activist forms of journalism.

The rise of interventionist role conceptions

The Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) surveys professional and normative attitudes among journalists worldwide. In these studies, Hanitzsch and his colleagues conceptualize an interventionist role that "includes roles such as the advocate, missionary, facilitator, and agent of change," practices that share "a strong journalistic disposition toward involvement and social commitment" (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 171). Specifically, their research revealed that journalists, globally, uphold activist and interventionist attitudes, such as "advocate for social change" (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 171). This item received an average score of 3.61 out of 5 and ranked seventh in importance among 18 journalistic roles (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 174). Similarly significant were the roles of "influence public opinion" at an average of 3.36 and "motivate people to participate in politics" at 3.15 (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 171). Hanitzsch's et al. (2019) general category of the "interventionist role," ranked second in importance with an average score of 3.35, following the "monitorial role" that consists mainly of objective journalism beliefs. The findings also illustrate an overlap between the monitorial and interventionist roles, suggesting they are not mutually exclusive and could be held simultaneously by journalists.

Moreover, when comparing the scores of the WJS global scores in 2007–2011 to those of the 2012–2016 study (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; worldsofjournalism.org), there is an increase in all four indexes of the interventionist role. The global average score of the interventionist role increased from 3.07 in the 2007–2011 study to 3.34 in the 2012–2016 study, i.e., 0.28 mean increase or a 9% rise, when all the four sub-components of this category have increased. In contrast, there is a general decline in the "monitorial role" from the average score of 3.91 in 2007–2011 to a score of 3.52 in the 2012–2016 study, i.e., –0.40 less or a 10.2% decrease. It appears that the global increase in the interventionist role is accompanied by, and possibly associated with, a decrease in traditional norms associated with objective journalism.

These WJS global scores should be qualified because there is a significant degree of country variability in role scores, and democratic countries appear to have lower interventionist role scores. Hanitzsch et al. argue that the interventionist role is "more strongly embraced in socioeconomically less developed countries" and in "societies that are going through disruptive changes and where the political climate is permissive of journalists playing a more proactive role in political discourse," and that approaches to interventionism are context dependent (2019, p. 192). Yet, we do not know enough about such trends in democracies because most WJS

countries were included in the 2012–2016 wave. When examining changes in the interventionist role average scores for the fourteen democratic countries that were included in both WJS waves—Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Germany, Greece, Israel, Mexico, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States—it appears that their combined average score rose from 2.90 in 2007–2011 to 3.17 in the 2012–2016 wave, i.e., 9.3% increase; only Australia, Germany, and Switzerland slightly declined. This comparison includes countries from both the liberal or North Atlantic model (e.g., the United States) and the North-Central Europe or Democratic Corporatist Model (e.g., Austria; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). These comparisons do not, in themselves, serve as proof of global trends or patterns within democracies, and they should be carefully evaluated and further explored using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Generally, the WJS literature implies that journalists around the world do not perceive their profession as merely reporting information as detached observers and letting people decide for themselves but also as a mission to influence audiences' hearts and minds and to change reality for the better (see also Raemy, 2021; Russell, 2017; Thomas, 2018, p. 403).

Role conceptions do not automatically lead to role enactment, and the gap between self-conception and actual practices depends on personal, work-related, and media outlet characteristics (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014; Schwinges, 2024). There are multiple levels of influence on journalists' news products that are often beyond the control of the individual journalist (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Strömbäck et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the underlying assumption of the role-conceptions literature is that there is a strong causal tie between how journalists normatively conceive their roles and how they perform them (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, 2018; Standaert et al., 2021). Hence, while role conceptions are not exact indicators of journalistic performance and output, they are nevertheless valuable approximations to comprehend changes in the beliefs and work of journalists (Tandoc & Vos, 2016).

Empirical evidence of how such role conceptions affect interventionist practices can be seen in the case of environmental reporters who advocate for ecological issues and work with communities (Tandoc & Takahashi, 2014, p. 892). Reunanen and Koljonen (2018) also reported that Finnish journalists are moving toward more interventionist practices, including increasing news interpretation and opinion on political affairs and provoking public debates. These findings join the evidence on the rise of interpretive journalism (Esser & Umbricht, 2014; Soontjens, 2019) and contentious negotiations between journalists and editors over what “objectivity” should mean (Konieczna & Santa Maria, 2023).

Advocacy journalism

The second theme has been the increasing writing about advocacy journalism or journalistic advocacy. The concept and the phenomenon themselves are not new. Janowitz (1975) critically distinguished between the advocate journalist and the gatekeeper, seeing the former more as a reformer or politician. Whereas the “gatekeeper orientation emphasized the search for objectivity and the sharp separation of reporting fact from disseminating opinion” (Janowitz, 1975, p. 618), the advocate journalist “must ‘participate’ in the advocacy process. He must be an advocate for those who are denied powerful spokesmen, and he must point out the consequences of the contemporary power imbalance” (Janowitz, 1975, p. 619).

While advocacy journalism fell out of favor in the commercialized-legacy media and was marginalized especially in the United States during the 1960s and onwards (e.g., Janowitz, 1975), this tradition never really disappeared and made its mark on modern journalism (Donsbach, 2010, pp. 39–40). This journalism tradition was reemphasized in recent decades with the rise of partisan news outlets, partisan news anchors and commentators on the one hand, and the increasing erosion and criticism of the objectivity model on the other (Konieczna & Santa Maria, 2023; Russell, 2017; Waisbord, 2009, p. 373).

Recently, there has been a growth in scholarship on advocacy journalism. The theoretical aspects of this scholarship seek to define what advocacy journalism is and how to delineate it from the objective

journalism model. Fisher argues that such boundaries are hard to agree on and defines advocacy journalism as “pleading another’s cause or arguing in support of an idea, event or a person” (2016, p. 712). These characteristics, Fisher (2016), can be found in the communication literature at large and in an array of contexts, such as peace journalism, interpretive journalism, partisan journalism, and many others. As Fisher puts it,

When each of these potential influences from the literature is considered, it becomes clear that elements of advocacy are present in all works of journalism, whether intentional or not. The question cannot be about whether advocacy is present in journalism, but to the degree of its presence. (2016, p. 723)

Thomas defines advocacy journalism as “journalism that takes a point of view” (Thomas, 2018, p. 393). He suggests a distinction between segmented and woven advocacy, whereby in the former advocacy has an inferior status to journalistic objectivity while in the latter advocacy is “part of the essence of the journalistic artifact and is central to its meaning” (Thomas, 2018, p. 396). Thomas argues that segmented advocacy is common and characterizes many, if not most, forms of journalism because journalists’ point of view inevitably enters news products. For some journalists, the goal of advancing a better society is the essence of journalism (Thomas, 2018; see case studies in, p. 403; Russell, 2017). Such conceptualizations stretch the definition of journalistic advocacy to the point of the (rhetorical) question “Is *all* journalism advocacy journalism?” (Thomas, 2018, p. 406, *emphasis original*).

Journalistic activism

The third related theme in the literature concerning changes in journalists’ role conceptions and practices involves the scholarship on journalistic activism. As Ruigrok notes, “When journalists lose their professional distance to the matter they report on, their journalistic practice can be labeled as a journalism of activism” (2010, p. 86). Evidence of such practices comes from scholarship on protest coverage. For instance, journalists became activists in the 2013 Gezi protests in Turkey. Some of them did not see their actions as activism while others did acknowledge it. Some thought activism was justified and some did not (Sözeri, 2016).

Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2014) and Shultziner and Shoshan (2018) also found that journalists advocated and actively participated in Israel’s Social Justice Protest movement in 2011. Journalists did so within or alongside their work in professional news organizations. Shultziner and Shoshan (2018) argue that journalistic activism is propelled by journalists’ identification with the stories they cover. The factors leading to such personal identification and activism are “ideological identification, the novelty and nonpartisan nature of an issue, personal attachment, intensive or intimate interactions between journalists and movement actors, credible and authentic movement leaders, similar life experiences, and moral shock and empathy” (Shultziner & Shoshan, 2018, p. 3).

Similarly, Barnard (2018) and Harlow (2022) illustrated journalistic activism by journalists who identified with the U.S. Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). Those journalists perceived certain types of activism, such as taking a stance in favor of the movement and tweeting affectively on social media, as both legitimate and “essential to a journalist’s responsibility toward society” (Harlow, 2022, p. 11). Most journalists argued that when certain situations and goals are involved (e.g., press freedom, minority rights), it is their role and duty to take a stance (Harlow, 2022, p. 11; Konieczna & Santa Maria, 2023). They pointed to social media as the main place where they can profess their values and try to impact society (Harlow, 2022, p. 14). These findings attest to a shift toward new norms and practices that often blur the lines between activism and journalism (Barnard, 2018, p. 2265; Donsbach, 2010, p. 38; Russell, 2017).

These and other studies have led Ginosar and Reich (2022) to reconceptualize the advocacy-activist type of journalism as “Obsessive-Activist” journalism and to contend that it constitutes a new model of journalism with a new breed of journalists: “These journalists dedicate their professional life—and some of their private lives—to fight for—and promote specific social goals, while working as full-timers, mostly as news beat reporters in mainstream news organizations” (Ginosar & Reich, 2022, p. 660). Obsessive-activist journalists are highly interventionist and nonobjective, yet they maintain

and adhere to traditional journalistic norms and practices, such as accuracy and fact-checking (Ginosar & Reich, 2022, p. 661). Ginosar and Reich (2022) ultimately argue that obsessive-activist journalists are a new and separate group of journalists who are characterized by an altruistic motivation for justice, professional practices (excluding objectivity and balance), expertise in a certain topic (or beat), and most of them have become public figures or even celebrities. Ginosar and Reich argue that such a model of journalism is both unique and confined to “a tiny minority” of journalists because it is more demanding than traditional roles, such as the reporter and informer (2022, p. 676).

However, contrary to what Ginosar and Reich (2022) posit, there is no necessary conceptual reason to assume that JI (journalistic interventionism) is an obsessive dichotomous role (or model), nor specific to a topic or social issue. The literature review suggests that today JI characterizes the work of many journalists to varying degrees and in a variety of ways. Journalists working in different roles within professional news organizations may engage in JI alongside their regular work while generally adhering to objectivity. The literature review also suggests that varieties of JI are spreading across nations and within media systems. Journalists may engage in activism and disengage from it based on context, interests, and the degree to which the topic is controversial. The literature review leads to the following theorization of JI which will be presented in the next section.

The theoretical construct: concepts and research questions

Based on the review above, the conceptualization in this paper is that JI is the creation of journalistic content, and the physical activism of journalists, with the specific intention of advancing a cause whether it be social, political, or economic. Journalists who engage in interventionism intentionally depart, even temporarily, from the traditional notions and norms of objective journalism to advance a normative goal through media content and in-person activism. Journalistic interventionism is not a specific role or type of journalist; it is a set of practices and behaviors of journalists who, in certain contexts, intentionally deviate from objective journalism to advance a cause or position they personally uphold.

The central characteristic that separates journalistic interventions from other forms of media bias is intentionality. Media bias is a broad and contested concept that refers to various forms and sources of influences on news content, and to the ways by which journalists and news outlets favor or criticize, emphasize or ignore, certain events, information, political actors, and policies (see reviews in Hopmann et al., 2012; Lichter, 2017; Shultziner & Stukalin, 2021a, 2021b). For instance, when journalists write news analyses and op-eds on occasional stories without an intention to advocate or intervene in current affairs, this is not JI even though the news products may be value-laden and affected by various unconscious biases (e.g., Fisher, 2016; Thomas, 2018). Moreover, journalists in partisan outlets may produce ideologically biased news, yet the journalists themselves may not be aware of their own bias and consider themselves, and may indeed be, professional journalists who follow the same professional routines as their peers at other outlets. It is not always simple to determine when intentionality was involved (e.g., in the creation of biased content), especially given that the very standard of objective journalism has been so seriously questioned (e.g., Konieczna & Santa Maria, 2023; Russell, 2017; Thomas, 2018; Waisbord, 2009). Intentionality is nevertheless a feature that distinguishes JI from other forms of bias that do not involve interventionism.

Based on the literature, four main types and dimensions of JI can be identified. First, advocacy interventionism revolves around journalists' influences on news products, such as news articles, opinion columns, pictures, and videos. These news products are advocative, one-sided, or partisan, and intended to promote political goals or push for social change, as Janowitz (1975) argued. Journalists who employ interventionist practices can do so by promulgating their personal views or provoking public debates on various matters in opinion articles and news analysis (Mellado, 2015; Reunanen & Koljonen, 2018; Russell, 2017; Standaert et al., 2021). In addition, reporters of current events and beat experts may act as partisan pundits on matters they care about. As Thomas (2018) argues, in some cases, advocacy by journalists is seen as an

inferior deviation from the objective journalism doctrine while in other cases it is the essence of the news product and its central purpose (p. 396). The literature suggests that advocacy interventionism has become quite common and arguably normalized (Fisher, 2016; Thomas, 2018).

A second type of JI is agenda setting. This type of interventionism goes beyond journalists' influence on news products and involves an attempt to set the public agenda. Journalists may do so by constantly trying to raise public awareness or to influence a public policy issue, such as climate change, data protection, inequality, etc (e.g., Russell, 2017). In their professional work, they knowingly uphold the issue that they care about over competing points of view and do not stand neutral between what they consider good and evil (see also, Konieczna & Santa Maria, 2023; Ruigrok, 2010, p. 86). The result is often one-sided reports, repeated advocacy pieces (e.g., op-eds), and value-laden news analyses on the same topic, aspiring "to 'form,' 'set,' 'create,' or even 'dictate' the public agenda" (Standaert et al., 2021, p. 929). This type is closest to what Ginosar and Reich (2022) term "obsessive-activism."

A third type of JI is driving action. In this type of interventionism, journalists encourage citizens and politicians into action and try to affect or change reality. They may try to personally influence the results of public policy issues and affect actual situations and outcomes. This type may involve journalists' physical in-person actions or online calls for action. For instance, journalists can participate in public decision processes. They can also publicize their personal views on public affairs during working hours on Twitter and encourage people into action, such as in the BLM movement (Barnard, 2018; Harlow, 2022). This type of JI motivates citizens to participate in political matters and to shape political outcomes.

A fourth type of JI is partisan activism. It refers to political actions and interventions by journalists, such as joining political campaigns, advising politicians and parties, and participating in protests (see also Waisbord, 2009, p. 372). These are the more blatant political manifestations of JI, such as when journalists participate in an election rally or a political commercial ad, or when they help to organize or join protest events. Journalists may also become unofficial leaders or spokespersons of movements (Russell, 2017). Their interventionism is also often in-person or physical, such as participating in public events and rallies (Shultziner & Shoshan, 2018). The exposure of partisan interventionism often raises criticism and allegations that those who engage in it are not real journalists but political advocates in disguise. In certain situations and places, partisan activism may elicit criticism and sanctions by the journalist's employer for deviating from the news outlet's ethical codes (Konieczna & Santa Maria, 2023).

These types of JI are complementary and not mutually exclusive, nor are they specific role models or distinct entities. The purpose of presenting these types is to illustrate how JI may operate through different journalistic roles and by different sorts of involvement. Moreover, there could be overlaps between these types in the sense that journalists can employ several kinds of intervention at a given time or over time. These types may also be conceptualized as dimensions of the larger JI phenomenon whose defining characteristic is journalists' conscious intention to deviate from objective journalism standards.

Despite the growing research that was reviewed above, we do not know enough about journalists' perspectives on this phenomenon, such as what they professionally and normatively think about interventionism, how they understand and define it, and what they perceive to motivate interventionism. A deeper perspective on journalists' conceptions of interventionism can better help us understand this complex phenomenon and better conceptualize JI. This article therefore addresses the following research questions, specifically by presenting data from interviews with professional Israeli journalists:

RQ1: How do Israeli journalists define journalistic interventionism?

RQ2: How do Israeli journalists normatively conceive of journalistic interventionism?

RQ3: Which types of interventions are considered legitimate and illegitimate from Israeli journalists' perspectives?

RQ4: What do Israeli journalists think motivates journalistic interventionism?

The four research questions are interrelated yet address different dimensions of the phenomenon. The interrelation rests on the connection between the assessments of normative or prescriptive aspects of a phenomenon and its non-normative or descriptive aspects. This interrelationship likely exists and journalists' normative assessments likely influences how they define JI. Nevertheless, as the separation between RQ1 and RQ2-RQ3 implies, there could also be differences and possible gaps between how journalists may define JI, how they normatively evaluate it, and how they practice it (if at all). This conceptual separation rests on prior distinctions between normative, cognitive, practiced, and narrated role conceptions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, 2018; Standaert et al., 2021) as well as distinctions between normative role conceptions and performed or enacted roles (Mellado, 2015; Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014; Schwinges, 2024; Tandoc & Vos, 2016). RQ3 adds another layer by exploring journalists' normative assessments not only about JI in general (i.e., RQ2) but by understanding if they distinguish between the JI types and evaluate them differently.

RQ4 examines journalists' views on what they believe may encourage or motivate JI. This question connects to the literature review, which suggests that the general "interventionist role" is on the rise, though without attempting a general causal explanation, as this lies beyond the paper's scope and method. The goal of RQ4 is to gain an initial understanding of journalists' perceptions of what drives interventionism and how they view journalism's informal rules and the incentives to depart from objective journalism in favor of JI. This is an important perspective that complements journalists' professional and normative assessments. The differences between the research questions guide the data analysis and the structure of the results section.

Data and methods

The analysis is based on interviews with journalists given IRB approval by the Research Ethics Committee at Jerusalem Multidisciplinary College (formerly Hadassah Academic College) in August 2022 under approval #346. Discourse with journalists can reveal how they define (and redefine) their professional roles, legitimize new practices and departures from established norms, and articulate and justify practices that are not in consensus and perhaps publicly contentious (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 151; Harlow, 2022, p. 6; Standaert et al., 2021; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014). The author conducted 20 in-depth phone interviews with Israeli journalists employed in professional news organizations (i.e., traditional, legacy media outlets) from September to December 2022. All interviews were conducted in Hebrew and answers were translated into English by the author.

Israel is closest to the "Liberal Model" of media systems, with independent public media outlets and a dominant market-oriented media, alongside smaller private and more partisan news outlets, similar to the European market and not that different than the North American system, though Israel's market-size is smaller, and its media coverage is also often affected by a protracted conflict (Peri, 2011). Thus, Israel's media system characteristics are similar to other liberal democracies (for other characteristics of the Israeli media-system see, Reich et al., 2016), though findings from any single case are naturally limited.

Journalists were selected from a list of all active Israeli journalists ($n = 1668$) that is produced annually by the Ifat media company. It is important to stress that the focus of this study is on journalists working in professional news organizations and not on independent journalists or media activists who do not work in media organizations or on bloggers and social media influencers (e.g., Russell, 2017). Only journalists who are regularly employed as reporters or news presenters in public outlets or large commercial media outlets were approached (the positive response rate was 51%). In

addition to these inclusion-exclusion criteria, the Ifat list is organized in alphabetical order and the first journalists who met the criteria on this list were contacted. The author made special effort, and mostly succeeded, to include Arab journalists, ultra-religious journalists, and women in the sample.

The focus on reporters and news presenters from professional news organizations is a hard test case: If interventionism is agreeable by reporters—whose job is to “report things as they are” and to convey a sense of objectivity to citizens—it is likely legitimate among less known journalists and in news beats such as welfare, education, and health. Moreover, most of the interviewees are established journalists who reached their positions after years of experience in different beats and positions and are well known in their fields and by the public. Generally, the positions of news presenters and reporters who specialize in politics, foreign affairs, security, and law are considered prestigious in Israel, with wide public exposure, name and face recognition, and impact. If journalists in these positions legitimize JI or practice it, other journalists are likely to follow their example.

The interviewees' ($N=20$) ages range from 27 to 65, with an average age of 46. They have considerable experience in journalism with an average of 20 years in the field. The journalists cover politics (5), security (3), crime and police (4), legal affairs (2), three large regions (Jerusalem, North, South), foreign affairs (1), and news presenters (2). The sample also includes three Arab, 2 ultra-orthodox, three female, and five public-media journalists. [Appendix](#) provides additional interviewee details. Interviews lasted 37 minutes on average.

The interview questions were derived from the main research questions and tapped into the journalists' professional and normative role conceptions and interpretations concerning JI (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, 2018; see also Standaert et al., 2021). To understand journalists' professional understandings of JI (RQ1), the interviewees were asked: “From your professional understanding, what is journalistic activism?”¹ This question taps into how the journalists define and understand interventionism and what kind of practices it involves.

To understand journalists' normative assessment of IJ (RQ2), they were asked: “What do you normatively think about this phenomenon?” The second question deals with the construction of interventionism's normativity while focusing on the discursive construction that confers legitimacy—and illegitimacy—on this phenomenon and its accompanying practices.

To explore more in depth which types of interventions are considered legitimate and illegitimate from journalists' perspectives (RQ3), journalists were asked: “Can journalists take personal stands on the issues they cover?;” “Is it acceptable for journalists to participate in a protest?;” and, “Which forms of activism in your view are permissible and which are not? i.e., where does the red-line cross?” These interview questions allow the closest approximation of journalists' professional and normative conceptions and their different interpretations of JI.

To explore RQ4, journalists were asked: “Has this phenomenon always been this way or is it spreading?” and “Why do you think that journalists are engaging in activism?” Admittedly, qualitative research of this type cannot establish general causal explanations, but I estimated that the question can provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and insights about journalists' informal rules and justifications for JI (see also the explanation on the RQs above).

Answers were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. The analysis borrows qualitative methods inspired by grounded theory methods and a constant comparative approach (e.g., Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018, p. 151; Harlow, 2022, p. 6; Martin et al., 2018; Molyneux, 2015; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014). Specifically, during the interviews, summaries of the answers of the journalists were written and the important points were highlighted immediately afterward. At the analysis stage, the summary answers for each question were grouped in a separate document, and similar answers and themes were highlighted in different colors. The conceptualization of the interventionism types that were proposed above was used to analyze the answers and to classify the forms of interventionism that journalists

¹In Hebrew, the word “interventionism” is close in meaning to “activism” while the latter implies the stronger forms of interventionism.

discussed. For example, answers about what JI is were coded in yellow, green, purple, and red, each color marking one of the four types of JI.

As the interviews progressed, general themes and categories began to appear and be refined. For example, the issue of interventionism in social media developed into a new sub-category about self-promotion on social media, which became an independent theme. Repeated answers and general themes began to appear after about 10 interviews and the saturation point was reached after the 15th interview. The presentation of the issues and themes that the interviewees raised proceeds along with the RQs, followed by a conceptual evaluation of the findings. Lessons from the results were used to reaffirm and refine the primary conceptualization of JI and its four types. Additional lessons that emerged from the data and its analysis were discussed in relation to theory development and refinement of the malleability of journalistic roles and journalistic branding.

Results

The results are discussed in four major sub-sections, along with the four research questions. The first sub-section deals with the professional conceptions of JI. The second sub-section deals with normative conceptions of JI. The third sub-section deals with what journalists perceived as legitimate and nonlegitimate forms of JI. The final sub-section discusses journalists' perceptions on the motivations for JI.

Professional conceptions of journalistic interventionism

In terms of their professional understanding of what interventionism is (RQ1), journalists referred to all four types of JI that were conceptualized above. When asked what JI is, as they understood it, nearly all of them referred to more than one type of JI in defining and demonstrating its practices.

All but two of the journalists referred to characteristics of advocacy interventionism. They described JI as journalism that involves ideological motivation which affects the choice of news stories, their overemphasis, and the content and framing of articles. The common theme was expressing a personal point of view or advocating one's worldview within and through one's work as a journalist. When defining JI, journalists often referred to expressing one's personal opinions, advancing an agenda, or an ideological stand. Some of them defined JI as propaganda and as journalism in the service of ideology. Several noted that journalists who engage in JI are personally involved in the issues they cover and lack neutrality and objectivity. As Participant 6 put it, "If someone defines himself as a warrior for a cause and also advances it through work . . . If you advance ideas that you believe in, you are an activist." As Participant 1 further explained,

A major share of journalists has a certain ideology and worldview that constitutes part of their motivation to work in this profession. Of course I want to bring good stories, but part of my motivation is ideological, like right-wing, Jewish or conservative.

Six interviewees referred to characteristics of agenda setting. In defining JI, they talked about "journalists who advance an agenda" and are "obsessive" about it (Participant 5), "push the same topic over and over" (Participant 10), and try to "raise and stir public discourse" (Participant 16). While the agenda setting category was present in the interviews, it was the least prevalent, possibly due to its overlap with the other JI types.

Characteristics of the driving action category were also mentioned by most interviewees. The journalists said that JI involves journalists' attempts to influence public decisions, such as "deciding who will be the next military chief of staff" (Participant 2), "affecting the police and the government into action" (Participant 16), "lead to a change in policy or law, public opinion, and among decision-makers" (Participant 15), and more generally to "influence a certain reality" (Participant 3). They also referred to attempts to affect public behavior and political behavior by "telling people what to do" (Participant 10), "forcing their opinion on the public" (Participant 11), "to create change in some area"

(Participant 12), or as Participant 20 put it, “To make people change their minds and get a whole country on its feet.”

Characteristics of the partisan activism category were mentioned in half the interviews. Journalists who engage in JI were described as “committed to certain political sources” (Participant 6), involved in “passing laws and organizing protests” (Participant 7), helping a politician and a certain political agenda (Participant 9), or as “political activists” (Participant 12). Some referred to journalists who engage in JI as “campaigners and politicians” (Participant 2), often making it hard to “tell if they are journalists or politicians or public relations persons” (Participant 5).

Overall, the four JI types could be found in the ways that the journalists defined and construed JI, with agenda setting being the least prevalent and the other types more prominent. The four categories were useful in analyzing journalists’ professional conceptions of JI. The fact that most journalists characterized JI in multiple ways suggests that the four categories are complementary. In general, the professional conceptions of JI related in some way to the objective journalism doctrine. JI conceptions were usually juxtaposed to objective journalism in construing the phenomenon. The element of intentionality was also central in the definition of JI, and it was clear to the interviewees that journalists’ deviations from objective journalism were motivated by conscious, planned, and even strategic personal choices.

Normative conceptions of journalistic interventionism

In terms of normative conceptions of JI (RQ2), most reporters legitimized it either fully or with caution and caveats (e.g., of being used correctly and responsibly), while few rejected it, and one did not give a clear answer. As elaborated in the subsections below, there were several main themes in journalists’ normative construction and legitimation of JI. Some journalists gave more than one justification for interventionism, and a few said that JI involves both positive and negative aspects.

Questioning the possibility of journalistic objectivity

A central theme in the construction of interventionism’s normativity was journalists’ disbelief in, or challenge to, the objective journalism doctrine. While they acknowledged its importance for fact-checking and telling the truth, they also noted that the ideal of objectivity is unattainable and that it is better to be open and transparent about one’s political convictions than to hide them under the guise of objectivity. As Participant 2 argued, “This phenomenon is inevitable because there is no real objectivity and there cannot be objectivity. Our system is better: free media in which people express their ideology.” Participant 10 noted,

There is no neutrality and there should not be neutrality but in a transparent and honest way . . . I don’t think you can demand journalists to separate between their values and their work. There is no such thing as objectivity.”
And P10 explained, “In some respects it [JI] is good because it brings transparency to the public.

In other words, the journalists argued that by being openly interventionist, the journalists’ positionality and ideology become more transparent so that audiences can better assess the story. These justifications referred mostly to advocacy interventionism and agenda setting. The journalists referred to these two types of JI as both more common and more acceptable compared to partisan activism, which was criticized. The later subsections provide a more detailed analysis of those perspectives

In general, there was a close nexus between journalists’ disbelief in the possibility of objectivity and their legitimation of JI. Journalists were mindful of the fact that aspects of JI stood against the standards of objective journalism and often referred to them as a yardstick to evaluate JI. Journalists justified interventionism by referring to pure objectivity as an outdated sole-ideal and arguing that the profession of journalism has evolved and matured. They justified JI either by challenging the very possibility of objectivity or by stretching the limits of what is acceptable in journalistic practice and norms, alongside the traditional model (see also Harlow, 2022, p. 8). Moreover, by acknowledging the impossibility—and in certain cases undesirability—of the objectivity ethos, the journalists who

supported JI emphasized other professional values, such as fact-checking and fairness, alongside transparency, honesty, and advancing a public goal, as elements that constitute a better form of journalism.

Giving voice to underrepresented groups and ideas

A second theme in the justification of JI revolved around its usefulness in giving voice and standing to underrepresented ideas and groups. For example, Participant 1 explained that “my initial motivation was not to act this way, but after I realized that I was underrepresented, I took it upon myself to bring this [right-wing] point of view.” Participant 4 said that JI can be relevant to raising issues “that are not covered enough due to commercial reasons” and additional journalists said interventionism is appropriate in topics like climate change (Participant 13), women’s equality (Participant 15), and fighting crime and enhancing equality (Participant 17).

Several journalists also justified JI in giving voice to underrepresented groups. Participant 1 talked about the need to represent right-wing groups that he believes are sidelined in the media. Participant 3 justified JI in enhancing the “plurality of voices.” And Participant 16 and Participant 18 justified interventionism in the need to protect the Arab and ultra-orthodox communities, respectively. Journalists acknowledged that JI is sometimes problematic and not appropriate to all matters, but if interventionism is performed on behalf of the weak and to address pressing public issues, it is justifiable as a counteractive practice against power imbalances and failures of the market. This line of legitimation refers to journalism as a public service and an enabler of voice plurality and representation in democracy.

The mission of journalism

A third theme was construing JI as an important tool for the general mission of journalism, to raise and solve social problems, and to serve as an effective watchdog in a democracy. In this conception, journalists justified using interventionist practices to be effective change agents.

For example, Participant 12 noted,

If I identify a phenomenon which is clearly not right and not legal and against certain values, I fight to change it. And if I encounter a stupidity of the bureaucracy, I will fight for that person. . . . This is the essence of the profession. Of course you want to change reality. Otherwise, I would not survive this work. This is the highest degree of satisfaction.

Participant 13 also viewed JI as based on “the perception that the media is a tool for social change.” Participant 15 also explained,

I promoted topics in the *Knesset* [i.e., Parliament]. The purpose is to lead change or some policy or exposure or change of perception among the public and decision-makers [and this is] the role of journalism, like the “watchdog of democracy.” The purpose of journalism is to act in order to fix and change [reality].

Or as Participant 7 observed,

You can understand this impulse of journalists, that for many years we stood from the sidelines . . . and you see the wrongdoings, and at some point you say “I am fed up with being the person who only photocopies reality. I want to be the one who shouts or the one who tries to change reality,” and I certainly respect some of those who chose this path of activism.

Generally, the journalists legitimized interventionism as part of their professional mission to be a watchdog for the public and change agents (see also Harlow, 2022; Standaert et al., 2021). This justification seems related to “the calling” aspect of journalists’ professional identity (Raemy, 2021) and the “view that emphasizes journalism’s (potential) contribution to the proper workings of democracy” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, p. 124). Journalists seem to conceive of their profession as a public service that entails responsibility, which legitimizes the use of their positions to protect and serve the public and to be change agents on the public’s behalf.

Legitimate and nonlegitimate forms of journalistic interventionism

The third research question concerns the legitimate and nonlegitimate forms and practices of JI. The journalists were asked the following questions: “Can journalists take personal stands on the issues they cover?;” “Is it acceptable for journalists to participate in a protest?;” and, “Which forms of activism in your view are permissible and which are not? i.e., where does the red-line cross?” Those questions allow a more fine-tuned understanding of the normative construction of specific interventionist practices and the JI types that were conceptualized above. The answers reveal common themes.

The legitimacy of advocacy interventionism

When asked whether journalists can take personal stands on the issues they cover and advance them, most journalists legitimized this practice, despite being reporters and news presenters. Stating one’s opinion and advocating for a certain policy were justified in several ways.

Only three journalists rejected this practice, saying that journalists must be completely objective (Participant 11), remain professional (Participant 12), and not involve themselves in any story (Participant 16). Most participants agreed that journalists can take personal stands on public matters and advance them. For example, Participant 10 said, “It is even desirable. You can’t really not take a stand. The very selection of what to talk about is a value judgment.” Participant 6 responded more bluntly, “These are questions that were true for yesterday. The separation between news and views is old-fashioned.” The journalists normalized opinion and advocacy by referring to its inevitability, both due to the lack of real objectivity and the fact that it is already a prevalent phenomenon. However, the agreement was not unconditional. Some of the journalists raised various caveats for advocating one’s opinion, such as: only about issues that are in consensus, such as helping disabled soldiers (Participant 2); or against the government mishandling of “criminal rampage, women’s killings and also high living costs. It’s legitimate and you cannot be wrong here” (Participant 17); only by journalists with at least 10 years of experience and in their area of expertise (Participant 4); only based on professional knowledge (Participant 5, P19); and only in private media and not in public media (Participant 8).

This conditional legitimation of advocacy interventionism illustrates that this practice is still negotiated and construed among journalists vis-à-vis the objective journalism doctrine. Journalists were aware that the “borders are blurred” and that “things that were once illegitimate are nowadays considered reasonable” (Participant 17). They were hesitant and more critical of applying advocacy to clearly political issues but normalized the practice when applied to issues they perceived as “in consensus.” In general, they were conscious that advocacy interventionism is contentious and may involve costs. As Participant 7 explained,

Expressing your opinion? It’s allowed; the question is whether it is right. . . . I debate this question myself. For example, on Twitter, I have expressed my positions, especially against [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu’s policies and against the occupation. On the other hand, when I arrive to produce news, I am marked in a clear color and people may say, rightfully so, that I already signaled the target. So sometimes I reduce the dosage in expressing my opinions.

Legitimacy and illegitimacy of protest participation

As conceptualized above, partisan activism refers to political actions and interventions by journalists, such as joining political campaigns, advising politicians and parties, and participating in protests. The findings reveal a more nuanced picture whereby protest participation was seen differently than other political actions. When asked whether journalists can participate in protests, it was surprising to see that 12 journalists agreed with such participation, with and without qualifications.

For example, Participant 6 said he agrees with journalists’ participation in protests because “a journalist already identifies his political views in writing, so it does not matter anymore” (i.e. if they protest). Others legitimized protest participation when journalists do so privately as citizens (Participants 7, 9, 11, and 15), outside their area of reporting (Participant 12), or when their workplace

is threatened (Participants 4 and 13). Others expressed their internal conflict about this sort of interventionism, as Participant 1 reveals:

I participated and continue to participate in protests. It does not happen a lot. Sometimes you feel the injustice is so significant that you cannot keep quiet. It is inevitable. It is a component that motivates us. Maybe theoretically it is wrong . . . because we are supposed to be bystanders who maintain distance and objectivity. The professional feelings say no but I am a human being. Where do I stop being a human being and begin to be a journalist? This separation does not exist for me.

This statement suggests that protest participation, and possibly JI more generally, occurs in situations in which the journalist feel they are forced to drop their professional commitments and are pulled into partisan activism by reflexes involving their identity or cherished values. It implies that JI involves, and is legitimized by, cognitive and emotional drives that are tied to social identity, possibly like in collective action mobilization (Abrams, 2001; Shultziner, 2025).

Several journalists pointed out that while it is permissible for journalists to participate in protests, it is not advisable because they risk losing credibility. Even journalists who said that they participated in or organized a protest were hesitant to normalize this practice. As Participant 16 explained,

I generally prefer that reporters won't participate in a protest, but only writing about the protest is not enough. In case you see yourself as a victim, you need to protest, and I even organized a demonstration following an attack on a journalist, because it is an attack against all journalists.

This line of legitimation connects to the social identity aspect that was noted above, which sometimes compels journalists to leave their bystander position.

The journalists who completely rejected protest participation talked about the dangers of losing professional credibility and public trust along with violating basic work ethics. As Participant 8 explained, "I didn't go to protests because I am a journalist. I am not in favor of that." Participant 2 called such practice "a mistake" and added, "You may gain some followers but lose your credibility." Or as Participant 17 noted, "It makes no sense. A journalist needs to be impartial, and he has other ways to influence." These journalists uphold the bystander position of objective journalism as inseparable and essential to their professional identity (e.g., Tuchman, 1972).

Overall, there was surprising support for this element of partisan activism, even though the practice is considered professionally contentious and risky. Even those who have participated in protests still debate this practice and have mixed professional feelings about it because of how strongly it contrasts with the demand for neutrality and the objective journalism doctrine. The journalists who legitimize this element of partisan activism mitigated its importance usually by de-politicizing their own participation (i.e., as private citizens) or presenting it as a rare practice and an example of good citizenship. The element of social identity seems important in this regard, as a legitimizing and incentivizing factor that triggers one's self-esteem and emotions.

Political interventions are illegitimate

Notwithstanding the support for protest participation, a major theme in journalists' answers was the denial of elements in partisan activism that involve political actions and interventions, such as joining political campaigns and advising politicians and parties. While certain practices were seen as legitimate in all four types of JI, the journalists tended to add qualifications and leave out practices that involved being overtly partisan, directly helping politicians, and acting on their personal beliefs in politically contentious issues. The journalists often criticized and gave examples of journalists who wrongfully engaged in such forms of partisan activism.

For example, Participant 8 said it is not legitimate for journalists to "use their reporting for propaganda . . . when he is part of the thing itself." Participant 1 who participated in political protests revealed, "there are subjects that are part of my [political] agenda, but I refuse to be part of campaigns to disseminate certain political messages." Participant 10 noted, "I don't like journalists who come to speak at *Knesset* committees. . . . To pressure people into action is also illegitimate, and to keep lists of politicians that are helping me or not." Participant 12 criticized journalists who "serve this or that side

or always on the same side and their entire writing is about this. And if you refrain from writing about a topic because of your opinion, this is no longer journalism.” And Participant 4 said, “a red line is when a journalist says that you should vote for this or that candidate because he is better than everyone else.”

The important point is that all the journalists who objected to these political elements of partisan activism legitimized other types and practices of JI. For instance, Participant 5 explains, “I do not accept political activism, but if you encounter wrongdoing and you solve it, this gives me more pleasure than ten articles in the newspaper.” Indeed, some journalists who rejected helping politicians agreed with protest participation. This complexity suggests there are nuances in the professional and normative conceptions of partisan activism and JI more broadly, some of which might be contradictory, as when journalists object to one dimension of JI but agree with other, even bolder, dimensions in other contexts or topics.

Perceptions on the motivation for interventionism: social media and self-promotion

The last research question explores what motivates JI from journalists’ perspectives. The journalists gave three complementary explanations and interpretations for what might motivate journalists to engage in JI.

The first explanation was closely related to, and largely overlapped with, the normative conception of JI as part of the mission of journalism. Journalists explained that what motivates journalists to engage in JI is a growing sense of urgency, and the self-expectations and ambitions of journalists to be change agents for the public. Since these arguments are very similar to the discussion above on the normative conceptions of JI, the arguments will not be repeated here.

Social media was a second theme in the participants’ answers concerning the motivation to engage in JI. The journalists argued that social media, and Twitter in particular, were allowing and encouraging journalists to depart from the norms of objective journalism. For example, Participant 13 said, “Considering that journalists do not need their media outlets and operate on social media, and do not need editing, no doubt that this has amplified this [interventionism].” Similarly, Participant 2 noted, “This phenomenon is growing because of social media. Nowadays they [journalists] can echo their activism [online].” Thirteen journalists made similar remarks on the role of social media in encouraging interventionism, especially of the advocacy activism and agenda setting types in which journalists express their views on social media, support and criticize politicians, and try to set the day’s agenda and to influence public opinion.

Journalistic interventionism as self-promotion?

Interestingly, when speaking about the connection between social media and JI, many journalists raised a factor and motive that was unanticipated. The participants tied interventionism to journalists’ professional ambitions to promote themselves, self-interest motives, and their chase of public recognition and approval. For instance, Participant 2 noted,

There is the chase of “likes.” Activism brings “likes” and adds to one’s ego as a more influential journalist. It makes you a central player. It frames you to certain audiences, and it is economically profitable because you are invited to lectures and gigs. It also promotes one’s ideology. So, it all converges.

Similarly, Participant 10 candidly revealed:

I can testify from my experience. Once, the newspaper was the most important thing in my life. Today, I work in different media outlets, and I work on Twitter, to be perceived in a certain way. We are in the age of celebrities. Since I transformed from being a “serious” journalist to a “populist” or popular journalist, I’m invited to panels, and I’m being paid for that. . . . To succeed, you need to be a brand name and this passes through activism.

Several participants also connected the motivation for interventionism to the chase of public approval and to competition considerations among journalists, including their desire to be publicly and professionally influential. As Participant 3 notes,

Given the large number of journalists and the competition between them, they try to be noticeable. There is more chutzpah. No filters. If I just report ordinary stories, I will be boring. I need some type of sting. Often you do it through activism.

Or as Participant 16 explained, “It’s very good to be an activist . . . A journalist without uniqueness cannot succeed in his work at all. I cannot be a reporter with simple articles.”

The journalists thus raise several complementing motivations for JI. First, the journalists construed JI as part of the mission of journalism. Second, journalists referred to the emergence of social media as a platform that allows opportunities for, and even encourages, advocacy, setting public agenda, and taking part in online campaigns. Third, the journalists pointed to professional ambitions and self-promotion, as well as competition considerations and distinguishing oneself from other journalists, as factors that motivate journalists to engage in JI.

The fact that JI is pursued for self-promotion was an unanticipated finding that raises questions about the intentionality of interventionism. It appears that advancing a public cause may not be the only goal that journalists seek in interventionism. While self-promotion and promoting a public goal do not necessarily contradict, this finding may stretch the definition of JI as not being motivated purely by ideological or public goals and perhaps involving a personal need for attention and positive self-esteem (see also Molyneux, 2015, p. 931). We will now turn to further conclusions that can be drawn from this study.

Discussion

This article conceptualized and explored four types and dimensions of JI based on recent developments in the literature. Overall, the findings suggest that these four categories can be useful to analyze JI and may be useful in future studies. Journalists’ professional conceptions of JI reflected the four types, with characteristics of advocacy interventionism, driving action, and partisan activism being referred to most frequently. Journalists’ definition of JI was not confined to a single type of intervention in news making or public life, thus reinforcing the conceptualization that the four types are complementary dimensions of the same phenomenon and share similar underlying motivations. Journalists emphasized the journalist’s intention or motivation as a defining characteristic of JI, consistent with the definition and conceptualization of JI that distinguishes it from other forms of media bias. These analytical categories, and the nuances and refinements that were noted above, can be further tested and evaluated in future studies, both qualitative and quantitative.

Journalists’ normative construction and legitimation of JI raises three main themes: the impossibility of objectivity in journalism; giving voice to underrepresented groups and ideas; and the mission of journalism. Interestingly, both the professional and normative constructions of JI involved the objective journalism doctrine as a standard. Journalists evaluated, justified and criticized JI practices based on the objective journalism doctrine’s notions of the bystander observer and neutral journalist. They were conscious of the tensions between JI and objective journalism. Journalists tried to reconcile these tensions and set limits on how far one’s opinions can intervene in news making and journalistic work more broadly.

In closing this paper, there are two main theoretical conclusions for future research that are worth highlighting. The first relates to the scholarship on journalistic roles and the second to the more recent literature on journalistic branding.

Journalistic interventions and the malleability of journalistic roles

The fact that experienced reporters and even news presenters legitimize interventionism suggests that JI is not confined to a specific role or type of journalist, as argued by Ginosar and Reich (2022).

Journalists in various roles, including reporters, may engage in interventionism depending on the context. These journalists regularly adhere to principles of objective journalism but explain that it is legitimate to engage in interventionism when it is necessary to help a person in need, a group (e.g., minority, women), an important goal (e.g., equality, religion), or a compelling or urgent political cause (e.g., pending legislation or political crises). Moreover, some of the journalists were not entirely consistent in their positions about the different types of JI, such as rejecting practices of advocacy interventionism and agenda setting but legitimizing—or even participating in—partisan activism. This malleability of role perceptions connects to recent arguments that “some factors might stand in tension with each other, possibly resulting in cognitive misalignment, more heterogeneous cognitive role orientations, or moral dilemmas” (Schwinges, 2024, p. 4).

It appears that the type of interventionism that journalists employ is affected by multiple and dynamic factors such as the way they use social media, their workplace (e.g., public or private media), the sensitivity and urgency of the topic in public discourse, and to one’s social identity, how far the practice deviates from objective journalism norms, and how publicly visible the methods of interventionism are. As a tentative conclusion, the closer one feels the issue is to one’s social identity and the more urgent the matter, the more likely they are to allow themselves to use bolder forms of interventionism such as driving action and even partisan activism (at least regarding protest participation). Another tentative conclusion is that journalists are more amenable to engage in interventionism within the general domain of media production (e.g., affecting news content) rather than in external domains (e.g., politics), thereby trying to somehow reconcile the objective journalism ideal with JI as a context dependent practice or impulse. These tentative conclusions can be tested in future studies.

As in other influences on journalists’ work and identity, the route to interventionism can arguably be in “a state of constant flux” and dependent on multiple levels, such as “journalists’ tasks, the current job situation, current events, and the organization they work for” (Raemy, 2021, p. 854). These multiple influences shape more flexible role perceptions among journalists that are highly context-dependent and “characterized by a nuanced interplay of specific role attributes and a hybridization of roles” (Schwinges, 2024, p. 4; see also Mellado, 2015; Raemy, 2021).

The findings can also be contextualized within the literature that argues that journalism is moving toward more involved and interventionist role perceptions. As Ward put it: “Today, many journalists see themselves as some combination of informer, interpreter and advocate” (2009, pp. 299–300). The profession may thus be moving toward “more critical, more aggressive, deeper, society-oriented, and contextual journalism” (Ginosar & Reich, 2022, p. 676).

Journalistic Interventionism, self-promotion, and branding

Another important conclusion from this study concerns the relationship between interventionism, social media, self-promotion, and branding. Journalists understood the affordances of social media, its open culture, and their ability to interact directly with specific audiences as what motivates and gives premium to JI. They also understood the rise of interventionist practices as related to competition considerations and distinguishing themselves from other journalists in a highly competitive and dynamic market. These findings connect to the recent scholarship on journalistic branding. For example, Molyneux found that journalists use tweets and retweets, often to express personal opinions, and they do so for self-promotion and “as a way to establish a personal brand” (2015, p. 930). Molyneux explains that, beyond promoting their own work, journalists use Twitter to develop a personal brand of themselves as a certain type of journalist or of certain qualities that are appreciated by one’s followers (2015, p. 931). Other studies also found that branding has become a common practice and that journalists use Twitter to promote themselves and to market their news outlets (Barnard, 2016; Molyneux et al., 2018; Tandoc & Vos, 2016).

Interventionism can be seen as a practice that is tied to such branding motivations. Branding may be connected to JI through the pressures on journalists to stand out and succeed in a competitive market, to find an audience that shares the journalist’s values and appreciates his

or her specific deviation from objective journalism. As Participant 10 who engages in partisan activism has put it above, “To succeed, you need to be a brand name and this passes through activism.” In this context, JI may be a self-marketing attempt that also caters to audience tastes and preferences, which is communicated on social media (see also Tandoc & Vos, 2016, p. 953). By standing out through JI, journalists receive direct positive feedback (comments and “likes”), lead traffic to their own work and to their outlet’s websites (i.e., creating revenue), and elevate their public standing (e.g., speaking invitation) and professional status (e.g., promotion). Or as Participant 2 put it above, “it all converges.”

A single case study based on 20 interviews obviously has limitations. Israeli journalists adhere to traditional journalistic norms and Anglo-Saxon journalistic culture, but they possibly also “tend toward a more interventionist role,” as Ginosar and Reich posit (2022, p. 663). JI may also have varied manifestations and sensitivities based on the country culture and context (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Further in-depth studies with journalists in other countries are needed. The conceptualization of JI which was developed in this paper may be incorporated into such future studies.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Prof. Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt for her valuable feedback, as well as the two anonymous reviewers, whose constructive comments greatly helped refine and improve the paper. Much appreciation to the journalists who agreed to participate in this study and for their honest answers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Doron Shultziner is an associate professor and head of the Politics & Communication Department at the Jerusalem Multidisciplinary College. He specializes in political communication and the study of partisan media bias and journalistic practices in particular. Shultziner is the Chief Editor of *Media Frames: Israeli Journal of Communication*.

ORCID

Doron Shultziner  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3370-2194>

References

- Abrams, D. (2001). “Social identity, psychology of.” *international encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences*. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (Vol. 11, pp. 14306–14309). Elsevier.
- Barnard, S. R. (2016). ‘Tweet or be sacked’: Twitter and the new elements of journalistic practice. *Journalism*, 17(2), 190–207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884914553079>
- Barnard, S. R. (2018). Tweeting# Ferguson: Mediatized fields and the new activist journalist. *New Media and Society*, 20(7), 2252–2271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817712723>
- Donsbach, W. (2010). Journalists and their professional identities. In S. Allan (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to news and journalism* (pp. 38–48). Routledge.
- Esser, F., & Umbricht, A. (2014). The evolution of objective and interpretative journalism in the Western press: Comparing six news systems since the 1960s. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91(2), 229–249. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699014527459>
- Fisher, C. (2016). The advocacy continuum: Towards a theory of advocacy in journalism. *Journalism*, 17(6), 711–726. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884915582311>
- Ginosar, A., & Reich, Z. (2022). Obsessive–Activist journalists: A new Model of journalism? *Journalism Practice*, 16(4), 660–680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2020.1816488>

- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hanitzsch, T., & Vos, T. P. (2017). Journalistic roles and the struggle over institutional identity: The discursive constitution of journalism. *Communication Theory*, 27(2), 115–135. <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12112>
- Hanitzsch, T., & Vos, T. P. (2018). Journalism beyond democracy: A new look into journalistic roles in political and everyday life. *Journalism*, 19(2), 146–164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916673386>
- Hanitzsch, T., Vos, T. P., Standaert, O., Hanusch, F., Hovden, J. F., Hermans, L., & Ramaprasad, J. (2019). Role orientations: Journalists' views on their place in society. In T. Hanitzsch, F. Hanusch, J. Ramaprasad, & A. S. De Beer (Eds.), *Worlds of journalism: Journalistic cultures around the globe* (pp. 161–198). Columbia University Press.
- Harlow, S. (2022). Journalism's change agents: Black lives matter, #blackouttuesday, and a shift toward Activist Doxa. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 99(3), 742–762. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990221108648>
- Hopmann, D. N., Van Aelst, P., & Legnante, G. (2012). Political balance in the news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 240–257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911427804>
- Janowitz, M. (1975). Professional models in journalism: The gatekeeper and the advocate. *The Journalism Quarterly*, 52(4), 618–626. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769907505200402>
- Konieczna, M., & Santa Maria, E. (2023). “I can't be neutral or centrist in a debate over my own humanity”: A study of disagreements between journalists and editors, and what they tell Us about objectivity. *Journalism Studies*, 24(15), 1839–1856. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2247487>
- Lichter, R. S. (2017). Theories of media bias. In K. Kenski & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political communications* (pp. 403–416). Oxford University Press.
- Martin, V. B., Scott, C., Brennen, B., & Durham, M. G. (2018). What is grounded theory good for? *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(1), 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018759676>
- Mellado, C. (2015). Professional roles in news content. *Journalism Studies*, 16(4), 596–614. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.922276>
- Mellado, C., & Van Dalen, A. (2014). Between Rhetoric and Practice. *Journalism Studies*, 15(6), 859–878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2013.838046>
- Molyneux, L. (2015). What journalists retweet: Opinion, humor, and brand development on twitter. *Journalism*, 16(7), 920–935. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884914550135>
- Molyneux, L., Holton, A., & Lewis, S. C. (2018). How journalists engage in branding on twitter: Individual, organizational, and institutional levels. *Information Communication & Society*, 21(10), 1386–1401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1314532>
- Peri, Y. (2011). The impact of national security on the development of media systems: The case of Israel. In D. Hallin & P. Mancini (Eds.), *Comparing media systems beyond the western world* (pp. 11–25). Cambridge University Press.
- Raemy, P. (2021). A theory of professional identity in journalism: Connecting discursive institutionalism, socialization, and psychological resilience theory. *Communication Theory*, 31(4), 841–861. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtaa019>
- Reich, Z., Barnoy, A., & Hertzog, L. (2016). Journalists in Israel: Country report. *Worlds of Journalism Study*. Retrieved December 9, 2023, from https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/31036/1/Reich_Bamoy_Journalists_in_Israel.pdf
- Reunanen, E., & Koljonen, K. (2018). Not partisans, but participants. *Journalism Studies*, 19(5), 726–744. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1204940>
- Ruigrok, N. (2010). From journalism of activism towards journalism of accountability. *International Communication Gazette*, 72(1), 85–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048509350340>
- Russell, A. (2017). *Journalism as activism: Recoding media power*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Schwinges, A. (2024). Navigating ideals and realities: On using reconstruction interviews to study journalistic roles. *Journalism Practice*, 18(9), 2224–2239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2024.2305165>
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Shultziner, D. (2025). Identity, collective action and inaction: The role of self-esteem and psychological benefits. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 55(1), e12440. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12440>
- Shultziner, D., & Shoshan, A. (2018). A journalists' protest? Personal identification and journalistic activism in the Israel social justice protest movement. *International Journal of Press/politics*, 23(1), 44–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217736889>
- Shultziner, D., & Stukalin, Y. (2021a). Distorting the news? The mechanisms of partisan media bias and its effects on news production. *Political Behavior*, 43(1), 201–222.
- Shultziner, D., & Stukalin, Y. (2021b). Politicizing what's news: How partisan media bias occurs in news production. *Mass Communication & Society*, 24(3), 372–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2020.1812083>
- Soontjens, K. (2019). The rise of interpretive journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 20(7), 952–971. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1467783>
- Sözeri, C. (2016). Rethinking activist journalism when freedom of press is under threat. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*, 2(2), 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajmmc.2.2.1>
- Standaert, O., Hanitzsch, T., & Dedonder, J. (2021). In their own words: A normative-empirical approach to journalistic roles around the world. *Journalism*, 22(4), 919–936. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919853183>

- Strömbäck, J., Karlsson, M., & Hopmann, D. N. (2012). Determinants of news content: Comparing journalists' perceptions of the normative and actual impact of different event properties when deciding what's news. *Journalism Studies*, 13(5–6), 718–728. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2012.664321>
- Tandoc, E. C., Jr., & Takahashi, B. (2014). Playing a crusader role or just playing by the rules? Role conceptions and role inconsistencies among environmental journalists. *Journalism*, 15(7), 889–907. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884913501836>
- Tandoc, E. C., Jr., & Vos, T. P. (2016). The journalist is marketing the news. *Journalism Practice*, 10(8), 950–966. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1087811>
- Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K. (2014). Producing protest news: An inquiry into journalists' narratives. *International Journal of Press/politics*, 19(4), 410–429. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214540941>
- Thomas, R. J. (2018). Advocacy journalism. In T. P. Vos (Ed.), *Journalism* (Vol. 19, pp. 391–413). De Gruyter.
- Tuchman, G. (1972). Objectivity as strategic ritual: An examination of Newsmen's notions of objectivity. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 77(4), 660–679. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225193>
- Waisbord, S. (2009). Advocacy journalism in a global context. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 371–385). Routledge.
- Ward, S. J. A. (2009). Journalism ethics. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 295–309). Routledge.

Appendix. Details of journalists interviewees

| Participant | Role | Private or Public Outlet | Outlet Type | Coverage Area | News Outlet |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| P1 | Reporter | Private | Newspaper | Politics | <i>Israel Hayom</i> |
| P2 | Reporter | Public | Television | Security | KAN11 |
| P3 | Reporter | Private | Television | Security | Channel 14 |
| P4 | Reporter | Public | Television | Jerusalem | KAN11 |
| P5 | Reporter | Private | Newspaper | Police and Crime | <i>Israel Hayom</i> |
| P6 | Reporter | Private | Newspaper | Legal | <i>Calcalist</i> |
| P7 | Reporter | Private | Television | Magazine-Investigative | Channel 12 |
| P8 | Reporter | Public | Radio | Legal | KAN11 |
| P9 | Reporter | Private | Newspaper | Politics | <i>Yated Neeman</i> |
| P10 | Reporter, commentator | Private | Newspaper, Radio, Television | Politics | Haaretz, GLZ, Channel 13 |
| P11 | News presenter | Public | Television | Politics | Knesset Channel |
| P12 | Reporter | Private | Newspaper | Security | <i>Maariv</i> |
| P13 | Reporter | Private | Newspaper | Foreign Affairs | <i>Maariv</i> |
| P14 | Reporter, Owner | Private | Internet News | Local | <i>Kan Darom</i> |
| P15 | Reporter, News presenter | Public | Television | Crime | KAN11 |
| P16 | Reporter | Private | Internet News | Arab society | YNET |
| P17 | Reporter | Private | Television | Regional | Channel 12 |
| P18 | Reporter | Private | Radio | Police and Crime, Jerusalem | Radio Kol Hai |
| P19 | Reporter | Private | Newspaper | Policy | Makor Rishon |
| P20 | Reporter | Private | Television | Crime | Channel 13 |