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CLICKS OR PULITZERS?

WEB JOURNALISTS AND THEIR WORK IN THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE

Angèle Christin

A DISSERTATION

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

This study examines the process of quantification taking place in web journalism. The internet is transforming journalism in many ways. Yet one of the most fundamental differences between print and online news is the multiplication of internet metrics: web journalists now receive a constant stream of quantitative information about the online popularity of their work.

Does quantification always foster standardization? This dissertation argues instead that metrics take on radically different meanings when they travel between countries. Focusing on the case of online news, I compare the reception of web analytics in two countries, the United States and France, which have different journalistic traditions and relations to market forces.

Drawing on ethnographic analysis of a pair of news websites in the United States and France, as well as additional qualitative and quantitative material, I find that web journalists in both countries are faced with conflicting definitions of journalistic value. Traditional "editorial" evaluation based on original reporting and peer judgment is at odds with "click-based" evaluation, which focuses on the number of page views.

In spite of these commonalities, American and French journalists manage the tension between qualitative and quantitative evaluations in different ways. At the U.S. website, journalists distinguish sharply between editorial and click-based modes of evaluation and keep them separate in their daily work. In contrast, *LaPlace*'s journalists constantly switch back and forth between qualitative and quantitative criteria of value. These different organizational styles manifest themselves in each website's editorial formats, newsrooms routines, and compensation practices.

These differences between the American and French news organizations can usefully be analyzed as distinct "arrangements" between modes of evaluation. Such arrangements stem from the respective trajectories and structures of the American and French journalistic fields. The American journalistic field has a long history of strong market forces, professionalization, and marked specialization. These features emerged more recently in the French journalistic field.

Growing economic pressures in the form of "clicks" affect American and French web journalists in different ways, with important effects on the content of online news in the two countries. This dissertation thus underscores how American and French journalists actively reproduce national differences at a time of economic and technological convergence.

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Introduction

"We really wrote for one another. Our primary reference group
was spread around us in the newsroom, or "the snake pit," as some called it.
We knew that no one would jump on our stories as quickly as our colleagues;
for reporters make the most voracious readers."
(Darnton 1975: 176-182)

"It's hard not to look at the number of clicks, because it's very visible.
I don't think that I choose my topics based on it
but I look at it and it puts me in a good mood ["*ça me fait plaisir*"].
When you see that a piece is working well, you're happy."
(Louise, French journalist, 2013)

The printed press is in turmoil. Over the past decade, the advertising revenues of newspapers have fallen by more than half in the United States. The circulation of daily newspapers and the overall number of newspapers also dropped, leading to massive layoffs in print newsrooms. The total workforce employed in American daily newspapers has shrunk from 54,700 to 38,000 over the past ten years, a 30% decrease (ASNE 2013, Pew Research Center 2013).

Every indication suggests that the future of journalism will take place online. The year 2010 marked the first time that more people read news online than in print in the United States.

In 2012, 50% of the American population got news in one or more digital form on an average day. Online advertising continues to grow. Digital publications are also the only ones who are hiring: they have opened thousands of full-time editorial positions over the last five years (Pew Research Center 2014, 2013).

The development of online news has been accompanied by many innovations in journalistic styles and formats. Short blog posts, frequent updates, casual writing styles, and interactions with online readers have become standard. Web journalists are taking advantage of the internet to create multimedia articles blending text, images, sounds, videos, and hyperlinks, thus contributing to a redefinition of journalistic production.

Less visible than these changes, but perhaps more profound in terms of differentiating print and online news, is the multiplication of internet metrics in web newsrooms. Web journalists and editors are now provided with a constant stream of quantitative data about the online success of their articles. Analytics software programs provide detailed and often real-time statistics about articles published online. These metrics include not only the number of visits ("clicks"), but also the numbers of citations and comments on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as the average time spent per reader on each article.

In most web newsrooms, journalists and editors have open access to these analytics programs, which are usually installed on every computer. Like Louise, the journalist quoted above who explains that she is pleased when her articles receive high numbers of page views, editors and journalists often observe and compare the number of visits for their articles. They make predictions about which articles will succeed and express surprise or disappointment when the actual numbers do not match their expectations.

This constitutes a major change from the situation at print newspapers. As many studies of print journalism have shown, newspaper writers in the past only had vague notions of their reading public.[1] "We really wrote for one another," Darnton recalls from his days as a newspaperman in the 1960s (Darnton 1975). Journalists wrote for their editors, their colleagues, their competitors, their friends, and their sources, rather than for the audience at large. They routinely disregarded the "letters to the editor" written by unknown readers (Gans 1979: 234). They assumed that what was of interest to them would also interest their readers. Instead, web journalists now have detailed data on the preferences of their "quantified audience" (Anderson 2011, Usher 2013).

1) Clicks, quantification, and standardization

Internet metrics not only materialize an audience that was more abstract for writers at print publications, they also transform the internal dynamics of journalistic production in web newsrooms.

Journalists and editors are now able to compare the quantitative success of different topics and formats. Traditionally prestigious subjects such as politics or international coverage tend to receive fewer page views than less prestigious ones such as celebrity news, or lifestyle articles. "Clicks" thus place different kinds of journalistic content on a single quantitative scale. This constitutes a second essential difference from twentieth-century print publications, where journalistic excellence was judged separately based by subject or genre. "Good journalism" meant very different things depending on the publication and the section. The organization that

[1] In this project I use the terms "journalist" and "writer" as synonyms.

awards the most prestigious professional prizes in print journalism, the Pulitzer Prizes, still reflects this specialization. The Pulitzers reward "journalistic excellence" in many different subcategories, including breaking news reporting, investigative reporting, international reporting, etc., totaling fourteen categories. Journalistic production is implicitly judged incomparable across such editorial categories.

Taking a step back, the growing importance of internet metrics in web newsrooms contributes to a process of quantification or *commensuration* – that is, the transformation of different qualities into a single quantity (Espeland and Stevens 1998). Quantification is not a new topic in sociological analysis. From the work of Karl Marx and Georg Simmel onward, social scientists have studied the quantification of previously incommensurable goods. Many different cases have been documented, from the commodification of work (Marx 1992 [1867]) to the rise of double-entry bookkeeping (Weber 2001 [1905], Carruthers and Espeland 1991), the development of a modern market economy (Polanyi 2001 [1944]), and the monetization of nature (Fourcade 2011, Espeland 1998), bodily goods (Almeling 2007, Steiner 2001, Healy 2010), and even death (Zelizer 1983).

What are the effects of quantification? Existing research underlines two main consequences. First, scholars emphasize the overall loss of value and disenchantment brought about by the rise of metrics. For example, in his *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel argues that money creates a new distance between people and what they value, thus contributing to a growing detachment, coldness, and impersonality of social relations (Simmel 2011 [1907]). A second idea is that quantification fosters standardization. In this view, by ranking objects, people, and ideas on a single scale, quantification facilitates comparison. This, in turn, contributes to the

rise of mimetic practices that eventually compel units to converge (Sauder and Espeland 2009, Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997, DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Yet does quantification necessarily lead to standardization and convergence? In this project, I argue that metrics operate in a more complex manner. Like other cultural forms, numbers can take on radically different meanings when they travel. The example of money – the master metric – is particularly revealing. As emphasized by Zelizer, "there is no single, uniform, generalized money, but multiple monies: people earmark different currencies for many or perhaps all types of social interactions" (Zelizer 1994: 4, Steiner 2009). Thus, money takes on different meanings depending on the social setting in question. Similarly, a new metric viewed as an affront to existing values in one field might become a strategic game to play in another. Metrics may even be used by skilled actors to reinforce existing identities and resist pressures towards homogenization. Context matters greatly in defining the meanings given to new cultural forms: ideas and practices are often transformed, reinterpreted, and put to different uses when they travel between countries (Bourdieu 2002, Sapiro 2008, Sallaz 2012, Lamont 1987).

2) Cultural arrangements: the reproduction of differences at a time of convergence

In this dissertation, I compare the reception of internet metrics at news websites in the United States and France, two countries that are often presented as polar opposites in terms of cultural norms and social organization.[2]

Starting with Tocqueville, social scientists have contrasted the democratic traditions dominant in the United States and France, the lesser role of market values in France, as well as

[2] In this dissertation, I alternatively use the adjectives "American" and "U.S." to describe the people and organizations located in the United States of America.

the stronger influence of the state in France compared to the United States (Tocqueville 2003 [1835], d'Iribarne 1993, Lamont 1992, Lamont and Thévenot 2000, Fourcade 2011). Scholars have also noted important differences between French and American journalism. In the United States, journalism is characterized by strong market forces and professionalization early in its history (Schudson 1978), whereas French journalism was, until recently, relatively shielded from market forces and weakly professionalized (Benson 2013, Bourdieu 1994). How do web journalists in these two different contexts respond to the rise of quantitative audience measurements?

Drawing on more than 400 hours of ethnographic observations in web newsrooms and 101 semi-structured interviews with French and American web journalists (a detailed description of the qualitative methods can be found in Appendix A), this dissertation documents a story of divergence within convergence.

I primarily focus on the reception of internet metrics at two news websites, *TheNotebook* in New York and *LaPlace* in Paris.[3] These two online-only publications share many characteristics. They were both founded by print journalists. They rely on advertising revenue as their main source of income. They have comparable positions in the rankings of the most popular news websites in their respective countries. In addition, there is a built-in convergence between the two websites, since *LaPlace* consciously imitated the editorial line and business model of *TheNotebook* in its early years. The editors-in-chief of the two websites know each other well and the two organizations even had a formal partnership for two years.

Based on this ethnographic fieldwork, I find that the two news websites pay close attention to internet metrics. *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* rely on the same software programs to

[3] The names of the websites have been anonymized in order to comply with IRB regulations. See Appendix A for a presentation and discussion of the anonymization process.

track the online success of their articles. At both organizations, web metrics have become an essential part of the daily routines of staffers and editors. For example, at both sites, editors change the location of the articles on the homepage depending on their online success. In both cases, journalists are aware that international news and culture articles fare poorly online, whereas articles about sex, scandals, and celebrities attract large numbers of page views. Journalists at both publications pay close attention to catchy headlines and search engine optimization.

More broadly, I show that *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* face a similar tension between two modes of evaluation of journalistic value, which I call "editorial" and "click-based." According to the editorial criteria, journalistic excellence depends on the opinion and respect of the journalist's peers and superiors. In contrast, according to click-based evaluation, journalistic quality is defined quantitatively by the success of the articles in terms of page views, 'likes,' and 'tweets.'

Nonetheless, the two news organizations organize the coexistence between editorial and click-based evaluations in different ways. *TheNotebook* relies on a strong division of labor between editors and journalists. Editors make most of the decisions involving traffic numbers. Journalists express indifference towards metrics and explain that they prefer to focus on writing good copy. These assertions were confirmed during my days of observation: editors constantly relied on analytics software programs, whereas such programs were never open on the journalists' computers. At *LaPlace*, there is no such specialization. Editors and journalists are both highly critical of traffic numbers, yet they also constantly switch back and forth between editorial and click-based definitions of journalistic value. Consequently, analytics programs were always open and traffic was a constant topic of conversation in the newsroom during my days of fieldwork.

These different organizational styles manifest themselves in each website's editorial formats, newsroom routines, staff management, and compensation practices.

I argue that the two websites rely on different "cultural arrangements" in order to manage the tension between quantitative and qualitative modes of evaluation. Drawing on Zelizer's framework (2005), I respectively label the arrangements at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* "separate" and "connected." Such arrangements did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, they stem from the respective trajectories and structures of the American and French journalistic fields.

3) *Observing change:* TheNotebook *and* LaPlace *as transitional forms*

Most of the analysis presented in this dissertation focuses on *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. I also conducted ethnographic fieldwork and interviews at four other news websites in the United States and France in order to get a better sense of the field of online news in the two countries (see Appendix A for a full description). Is it the case, based on this additional material, that other news sites draw on the same "separate" and "connected" arrangements as *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*?

This question requires a brief description of current structure of the field of online news. In the United States and France, three main types of news websites coexist. The first category consists of the websites of legacy media companies, such as daily newspapers and television channels. This includes websites such as *The New York Times* (NYTimes.com) and CNN (CNN.com) in the United States or *Le Monde* (LeMonde.fr) and France Télévision (Francetvinfo.fr) in France. These companies typically have long editorial traditions and

emphasize their serious editorial line. They rely on complex hierarchical structures and extensive infrastructure, which are both an asset and a liability.[4]

The second category includes recently created web-only sites such as *The Huffington Post*, *BuzzFeed*, and *Gawker*, which can be labelled "digital natives" (Pew Research Center 2014). These sites enjoyed an exponential increase in traffic, advertising revenue, and number of employees over the past five years. Digital native sites relied from the start on innovative technologies, aggressive traffic maximization techniques, and small organizational structures and staff sizes. Digital native sites are often criticized for their reliance on aggregation (e.g., featuring content first published elsewhere) and their tabloid-like editorial line (Keller 2011, Editors 2011). Almost all of their income derives from advertising revenues.[5] They were typically created by people who had little or no traditional news experience.[6]

Websites such as *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* constitute a third category of actors in the field of online news. Like digital natives, they are web-only publications; like traditional media sites, however, they were created by print journalists. They rely on advertising revenues as their main source of income, but they also want to grow a loyal base of readers. They want to maximize traffic, but they also care about traditional conceptions of editorial integrity and condemn tabloid content. Finally, these mid-sized media companies remain much smaller than traditional media websites, but are still larger and more bureaucratic than digital-native sites. In

[4] On the one hand, these websites are able to rely on the prestige and brand of the legacy media in order to monetize their content with digital subscription plans: they create so-called "paywalls" preventing non-subscribers from readings articles. Thus, about 150 dailies in the United States had a digital subscription service in 2012 (Pew Research Center 2013), most notably *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. On the other hand, these companies also have significant costs that are generally not yet offset by paywall and online-advertising revenues.
[5] For-profit digital natives typically do not have digital subscription plans (Pew Research Center 2014). Exceptions include websites such as *Business Insider* and *Capital New York* that offer premium content to users willing to pay a fee.
[6] Arianna Huffington and Jonah Peretti (who co-founded *The Huffington Post* and later started *BuzzFeed*) are emblematic examples. Nick Denton, the founder of Gawker Media, began his career at the *Financial Times* but soon started working full-time at a social media start-up.

other words, sites such as *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* are transitional organizational and editorial forms, occupying a middle ground between traditional media sites and digital-native sites.[7]

Do these different types of websites all rely on "separate" arrangements in the United States and "connected" arrangements in France? Based on several weeks of fieldwork and 40 interviews conducted both at traditional media sites and digital natives in Paris and New York, I document a more complex set of findings. In fact, legacy media websites tend to rely on separate arrangements both in the United States and France, whereas digital native sites rely on connected arrangements in the two countries. Thus, American and French journalists working for the online versions of large daily newspapers generally disregard "clicks" as a measurement of professional value,[8] whereas French and American journalists working for digital native sites pay constant attention to clicks, accepting page views as a proxy for their professional worth (Phelps 2012, Boutin 2008). Table 1 summarizes the differences between traditional media sites, digital native sites, and transitional sites in the United States and France.

[7] A more complete description of the field of online news should also include news websites that are not for explicitly designed to make a profit, such as *ProPublica* in the United States, which is a non-profit corporation under the 501(c)(3) section. Yet another category would include "hyperlocal" websites, which target their content to a small-scale, local audience (Engesser 2013).

[8] Several journalists and editors working for the websites of print publications in New York and Paris used strong critical terms to describe the quest for clicks, such as "bloggers' disease" ("*la maladie du bloggeur*"), "traffic whoring," and "clickbait" (Chittum 2014). Recent analysis indicates that several second-tier traditional media sites are starting to rely on click-based incentives to compensate their writers (Carr 2014). This last case, however, remains an exceptional situation.

Table 1. Arrangement by type of website

	United States	**France**
Traditional media sites	Separate arrangement	Separate arrangement
Digital native sites	Connected arrangement	Connected arrangement
Transitional sites	Separate arrangement	Connected arrangement

In sum, the opposition between traditional media sites and digital native sites trumps national differences as far as the click-based logic is concerned. In contrast, national differences manifest themselves when I take into account transitional sites such as *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*.

Hence, the specific position of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* in the field of news websites provides an opportunity to examine how the transition from print to online journalism took place in the United States and France. The analysis presented here documents how a subset of web journalists in the two countries actively *reproduced* national differences at a time of technological and economic convergence. The focus of this dissertation is to understand precisely how these processes operate.

4) Dissertation outline

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the main concepts and Chapter 2 provides a historical background. Chapters 3 to 6 constitute the core of the argument. Chapter 7 concludes the empirical part by statistically testing some of the ideas put forward in the previous chapters.

In Chapter 1, "Modes of evaluation and arrangements," I present the theoretical framework of the project, which is at the intersection between cultural sociology and economic sociology. I introduce the main concepts that will be used in the rest of the dissertation, before turning to a discussion of the contribution of this project to the sociological literature on evaluation, cultural convergence, and national differences.

Chapter 2, "The American and French journalistic fields in a comparative perspective," provides an overview of the history and structure of the U.S. and French journalistic fields. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the U.S. journalistic field became organized around strong market forces and early professionalization. In France, journalism developed as a more literary and political occupation that was relatively protected from market pressure by the state. However, such differences between American and French journalism changed over the past thirty years, first due to of the transformation of the news market in the 1980s-1990s, and second because of recent digital developments.

Chapter 3, "A tale of two websites," moves away from the large-scale analysis of the previous chapters. This chapter draws on my interviews to describe the creation and evolution over time of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. Whereas the editorial projects and business models of the two websites appear to be similar, their organizational cultures are nonetheless very different. Yet the two websites went through similar phases over time. Starting in 2008, they faced stronger pressures to become profitable businesses in a more competitive market. *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* then developed surprisingly similar strategies in order to stay afloat financially. Taken together, the two stories provide a micro-level analysis of the ways in which American and French journalists transitioned to the digital age.

Chapter 4, "Counting Clicks," focuses on the use and interpretation of internet metrics at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. Both websites started using the same analytics software program, Chartbeat, at about the same time. Yet, despite this apparent similarity, internet metrics took on different meanings at the two organizations. At *TheNotebook*, editors make important editorial decisions based on Chartbeat, whereas editors at *LaPlace* have conflicted feelings about it. Paradoxically, however, staff journalists at *TheNotebook* profess indifference regarding internet metrics, whereas staffers at *LaPlace* are obsessed with numbers. This chapter demonstrates that quantification does not always lead to standardization: numbers, like ideas and practices, are transformed when they travel between different countries.

In Chapter 5, entitled "Which bloggers get paid?," I use compensation as a means to explore the different cultural arrangements developed at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. I document that the two websites rely on radically different compensation systems. At *TheNotebook*, everybody is compensated, but the variation between payments is high. Top editors are autonomous in deciding the "right" rate to offer to a given journalist. In contrast, *LaPlace* relies on clear rules about payment, such as a flat rate for freelance pieces and not paying bloggers. Yet these rules have many exceptions, reflecting the complex coexistence of editorial and click-based evaluation at the French website.

Chapter 6, "Living in the market," focuses on individuals instead of organizations. In spite of the different systems of public support for freelancers in the two countries, I find that freelancers and bloggers organize their careers in similar ways in the United States and France. Like news organizations, freelance journalists balance quantitative and qualitative concerns when making choices about their careers. However, French freelancers are more reluctant than

their American counterparts to describe themselves as rational maximizers in a competitive marketplace.

Finally, Chapter 7, entitled "Sex, Scandals, and Celebrities?," relies on statistical analysis to test some of the assumptions made by web journalists in previous chapters. Based on their daily interpretation of internet metrics, web journalists often claim that "sex, scandals, and celebrities" are the best recipe for attracting readers; they also assert that articles on politics, world news, and culture fare poorly online. Drawing on the quantitative analysis of a data set gathered on the French website *LaPlace*, I test these intuitive claims and document a more complicated set of determinants for the popularity of news articles.

Taken together, these chapters document how the internet is transforming journalistic practices and representations in the United States and France. My research shows how these changes are interpreted and routinized differently in the two countries. The dissertation's conclusion situates this research with respect to two broader questions. The first one is a critical assessment of how the internet is transforming journalism, in positive and negative ways. The second question addresses quantification, online and offline, and the political implications of such processes.

Online journalism is transforming so rapidly that the specific findings of this project may soon be a description of a discrete historical moment. However, the broader aim of this dissertation is to examine the ways that people use, interpret, and resist numbers in different contexts. Such mechanisms reach far beyond the daily routines and representations of web journalists in New York and Paris.

CHAPTER I

Modes of Evaluation and Cultural Arrangements

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the dissertation. Why are similar technological innovations such as internet metrics used and interpreted in different ways at French and American news websites? Answering this question requires a two-step theoretical examination.

Journalism, like other fields of cultural production, is characterized by an intrinsic tension between market-based and artistic or professional definitions of value (Bourdieu 1993). In the first section, I argue that different definitions of journalistic value can usefully be conceptualized as "modes of evaluation" involving distinct cognitive operations, material practices, and technological devices. A variety of modes of evaluation may coexist at the field- and organizational levels. Yet there are different ways to organize the coexistence between qualitative and quantitative modes of evaluation, which I label "cultural arrangements." The

specific form that these arrangements take depends on the history and structure of the field under consideration.

I rely on this idea of cultural arrangement to analyze the question of the difference between the United States and France. In so doing, I draw on two programs of research that make differing predictions about convergence between national fields. First, the neo-institutional literature explains that the development of worldwide networks of competition and communication (in which quantification plays a central role) leads to convergence between organizations, fields, and countries. Second, a school of research in comparative cultural sociology highlights the enduring cultural differences between countries such as the United States and France. The concept of "cultural arrangements" reconciles these two perspectives by examining how people and organizations reproduce national differences *within* processes of convergence.

I. Autonomous and heteronomous definitions of journalistic value

A central line of inquiry in economic sociology examines the relationship between the economic logic and other – aesthetic, professional, and moral – ways of categorizing and hierarchizing people and objects. Journalism is a particularly interesting subject for studying the relationship between economic logic and symbolic logics because it is characterized by a central and constitutive tension: journalism is both a public good and a commercial enterprise (Bourdieu 1994).

First, journalism is a public good essential for democracies (Schudson 2008). Information plays an important role in the constitution of "public spheres" where citizens are able to discuss

contemporary affairs as equals and make informed political decisions (Habermas 1989 [1962]). Critics have also long expressed their doubts about the actual effects and usefulness of the media on political consciousness (Lippmann 1922). However, communication scholars examining the connection between news readership and political behavior document that people who read the news are more likely to value political engagement and to vote, holding other variables constant (Ansolabehere, Behr, and Iyengar 1991).

A second public function of the media is to serve as a "watchdog" for preventing abuse among political authorities and business elites. In the United States, the "Watergate" and "Pentagon Papers" scandals, which were both uncovered by investigative journalists, have become exemplary manifestations of this "watchdog" role of the media (Schudson 1993). The media might not catch every single case of corruption or deviation from the law, but the fact that journalists might be watching still curbs the worst abuses of politicians and corporations.

Third, the media can be understood as an important cultural actor engaged in community- and nation-building. Thus, Anderson calls reading the newspaper a "daily ritual" that millions of faithful followers engage in every morning (Anderson 2006 [1982]). In the same vein, Arthur Miller noted how a "good newspaper is a nation talking to itself" (see Schudson 2008 for a discussion). More generally, the media create "frames" and stories that contribute to simplifying complex information (Benson and Saguy 2005, Ferree 2002, Gamson and Modigliani 1989, Tuchman 1978, Goffman 1974) and making the world understandable, though often by disregarding alternative perspectives in the process. The media thus participate in the construction of a common set of cultural references for a large group of readers.

Yet, in addition to its status as a public good, journalism is a business dealing in a highly commercialized commodity. It is produced and sold by media companies that make a profit

based on a mixture of subscriptions and advertising revenues (Gitlin 1983, Bagdikian 2004, Klinenberg 2007). The market for news is complex, in the sense that both readers and advertisers pay for it (Cabrolié 2013). It was a highly profitable market from the 1950s to the early 1990s, at least in the United States, where publicly owned media conglomerates made double-digit profit margins every year (Baker 2007). It is now a rapidly shrinking market (Pew Research Center 2014).

In sum, journalism – "the business or practice of regularly producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of public interest and importance" (Schudson 2011: 3) – is both a public good and a commercial enterprise. Hence, "value" in journalism can mean either of two things: it may mean providing relevant, high-quality information to readers, regardless of the profits of the media organization. Yet value could also be accorded by the sole criterion of being a profitable enterprise in the media market, regardless of the editorial quality of the publication. In a perfect world, quality and profit would always match. Unfortunately, most observers agree that these two types of values rarely coincide.

"Value," like "legitimacy" or "worth," is an elusive idea in sociological research (Weber 1978 [1922]). I rely on several related concepts at the crossroads of economic sociology and the sociology of culture in order to theorize the relationship between professional and market definitions of journalistic value. I distinguish between two main approaches: first, field-level perspectives that posit a radical conflict between market and professional forces; second, micro-level analyses that focus on the coexistence of different modes of valuation within given social settings.

1) The field level: a tension between autonomous and heteronomous logics

Two approaches provide insightful analyses of the relationship between economic and symbolic logics at the macro-level: Bourdieu's theory of fields and the "institutional logics" perspective. In both cases, there seems to be a clear trade-off between the market logic and other types of logics, in the sense that any progress on the market front corresponds to a weakening of other logics.

Cultural fields between autonomous and heteronomous forces

The concept of "field," and more specifically the idea of a journalistic field as a space of positions, was first put forward by Bourdieu. Bourdieu and Wacquant's most inclusive definition of the concept is as follows:

> A field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relations to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97)

A field is a relatively autonomous social sphere that follows its own rules. Bourdieu uses the metaphor of the "game," where players who have stakes in the game ("illusio") develop strategies to jockey for change and conquer the field.

According to Bourdieu, all fields of cultural production (the literary field, the field of visual arts, or the journalistic field, among others) are defined by a double hierarchy (Bourdieu 1993, Champagne 1995). First, there is an autonomous principle of hierarchization based on the

degree of specific consecration (for example, literary or journalistic prestige). Second, there is a heteronomous criterion that relies on various quantitative measures of market success (book sales, number of performances, or, in the case of online journalism, circulation or audience ratings).[1]

Autonomous and heteronomous logics are always in tension in cultural fields. Bourdieu contrasts two opposite poles within cultural fields: the subfield of "small-scale" or "restricted" production, which is highly autonomous from the economic field (and the larger field of power); and the subfield of "mass" production (*grande production*), which is more heteronomous (Bourdieu 1996: 124, Bourdieu 1984). In this view, the equilibrium between autonomous and heteronomous logics usually functions as a zero-sum game: an increase in the amount of economic capital (and a step towards the heteronomous pole) often translates into a decrease in the amount of symbolic capital (and a step away from the autonomous pole), and vice versa. Only a handful of dominant players with high amounts of both economic and symbolic capital are able to score high on the two logics. *De facto*, they dominate the game and are able to define what "art" means in the field.

Among cultural fields, Bourdieu considers the journalistic field to be one of the most heteronomous. Strong commercial pressures constrain journalistic work at the organizational level (depending on the location of each media outlet in the field, i.e. whether they are on the commercial side or on the intellectual side) and at the individual level (depending on one's position within each organization: freelancer, staffer, etc.) (Bourdieu 1994: 4, Duval 2004, Marchetti 2010, Benson and Neveu 2005, Krause 2011). Bourdieu vividly describes the "rating mindset" of organizations and individuals located at the heteronomous end of the field, where

[1] According to Bourdieu, the "heteronomous" pole can be influenced either by economic or political forces (see Benson 2013 for a criticism). In this research, I focus more on the effect of market forces on journalism but also take into account the role of the state.

"ratings have become the journalist's last judgment" (Bourdieu 1996: 27, cited in Childress 2012).

Bourdieu's concept of field presents another particular interest for this project, since it offers a nuanced explanation of the differences between the French and the American contexts. Whereas Bourdieu himself did not provide comparative analyses of cultural fields in different countries, scholars drawing on his framework have extended the concept for the purpose of comparative studies of journalism between the United States and France (Benson 2013, Benson and Neveu 2005, Benson and Saguy 2005). Chapter 2 will describe these differences in depth.

Institutional logics

A complementary approach in organizational theory emphasizes the importance of "institutional logics" in explaining the evolution of a given organizational sector (Friedland and Alford 1991, Thornton and Ocasio 1999, Scott, Ruef, Mendel, and Caronna 2000). Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury characterize logics as the "socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012: 51, Thornton and Ocasio 1999: 804). The authors propose six ideal types of broadly institutionalized logics: the market, state, family, religion, corporation, and professional logics.

Many scholars have drawn on the "institutional logics" framework to describe how different logics operate within specific organizational fields, usually emphasizing how logics clash and transform the rules of the game within an industry. For example, Thornton and Ocasio (1999) document how the academic publishing industry went through a major transformation

from professional to market logic in the mid-1970s. Before then, the industry was made up of small publishing houses that focused on prestige, close relationships with the authors, and personal imprints – what the authors describe as an "editorial logic." A shift occurred with the aggressive behavior of large corporations whose main targets were high profit margins and market share – what the authors call "market logic." Though most existing research focuses on the replacement over time between institutional logics, several pieces discuss how different logics might coexist within given fields or organizations (McPherson and Sauder 2013, Murray 2010, Pache and Santos 2010).

The concept of "institutional logics," however, is problematic for several reasons. First, as Geertz first pessimistically stated, "logic is a treacherous word; and nowhere more than in the analysis of culture" (Geertz 1973: 195, cited in Swidler 2001). What is logical about 'institutional logics' (Swidler 2001: 201) and why do social actors consider logics to form coherent wholes? The 'institutional logics' perspective does not say much about this issue. Second, people with different trajectories, positions, and dispositions probably respond differently to different kinds of logics. These differences in positions and dispositions are essential in understanding the conflicts that take place within a given social field. As Fligstein and McAdam underline: "The use of the term "institutional logics" tends to imply way too much consensus in the field about what is going on and why and way too little concern over actors' positions" (Fligstein and McAdam 2012: 11). For these reasons, this dissertation draws on the Bourdieusian concept of "field" rather than the "institutional logics" perspective when analyzing macro-level processes.

2) The micro-level: multiple evaluations

I now turn to the micro level, focusing on the several trends of research in economic sociology and the sociology of culture that can be grouped under the "valuation/evaluation" perspective (Lamont 2012). This approach emphasizes the coexistence and overlap of several kinds of valuation processes in given social settings rather than the conflict and replacement between macro-level logics.

Orders of worth and heterarchies

Boltanski and Thévenot first proposed a pragmatist theoretical framework analyzing how people make sense of the social world (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 1983).

Drawing on classical texts in political theory, Boltanski and Thévenot delineate six broadly institutionalized "orders of worth" that people use when they try to justify their understanding of a situation: the inspired, domestic, civic, opinion, market, and industrial orders of worth. Contrary to the "institutional logics" perspective, Boltanski and Thévenot explicitly focus on the coexistence of different orders (Beckert and Musselin 2013: 12, Lamont 2012) and the conflicts that emerge from this coexistence. For example, they study cases of controversy, when different understandings of the same situation collide (Lemieux 2007).

In a later development, Stark defined the concept of "heterarchy" to describe organizations where different orders of worth coexist (Stark 2009). Stark argues that heterarchical arrangements foster creativity and innovation. Yet he also discusses cases such as a

socialist factory in Hungary where the coexistence of different orders of worth led to deep crises that could only be solved by the destruction of one of the logics (Stark 1990).[2]

Valuation/evaluation in economic sociology

A complementary approach focuses on small-scale, inter-individual processes. According to Lamont, evaluative practices, that is, "assessing how an entity attains a certain type of worth" (Lamont 2012: 205), far from being merely cognitive operations, are in fact deeply social and cultural processes.

Drawing on Lamont, one can identify two main steps in the evaluation process. First, people have to agree on the relevant set of criteria that applies when judging of a specific situation. Second, people have to rank the different entities on a single scale. Many scholars in cultural and economic sociology have focused on the tension and conflicts that arise between different modes of valuation in specific contexts, for example between moral, aesthetic, and economic understandings of worth (Fourcade 2011, Zelizer 2007, 1997, Weber 2009, Anteby 2008, Almeling 2007, Espeland and Stevens 1998, Morrill 1995, Beckert and Aspers 2011, Mears 2011a, Childress 2012).

Vatin and his colleagues (2013) further explore the complex relationship between "valuation" and "evaluation." They propose the following definitions: ""To evaluate" [*évaluer*] is a static judgment attributing a value to a good, an object, a person; "to valorize" [*valoriser*] instead has a dynamic aspect; it increases value" (Vatin 2013: 18, my translation). According to Vatin, it is mistaken to assume that evaluation necessarily comes before valuation. In fact, valuation is implied and interwoven in every step of the evaluation process.

[2] See Chapter 5 in this manuscript for a discussion.

Hence, valuation and evaluation are usually collective, contentious, and messy: different kinds of meanings, strategies, and calculations (both economic and non-economic) coexist in any given social situation (Zelizer 2013, Weber 2011). As summarized by Callon, who prefers the term of "qualification" to "evaluation," "the qualification of given goods is a process, the result – always temporary – of collective work relying on many devices and permeated by many conflicts" (Callon 2013: 265, my translation).

Market devices

Devices and technologies indeed play an essential role in the institutionalization of different processes of evaluation, whether economic or not (Pinch and Swedberg 2008, Karpik 2010, Ziewitz 2012). Evaluative practices become embedded in micro devices, which in turn contribute to the naturalization of specific categories and hierarchies that gradually become taken for granted (Berger and Luckmann 1966, Douglas 1986, Zerubavel 1999, 2003).

Market devices are of particular interest: from double-entry accounting books (Weber 2001 [1905], Carruthers and Espeland 1991) to equations derived from economics (Callon 1998, MacKenzie and Millo 2003, Fourcade 2010), computerized markets (Garcia 1984), or the different types of "tallies" used in commercial transactions across the world (Weber 2009), markets have flourished with technologies designed to simplify economic decision-making (Callon, Millo, and Muniesa 2007).

As is often the case when technologies represent or "appresent" (Cetina and Bruegger 2002a, 2002b) a reality that is only reachable through the device, people often "inhabit technology" in the sense that they develop strong feelings about the technological artifact, whether positive or negative (Vertesi 2012, Bechky 2003, Latour 1993, Latour and Woolgar

1986 [1979], Barley 1986). Thus it is important to pay attention to the ways that emotions become attached to specific objects and technologies.

3) *Modes of evaluation and cultural arrangements in organizations and fields*

I rely on this literature about fields, valuation/evaluation, and market devices in order to understand how people define "good journalism" in online news the United States and France.

"Editorial" and "click-based" modes of evaluation

First, I define the concept of *mode of evaluation* to encompass the set of cognitive and practical operations by which people in a given group categorize and hierarchize individuals, discourses, objects, and practices.

In this view, the "economic" or "market" mode of evaluation is only one among of the many kinds of evaluative practices that take place within any given social scene (Zelizer 2010, Weber 2009). Modes of evaluation often mirror larger organizing principles that are present in the field. Hence, in the case of online journalism, the "autonomous" and "heteronomous" logics analyzed by Bourdieu are reflected in two micro-level modes of evaluations that I label "editorial" and "click-based." Without encroaching on Chapter 5, which describes these two modes of evaluation in more detail, I will give a brief summary of my application of these concepts.

The qualitative or "editorial" criterion draws on traditional definitions of journalistic quality and print newsroom values (Darnton 1975, Gans 1979, Schudson 1978). Journalism is seen by editors and journalists as a demanding professional practice with specific rules, formats, and criteria of quality that should be respected. Articles are structured in highly codified way,

with an "inverted pyramid" structure where the opening paragraph contains the most important information. The fuzzy but highly institutionalized concept of "newsworthiness" also dictates the length and the placement of the article in the newspaper or on the website. "Newsworthiness" is assessed by the journalist's superiors, colleagues, and competitors, in an informal system of journalistic peer review. Original reporting, investigation, and interesting angles are highly valued. Objectivity is idealized. Short blog posts and opinion pieces are overall less essential.

In contrast, according to the quantitative or "click-based" mode of evaluation, people rely on quantitative indicators of success to evaluate the quality of an article. Editors and journalists want articles to be widely read and shared: the "viral" potential of an article is an important criterion of legitimacy and prestige in the newsroom. In this view, journalistic writing is seen as an act of communication with an audience rather than the exhaustive reporting of important facts. Writers have to be "webby" and "reactive" when they interact with the readers. Short blog posts, "fun" pieces even with minimal reporting, and interactive content are valued. Analytics programs such as Chartbeat and Google Analytics are central to this click-based mode of evaluation, since they provide real-time information on the preferences of the audience.

Of course, the description of these two modes of evaluation reifies them in a way that is fairly disconnected from the actual – and messy – interactions that take place in web newsrooms. People engage in constant negotiations to define the value of their articles. Journalists with different positions in the organization (which often reflect different social backgrounds, levels of educational attainment, and overall prestige in the group) are more or less likely to rely on qualitative or quantitative modes of evaluation. In short, valuation and evaluation are collective and contested processes within U.S. and French web newsrooms.

Between separate and connected arrangements

Most social settings are characterized by the coexistence of different modes of evaluations. Yet this coexistence can take different shapes.

For example, in Zelizer's *Purchase of Intimacy* (2007), judges attempt to distinguish between permissible and illegal cases of overlapping monetary transactions and sentimental relationships. Similarly, in her analysis of oil spills litigation, Fourcade documents how courts in the United States rely extensively on quantitative evaluations of how much "nature" is worth, whereas magistrates in France use quantitative methods less systematically (Fourcade 2011: 1767).

Similar situations emerge when economic evaluation is not directly concerned. For example, when academics from different disciplines engage in multidisciplinary peer-review, they usually distinguish between different modes of evaluation depending on the discipline of the applicant: sociologists evaluate sociology projects and historians evaluate history projects (Mallard, Lamont, and Guetzkow 2009, Lamont 2009). Yet, in cases where the project can be categorized either as a sociology or history project, the different modes of evaluation can collide, making it impossible to reach a consensus.

In an effort to formalize these differences, I propose the concept of *arrangements*, or local strategies used to manage institutional complexity in order to avoid incoherence and open conflict. According to the definition of the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, to "arrange" something is to "move and organize (things) into a particular order or position." An "arrangement" is "the way that things and people are organized for a particular purpose or activity." Arrangements are highly localized ways to organize collective projects. They include specific sets of practices,

cognitive categories, technological devices, and organizational forms. They are precarious, contested, and flexible.

Drawing on Zelizer's terminology, I further distinguish between two opposite types of arrangements in order to analyze my ethnographic findings. Specifically, I argue that *TheNotebook* relies on a "separate" type of arrangement between quantitative and qualitative criteria: there are clear organizational, spatial, discursive, and cognitive boundaries separating the click-based and the editorial modes of evaluation. In contrast, at *LaPlace*, people rely on a "connected" type of arrangement, in which everyone constantly switches back and forth between editorial and click-based evaluation. These different arrangements translate into different uses of the main market device (e.g., analytics software programs) present at news websites.

The concept of arrangement can be seen as an extension of Zelizer's "circuits of commerce," though it also shares affinities with other important sociological concepts such as "moral economies"[3] and "settlements."[4] According to Zelizer, circuits of commerce involve several important elements, including distinctive social relations, shared economic activities, common accounting systems, shared understandings of the economic transactions, and boundaries between members and non-members (Zelizer 2010: 304).

Like Zelizer's "circuits," arrangements focus on inter-individual connections, shared meanings, and common economic activities (Zelizer 2010). However, the concept of arrangement pays more attention to organizational forms and organizational routines than the "circuit" framework (Steiner 2013). Arrangements also take into account different types of

[3] Drawing on E.P. Thompson's work (1971), Fassin (2009, 2005) defines the concept of "moral economy" as "the economy of the moral values and norms of a given group in a given moment" (Fassin 2005: 365). The concepts of "moral economy" and arrangement largely overlap, yet "arrangements" specifically examine the economic and organizational underpinnings of a given moral order, which are less central in Fassin's framework.
[4] Abbott (1988, 2005) defines "settlements" as macro-level divisions of "jurisdictions" and "locations" between professions at a given moment. Arrangements thus differ from "settlements" in the sense that they consist of a more localized and precarious forms of organization.

organizational power and discipline (Foucault 1977).[5] Finally, arrangements are more structured than circuits in the sense that they depend on the social field under consideration (e.g., French and U.S. journalistic fields), the position of the organization in the field (e.g., transitional organizations such as *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*), and the employment status of individuals within the organization (e.g., editors, staffers, and freelancers).

It is important to note that arrangements also represent different political systems. At *TheNotebook*, several modes of evaluation coexist without open conflict: plurality is institutionalized in organizational routines. Depending on the context, the object at stake, and the people involved, quantitative and qualitative modes of evaluation are both considered to be relevant ways of making sense of the world. In contrast, people at *LaPlace* try hard to reach a consensus on a single mode of evaluation but fail to define exactly what this should be (see Mallard, Lamont, and Guetzkow 2009 for a similar case). This resembles the traditional opposition between U.S. multiculturalism and French universalism (Lamont and Thévenot 2000: 317).[6]

To conclude this theoretical section, Table 2 summarizes the relationship between fields, modes of evaluation, and arrangements.

[5] See Chapter 4 in this manuscript for a discussion of "sovereign" versus "disciplinary" types of power depending on the arrangement.
[6] Going a step further, one might even establish a parallel between this distinction and Durkheim's analysis of the role of division of labor in creating "organic" instead of "mechanical" solidarity in modern societies (Durkheim 1997 [1893]). In this view, separate arrangements would contribute to organic solidarity whereas connected arrangements would participate in mechanical solidarity.

Table 2. Fields, evaluation, and arrangements

Definition of value	Field level	Organizational level	Micro level
Qualitative	Autonomous logic, symbolic capital	Editorial evaluation	No single device
Quantitative	Heteronomous logic, economic capital	Click-based evaluation	Device: Analytics software program
Relationship between the logics	Double Structuration	Arrangements (connected or separate)	Individual uses of software programs

Evaluative practices thus take place at three different levels: the field level, the organizational level, and the micro level. At the field level, the tension between quantitative and qualitative definitions of value is best described by Bourdieu's framework: fields are characterized by a double structuration between autonomous and heteronomous logics. At the organizational level, drawing on economic and cultural sociology, the concept of mode of evaluation describes the coexistence of different value systems in the workplace. Organizations rely on cultural arrangements in order to manage the coexistence of different modes of valuation in the same social setting. Finally, at the micro level, it is essential to pay attention to the ways in which people use, interpret, and project emotions on specific devices and technologies.

II. The United States and France: convergence or reproduction of difference?

Are fields and organizations in the United States and France converging or not? This section examines two theoretical approaches that provide different perspectives on this question. The neo-institutionalist perspective draws on the concepts of organizational fields, isomorphism, and

world society to emphasize global processes of convergence. In contrast, research in comparative cultural sociology delineates major differences between the United States and France and argues that these cultural differences are reproduced over time. Both approaches provide important insights on the case of online news in the United States and France.

1) Isomorphism, organizational fields, and the world society

Why do organizations tend to become more similar over time? This is the question explored by the new institutionalism in organizational analysis. This perspective argues that when certain sectors of social life become structured – when network ties become more complex, flows of information increase, and structures of domination and coalition emerge – people, organizations, and countries tend to converge.

Organizational fields

DiMaggio and Powell first proposed the concepts of organizational field and isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Powell and DiMaggio 1991, see also Meyer and Rowan 1977). DiMaggio and Powell define organizational fields as "those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:148). According to DiMaggio and Powell, when a field becomes structured, that is, when the interactions, awareness, coalition patterns, and information flows reach critical levels among different actors of a given sector, the organizations of that field tend to converge and become more alike.

This process, labeled "institutional isomorphism," depends on several conditions: the organizations' degree of dependency on one another, the degree of centralization of resource supply, and the overall indeterminacy of the relationship between means and ends in the field. DiMaggio and Powell further specify different types of isomorphism, which may occur separately or together. Coercive isomorphism occurs when the organizations upon which the field depends, such as the state, exert direct pressure. Mimetic isomorphism occurs in contexts of uncertainty, when organizations imitate the most legitimate members of the field. Normative isomorphism stems from the process of professionalization.

World society

The "world society" approach proposed a variant on the concept of institutional isomorphism at the global level: Meyer and his colleagues focus on processes of convergence not between organizations but between nation-states (Meyer 2010, Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997, Ventresca 1995).

According to this perspective, the development of worldwide networks of competition, exchange, and association between nation-states contributes to the convergence of states around a handful of highly legitimate, rationalized, and articulated worldwide cultural forms. Examples of this process include the cases of human rights, the rule of law, or the struggle against racial discrimination, objectives that have become global cultural forms promoted by influential international organizations. A majority of nation-states acknowledge the legitimacy and importance of such objectives.

Yet Meyer and his colleagues point out that "decoupling" is frequent: while most nation-states assert their adherence to worldwide cultural templates, it is often complicated and costly to

implement these policies at the local level. Thus, official statements about human rights often become "decoupled" from the actual policies that are implemented on the ground in each country.

Quantification, commensuration, and convergence

Quantification plays an important role in fueling mimetic practices and isomorphic convergence. Scholars studying quantification have emphasized several mechanisms through which this takes place.

In their review piece on commensuration, Espeland and Stevens (1998) indicate two main mechanisms by which quantification leads to convergence. First, the authors argue that the rise of a metric creates new relations between units by making them comparable and ranking them on a single scale, whether money or any other type of metric (Espeland and Stevens 1998: 324). Thus, quantification entails a relative diminution of the difference between people or organizations simply by providing more information and facilitating comparisons across time and distance.

A second mechanism stems from the normative and disciplining aspect of metrics. Espeland and Sauder explain that "measures, because they standardize, simplify, and provoke comparison, become sturdy vehicles for transporting practices and values from one site to another" (2007:36). This is not only because of the high legitimacy of rationality and numbers in modern societies (Dobbin 1994, Meyer and Rowan 1977), but also because of the specific discipline created by numbers (Sauder and Espeland 2009, Foucault 1977). In the case of rankings, most people internalize metrics without necessarily realizing that they do. They develop several strategies in order to maintain or improve their position in the rankings,

especially by imitating their competitors, thus contributing to the institutionalization of the metric.[7]

Espeland and Sauder's (2007) analysis of the impact of rankings in the field of law schools provides a perfect example of how commensuration can be interpreted in line with the neo-institutionalist hypotheses on isomorphism. The authors describe the role played by the rankings in structuring the field: "Formerly the field of legal education was internally fragmented (…). Rankings challenge this fragmentation by reducing distinctiveness to magnitude" (Espeland and Stevens 2007: 19). The authors then carefully analyze the process of constant monitoring and mimicry that takes place among law schools. Many law schools adopted a similar set of policies and behaviors in order to increase their ranking, such as admitting students with higher LSAT than before, sending expensive brochures to the legal community, and cooking their placement statistics.

Thus, quantification appears to be one of the mechanisms by which convergence and homogenization between organizations take place in organizational fields, both within and between countries.

2) *National cultural repertoires*

Another perspective analyzes the enduring cultural differences that characterize the United States and France. Starting with Tocqueville, many social scientists have noted the stronger role of

[7] Specifically, these mechanisms – a growing amount of shared information and the rise of monitoring and mimetic behaviors – closely resemble two processes emphasized by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). First, commensuration is a good instance of what DiMaggio and Powell label the "structuration" of organizational fields. Second, commensuration may participate in institutional isomorphism: in fields with high uncertainty about the connection between means and ends, organizations are more likely to rely on mimetic isomorphism, in other words imitating competitors that they perceive to be successful.

market justifications in the United States compared to France (Tocqueville 2003 [1835], Iribarne 1993, Lipset 2003). Lamont and her colleagues have recently developed a more systematic analysis of the cultural differences between the two countries.

In her first book, *Money, Morals, and Manners*, Lamont argues that economic boundaries are stronger in the United States whereas cultural boundaries based on aesthetic tastes are more important in France (Lamont 1992). Lamont documents how the French upper-middle class tends to draw stronger cultural distinctions about the kind of people they approve of, whereas the American upper-middle class is more concerned by moral and economic criteria of worth. According to her, the differences in these repertoires are caused both by structural and cultural factors. Lamont stresses the different roles of the state and varying levels of social diversity in the two countries, in addition to the legacy of an aristocratic tradition in France and its absence in the United States.

Lamont and Thévenot (2000) later developed the concept of "national cultural repertoires," defined as "relatively stable schemas of evaluation that are used in varying proportion across national contexts" (Lamont and Thévenot 2000: 8). Drawing on variety of cases, from sexual harassment to contemporary art, the authors point out that the French are less likely than the Americans to draw on market-based arguments; they rely instead on "civic-solidarity" arguments and emphasize non-materialist and egalitarian values. The chapters of this edited volume document the enduring role of different national cultural repertoires, even in cases of rapid social change (Lemieux and Schmazlbauer 2000).

Some of my findings support this perspective. For example, I find that French web editors are more critical overall of web metrics than their American counterparts. They develop a metaphor of betrayal and prostitution ("selling oneself cheap") when describing the race for page

views.[8] Similarly, French freelancers are more reluctant than their American counterparts to describe themselves as rational maximizers in a competitive market; they criticize 'personal branding' as an overtly commercial and strategic behavior and contrast it to 'natural' and authentic ways of making friends, whereas American freelancers do not find this to be an issue.[9]

Yet some of my findings also differ from the predictions of the "national cultural repertoires" perspective. For example, during my days of ethnographic observation, I noted that *LaPlace*'s editors and staffers, in spite of their vocal criticisms of page views, paid closer attention to web metrics than their counterparts at *TheNotebook*. This is puzzling if one expects the market repertoire to be more important in the United States than in France.

These ideas point to some of the limitations of the national cultural repertoire perspective. First, any theoretical framework focusing on differences at the national level runs the risk of overlooking fine-grained variation that takes place within each country, depending on the field, organization, and individuals under consideration.[10] Second, and more importantly, Lamont and Thévenot's work focuses on discourses rather than practices. This is not a problem *per se*: mapping differences in the justifications provided by people from different countries is important. Yet the use of different repertoires of justification does not necessarily entail that individuals in fact behave differently in each country.[11]

[8] See Chapter 4 in this manuscript.
[9] See Chapter 6 in this manuscript.
[10] Lamont and Thévenot mention this limitation in their introduction but argue that their analysis in terms of varying uses of cultural repertoires lessens the issue (Lamont and Thévenot 2000: 10).
[11] See Swidler (2001), Vaisey (2012), and Swidler (2008) for a discussion of the relationship between actions and justifications, as well as Christin and Ollion (2012) for an overview. See Pugh (2013) and Jerolmack and Kahn (2014) for a related methodological discussion on the comparative benefits of qualitative interviews and ethnographic observations. See Wuthnow (1989) for a broader discussion of the articulation between ideas, discourses, and social structure.

3) Arrangements: divergence within convergence

The analysis proposed here offers a solution that take into account both the neo-institutionalist and "national cultural repertoire" perspectives.

I document a process of divergence within convergence: common technological innovations are actively reinterpreted within existing cultural arrangements. Specifically, analytics programs and traffic numbers are integrated into the different understanding of French and American journalists about the proper organization of online newsrooms, the best strategies to handle market pressure, and most productive ways for a news organization to survive in the digital world. In the final section of this chapter, I briefly list the main theoretical advantages of this approach in terms of cultural arrangements.

A first benefit is methodological. Whereas the national cultural repertoires perspective focuses only on discourses, arrangements are both cognitive and practical. Arrangements take into account not only the justifications of the actors but also their daily routines, the technological devices that they use, and the organizational structures in which they operate (Healy 2006).

Second, regarding the question of the differences between the United States and France, the concept of arrangement moves the analysis to the second-degree or "meta" level. Instead of directly comparing which mode of evaluation is more prevalent in the United States and France, I compare the ways that different modes of evaluation coexist depending on the context. Thus, the main difference between American and French news websites under consideration is not the relative dominance of market versus civic repertoires. Rather, it is the fact that the two modes of

evaluation are kept separate at the U.S. website whereas they constantly overlap at the French website.

Third, regarding the question of convergence, arrangements add a layer of complexity to isomorphism. In addition to documenting the adoption of organizational forms, technological innovations, and ideas in different countries, I examine how the uses and interpretations of these shared forms vary depending on the context. This approach is inspired by existing studies on the transnational circulation of ideas, which examine how and why symbolic goods are transformed when they travel between countries (Bourdieu 2002, Sapiro 2013, Heilbron, Guilhot, and Jeanpierre 2008, Hauchecorne 2009, Dezalay and Garth 2002, Lamont 1987, Westney 1987, Sallaz 2012).

Finally, the concept of arrangement holds together three levels of analysis: the organizational, field, and national levels. Arrangements are cultural creations that take place first and foremost between given sets of individuals who interact within institutionalized social settings such as formal organizations. Yet arrangements also mirror the trajectory and structure of the social field in which the organization is located. Social fields are themselves organized differently depending on the country under consideration (Benson and Saguy 2005), as the next chapter will make clear.

In this first theoretical chapter, I argued that the concepts of fields, modes of evaluation, and cultural arrangements help to explain why web journalists at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* use and interpret similar technological innovations in different ways. Yet, before turning to the micro-level and the ethnographic analysis of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, it is essential to provide an overview of the histories and structures of the U.S. and French journalistic fields.

CHAPTER II

The American and French Journalistic Fields

in a Comparative Perspective

"The uncontrolled flow of information pushed to the extreme
has transformed journalism, killed the great articles of discussion…,
and increasingly gives more importance to news dispatches, trivial news,
and to the articles of *reporters* and *interviewers*"
Emile Zola (1888)
(Ferenczi 1993: 32)

"[*Le Monde*] is the best something in the world,
but whatever it is, it's not a real newspaper"
Abe Rosenthal (1985),
former *New York Times* editor
(Padioleau 1985:39)

Journalism as an occupation, a business, and a form of cultural production followed a markedly different path in the United States and France. Since the nineteenth century, American and French journalists have noted the differences between their respective approaches with a mixture of admiration, disdain, and amusement. French journalism was from the start more a literary, opinion-based, and intellectual endeavor. In contrast, journalists in the United States became

more professionalized in the late nineteenth century, developing an ideal of objectivity expressed in journalistic methods such as collecting interviews and relying on a fact-based writing style.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that U.S. and French journalists were often critical of the approaches of their colleagues across the Atlantic. In the late-nineteenth century, Joseph Pulitzer was asked to describe the distinction between the French and American press. He replied: "In America, we want facts. Who cares about the philosophical speculations of our correspondents?" (Loliée 1903: 716, quoted in Chalaby 1996: 311). Conversely, French journalists were not convinced by the American journalistic tradition. Pierre Giffard, a well-known French journalist and "Grand Reporter" of the early twentieth century, assessed: "The French reader would never accept the banal inventory that constitutes the daily catch of Yankee reporters. He wants to know the type and flavor ["*le côté typique*"] of the characters and nothing else" (quoted in Ferenczi 1993: 39).

Are these Belle Époque differences in journalistic cultures still evident in the era of iPhones and the internet? This chapter compares the historical evolution and current state of the American and French news media. The first section provides a historical overview of the trajectory of the journalistic field in the United States and France. As noted, journalism was more market-oriented from the start in the United States, whereas strong public policy interventions and regulations protected the media from market forces in France to a greater degree until the late-twentieth century. Yet, beginning in the late 1980s, the French media became more commercialized and professionalized, converging with the American example. The second section compares the current structures of the French and American journalistic fields. Despite growing similarities, there are still significant differences between the two countries. The third and final section focuses on digital developments. The internet reinforced processes of

convergence between French and American journalism. In both countries, the markets for online news and online advertising became more concentrated. Furthermore, web journalists developed mimetic practices that contributed to a growing homogeneity of the news.

I. Between the market and the state: a short history of the U.S. and French journalistic fields

French and American journalism have witnessed several waves of divergence and convergence over the past two centuries. Three periods were central in defining the trajectories of the journalistic field in the two countries before the digital era: the second half of the nineteenth century, when the commercial printed press emerged; the mid-twentieth century, with the development of radio and television; and the 1980s-1990s, when the commercialization of the journalistic field increased both in the United States and France.

1) Early developments: the rise of a commercial printed press

In both the United States and France, the earliest newspapers originated in the seventeenth century under monarchical rule. Théophraste Renaudot obtained a royal privilege for his *Gazette* in France in 1631. Half a century later, in 1690, Benjamin Harris founded *Public Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick* in Boston. Many newspapers followed suit in both countries during the eighteenth century. Yet using the terms "news" and "newspapers" to describe these early publications is somewhat anachronistic (Krause 1991 but see Pettegree 2014), since the rhythm of publication was frequently irregular and censorship was strong (Delporte 1995, Charon 2003, Starr 2005).

In France, political turmoil led many publications and writers to alternate between periods of political dissidence and periods when they could write freely throughout most of the nineteenth century. From Napoléon Bonaparte's 1799 coup d'état to the monarchical restoration of 1815, the July Monarchy in 1830, the Revolution of 1848, and the Second Empire of Napoléon Bonaparte after 1851, violent uprisings and rapid shifts between monarchy, republic, and empire made journalism a highly political endeavor. Writers and publishers took sides for or against monarchy and democracy, which in turn had important consequences on their writings, their freedom, and sometimes even their lives (Delporte 1999). Newspapers and magazines during this time were still small-scale political publications designed for a highly educated and politicized audience.

The 1830s and the rise of a "penny press" in the United States

In the United States, the passage of the First Amendment guaranteeing the freedom of the press in 1791 granted legal protection to journalists and newspapers (Lind and Rankin 2012). The commercial press that developed over time gradually became less aligned with political parties.

Yet it is in the 1830s, with the creation of a mass-circulation "penny press" (cheaper than the existing newspapers which cost six cents) that the modern journalistic landscape emerged. Penny newspapers such as the *New York Sun* or the *New York Herald*, created in 1833 and 1835 respectively, contributed to the development of a more populist and information-oriented form of journalism (Schudson 1978: 18). In order to become an omnibus medium that could reach large segments of the public and gather significant advertising revenues, newspapers and journalists developed a more balanced and descriptive coverage of daily events of interest: the concept of the "news" was born. The growing market for newspapers also benefited from several

technological innovations such as the telegraph and the steam press, as well as increasing literacy and the development of a reliable and exhaustive postal service (Starr 2005).

By the late nineteenth century, journalists in the United States constituted a distinct occupational group, with specific norms, professional practices, modes of sociability, and ethical codes (Schudson 1978). In the 1870s, practices such as reporting and interviewing became common, thus establishing a "fact-centered" model of journalism (Chalaby 1996). This development of an autonomous pole in the journalistic field (Bourdieu 1994) was consolidated at the turn of the twentieth century by the creation of journalism schools and professional awards. Thus, the first journalism course took place at the University of Pennsylvania in 1893, followed by the creation of the first journalism program at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1908 and the founding of the Columbia Journalism School in 1912. The most prestigious professional awards for journalists, the Pulitzer prizes, were established in 1917 by the publisher Joseph Pulitzer (Hohenberg 1997).

In the 1910s-1920s, most journalists had started to strongly separate "facts" and "opinions;" they held "objectivity" to be a central principle of professional practice. In so doing, they distinguished themselves from less prestigious competitors such as public relations specialists and propagandists (Schudson 2001). These new professional boundaries contributed to the legitimation of journalism as a respectable occupation and form of cultural production.

France: politics, literature, and journalism during the Third Republic

Journalism in France looked rather different in the late nineteenth century. After the Third Republic passed a law in 1881 guaranteeing the freedom of the press (Kalifa 2005), newspapers became a vibrant medium for the newly created republic. Leading newspapers such as *Le Petit*

Journal and *Le Petit Matin* set the tone and the political agenda for an audience living primarily in large cities.

Yet during this time journalism was more of a first step preceding a political or literary career rather than a profession in itself (Ferenczi 1993). Aspiring politicians and writers honed their writing style and imagination in newspapers before moving to more prestigious positions. The most famous editorial piece of this period, Emile Zola's "J'accuse" during the Dreyfus Affair, crystallizes the literary and political facets of journalistic writing at that time (Charles 1990, Ory and Sirinelli 1986, Martin 1997).

Though the first school of journalism in France opened its doors in 1899 (Goulet 2009), journalism was then not considered to be a long-term professional activity. Journalists did not constitute a distinct professional group (Ruellan 1993). Contrary to the developments in the United States, the rise of a commercial press in France in the late nineteenth century was not accompanied by a clear professionalization process and lessened political partisanship.

During the First World War, political censorship and economic hardship impeded the printing and circulation of newspapers in the country. After the war, newspapers started again with renewed energy. Yet the interwar period in France was marked by a growing popular distrust of the press. The political polarization of newspapers grew stronger during the 1920-1930s, both on the Far-Right and the Far-Left. Financial scandals also shed light on the corruption of the media ("*l'abominable vénalité de la presse*") (Martin 2006, 1997). For example, it became known that several newspapers, including the prestigious *L'Evénement* and *La Lanterne*, received money from the Russian government between 1901 and 1914 in exchange for presenting positive information about the Russian bonds (which became worthless after the Russian Revolution of 1917).

In spite of these troubled times, the interwar period marked the organization of journalists into a professional group. The *Syndicat des Journalistes*, created in 1918, lobbied to pass a law defining a specific professional status and protections for journalists. As a result of these efforts, the 1935 Brachard Law granted several rights to professional journalists[1] (Charon 2003), such as a national press identification card ("*carte de presse"*) and the right to leave a publication with compensation if the company was sold ("*clause de session*") or because of intellectual disagreements with the publisher ("*clause de conscience*").[2] The law created several joint commissions ("*commissions paritaires"*) including representatives of both journalists and publishers. It also established intellectual property rights in journalism.[3]

2) Radio and television: commercial versus public regulations, 1930s-1980s

The 1930s also witnessed the appearance of a new medium: the radio. In the United States and in France there were intense struggles regarding the best way to regulate radio transmissions. The two countries chose opposite paths.

In France, public and private radios coexisted for most of the 1920s, but, as private radio stations became increasingly aligned with the Far Right, the state created a public agency ("Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones," or PTT). The PTT ran multiple local channels before gradually taking control of major private networks such as Radio Paris in 1933.

[1] After long negotiations, the Brachard Law promoted a capacious definition of "professional journalism": in order to be considered a "professional journalist," an individual only had to demonstrate that she received more than half of her income from one or several media companies.
[2] These benefits were extended to freelancers in 1974 with the Cressard Law, see Chapter 6.
[3] The French law followed a previous decision of the Supreme Court of the United States (International News Service v. Associated Press, 1918) (Charon 2003).

In contrast, the United States adopted a commercial model for the regulation of radio waves. During the 1920s, many politicians favored a noncommercial system similar to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the United Kingdom. However, private lobbies succeeded over time in their efforts to promote a market-based system. The Communication Act (1934) created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which allocated radio waves to private companies (McChesney 1993). Public service was not completely forgotten and resulted in the creation of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) (Benson 2013: 31).

Hence, the United States and France developed very different media systems at the turn of the twentieth century. In the United States, the journalistic field became organized around a commercial model with high professionalism and low state involvement. These different features of the American journalistic field later became known as a template for "liberal" media systems, such as those of the United Kingdom and Canada (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In France, during the first half of the twentieth century, journalism was a more political and literary activity, with low circulation figures for newspapers that were carefully regulated by the state and closely aligned with political parties. According to Hallin and Mancini, these specific features constitute the core of a "polarized pluralist model" which also characterizes Italy, Greece, and Spain.

"High Modernism": American journalism in the Post-War Era

After the Second World War, the number of newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and television channels increased dramatically both at the national and local levels (Krause 2011). Many journalism schools and communication programs were created after the 1950s (Weaver 2007). The invention of television solidified the commercial system that had been adopted for

the radio. The FCC adopted a framework that loosely regulated commercial television channels. Once again, the public-service channels included in 1967 within the Public Broadcasting Service represented a small fraction of the television landscape.

The media witnessed a period of optimism and "high modernism" in the post-war period (Hallin 1992). Journalism as a whole became increasingly "differentiated" from political parties and lobbies (Alexander 1981). Journalists embraced an ethos of public service and saw their role as bringing objective news to a larger audience. Hallin characterizes this dominant journalistic ethos as follows: "This was the high modernism of American journalism, an era when the historically troubled role of the journalist seemed fully rationalized, when it seemed possible for the journalist to be powerful and prosperous and at the same time independent, disinterested, public-spirited, and trusted and beloved by everyone, from the corridors of power around the world to the ordinary citizen and consumer" (Hallin 1992: 16).

During the Vietnam War, the media became more critical, first of the war and second of the state itself. Investigative journalism became a prestigious part of the newspapers' activities. This process culminated with publication of the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate scandal, which became part of the journalistic and political mythology in the United States (Schudson 1993). Yet American journalists were never as critical of politicians as they depicted themselves: they still largely respected and deferred to the "Establishment," whether public or private (Schudson 1978, 2001).

The aftermath of the war and the creation of a public monopoly in France

The media in France followed a different path in the second half of the twentieth century. During the Second World War, many newspapers and radios collaborated either with the German

occupation or the Vichy Regime. As a consequence, the postwar government forbade many radio stations and newspapers from reopening after the war: out of the 206 daily newspapers that had been published in 1939, only 28 were allowed to resume operations in 1944 (Kuhn 1995: 54).

In the aftermath of the war, the commercial press was largely discredited. The politically engaged noncommercial press benefited from this situation. Following the Liberation, the highest circulation numbers where those of the communist newspaper *L'Humanité*. *Le Monde* was created in 1944 by former Resistance hero Hubert Beuve-Méry, with the aim of becoming a "newspaper of record" ("*journal de référence*") (Padioleau 1985, Jeanneney 1979). In the same vein, the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and others founded the left-wing newspaper *Libération* in 1973 (Samuelson 1979). These new publications benefited from the wide array of public subsidies created to support the diversity of the press (Charon 2003).

The French state also took control of the broadcast media after the war, with the explicit goal of protecting radio and television from private interference. Radio and television channels were nationalized in 1949 with the creation of the Radiodiffusion -Télévision Française (RTF). Successive conservative governments consolidated this public monopoly during the Fifth Republic. The directors of the RTF were directly appointed by the government.

This system became the subject of increasing criticism, especially after the student revolts of May 1968. During the 1970s, left-leaning journalists created "free radios" (private radios operating illegally) that were widely popular, especially among the youth. Only with the election of a socialist majority in 1981 did the system radically change. In 1981, François Mitterrand deregulated radio channels. In 1982, his government announced the creation of private television channels. Four years later, after the election of a right-wing majority, TF1 (the first private television channel) started to operate.

3) From the 1980s to the 2000s: commercialization and concentration

The past thirty years have been marked by increasing strength of the commercial pole of the journalistic field in the United States and France (Bourdieu 1999).

In the United States, the concentration of media markets accelerated in the late 1970s. The number of publicly listed media companies increased dramatically, as did the percentage of chain ownership in the media sector. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the largest U.S. newspaper companies – Gannett, Knight-Ridder, Newhouse, and Times Mirror – controlled about 25% of newspapers in circulation (Krause 2011: 98). These changes were accentuated by a transformation of the political climate and media regulatory framework (Baker 2007), in which the FCC put an end to most limitations on media ownership with the Telecommunication Act of 1996. Many mergers took place in the following years, especially in the radio sector, where Clear Channel and Viacom ended up controlling 45% of industry revenues (Williams and Roberts 2002, cited in Krause 2011).

The growing proportion of large publicly traded media companies also transformed the orientation of news organizations toward more profit-oriented management. High profit margins typically came at a cost. Media managers increasingly saw investigative reporting as too time-consuming and expensive relative to readers' interest in them (Downie and Kaiser 2003, McChesney 1999, Krause 2011). Managers cut down the budget for reporting not only in newspapers but also at local radio and television channels, where most of the programs were replaced by syndicated services produced by major networks or broadcasting agencies (Klinenberg 2007).

Critics of these tendencies have also noted the relative weakening of the "wall of separation" between marketing and editorial departments that had been the trademark of the "high modernism" period (Gans 1979). For example, in 1999, the *Los Angeles Times* published a special issue of its Sunday magazine about the new Staples Center. After the publication, the journalists learnt that the newspaper had shared the advertising profits from the magazine with the Staples Center. The publisher apologized. Yet this encroachment of the marketing department on the domain of the editorial department provoked a strong reaction from the *Los Angeles Times* staff journalists and from the media world more broadly (Klinenberg 2007, McChesney and Pickard 2011).

In France, the concentration process of media companies started during the 1990s. The development of private television channels such as TF1, M6, and La Cinq, as well as the rise of a handful of big media companies such as Lagardère and Vivendi worried many contemporary observers (Bourdieu 1996, Accardo et About 2007, Halimi 1997). The concentration process, however, was relatively limited and remained subject to stringent regulations. For example, a law was passed in 1986 that created strong restrictions on public stock ownership of media companies and foreign investment in French media (Benson 2013:46).

II. The current media landscape in the United States and France

Do these different journalistic traditions still manifest themselves in the current media landscape? Comparing the market structure, journalistic workforce, and forms of the news in the United States and France, this section documents persistent differences between the two countries.

1) The structure of the journalistic field in the United States and France today

I start by comparing the current organization of the journalistic field in the United States and France.[4]

Market structures

There are important differences with respect to advertising revenue in the two countries. In the United States, 87% of newspapers' revenues came from advertising in 2002-2004, versus 39% for French newspapers for the same period (Benson 2013: 43). These figures are consistent with long-term averages for the two countries. Such differences reflect the generally smaller role of advertising in France compared to the United States: total advertising expenditures as a percentage of GDP are more than twice as high in the United States as in France.

The type of ownership of news organizations also differs between the two countries. In the United States, 80% of chain-owned newspapers are publicly traded corporations (Benson 2013: 44), with the notable exception of the *Daily News* and the *Christian Science Monitor* (Usher 2012).[5] In France, only two newspapers are parts of publicly traded companies: *Le Figaro*, under the control of the aeronautics and arms manufacturer company Dassault, and *Les Echos*, owned by the luxury goods conglomerate LVMH. Newspapers' ownership models are typically more varied. *L'Humanité* and *La Croix* are nonprofit companies; *Le Monde* used to belong to its journalists through a "Société des Rédacteurs" but was sold in 2010 to three investors; and *Libération* is now controlled by two principal investors, though the employees still control 20% of its stock.

[4] This summary draws on Benson's (2013) excellent analysis of the differences between the two countries.
[5] The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* rely on a hybrid system.

Profit expectations also vary significantly between American and French media companies, in part due to the ownership structure of the media companies and the lesser emphasis on shareholder value in France. In the United States, companies such as Gannett have routinely earned 25 to 35 percent profits until the late 1990s. In France, newspapers' owners are content when the publication breaks even (Charon 2003). *Le Monde*'s founder Hubert Beuve-Méry once declared that "only a poor press could be independent;" this view appears to remain widely shared today by French journalists and managers (Benson 2013: 47 but see Duval 2004).

Public aid

The French and American media also differ starkly with respect to the amount of public aid that news organizations receive.

In France, public subsidies for the press amount to approximately 2 billion euros per year (Charon 2003), which represent between 10 to 15 percent of press revenues in France (Benson 2013). There are two main types of subsidies for the press. "Direct aid" is voted every year by the parliament. These include subsidies for the transportation and delivery of newspapers across the country, retirement subsidies for printing workers, subsidies for the sale of newspapers outside of the European Union, subsidies for daily newspapers which have low advertising revenues, subsidies for local media, and aid for multimedia investment. "Indirect aid" mostly consists of preferential postal rates and tax deductions for newspapers and journalists.

This system of public aid has been extended to online news. In January 2014, the parliament voted a law that restricted the Value Added Tax (VAT) to 2.1% instead of 20% for news websites, thus granting them the same tax privileges as print publications (*Le Monde* 2014). A special public budget line ("*Fonds d'aide au développement des services de presse en ligne*")

of 20 million euros was also created in 2010 to support the development of news websites in France (Charon and Le Floch 2011: 30).

In the United States, to the contrary, there is no system of public aid to the press.[6] It is indeed widely believed that public aid – as well as any type of public interference[7] – would encroach on the freedom of the press protected by the First Amendment.[8] Despite recent proposals arguing in favor of public funding to support newspapers (Downie Jr. and Schudson 2009), this view has not yet gained widespread support. Philanthropic foundations contribute around $180 million to news organizations in the United States – a modest figure compared to the 2 billion euros of public aid in France. Donations typically fund the creation of new business models for print and digital publications rather than the ongoing operations of printed newspapers (Benson 2013).

A less severe crisis of the press in France compared to the United States?

Hence, the structure of the newspaper market still differs between the United States and France. The lesser importance of advertising for print revenues and higher public subsidies in France have to a certain extent protected French journalism – as well as other European media – from the recent crisis that hit American newspapers (Starr 2012).

The crisis of the printed press in the United States has been severe. The circulation of print newspapers has been shrinking over the last twenty years. According to the Newspapers Association of America (NAA), the daily circulation of newspapers has decreased by about 30

[6] However, U.S. newspapers benefited from reduced postal rates between 1792 (the Post Office Act) and the 1970s (John 1998, Starr 2005). John reports that, by 1794, newspapers generated only 3 percent of postal revenue but accounted for 70 percent of postal matter by weight.
[7] This extended view of the First Amendment was made clear by the Supreme Court in Miami Herald Publishing Co v. Tornillo in 1974 (see Schudson 2011 for a discussion)
[8] It should also be noted that, because of the First Amendment and the protection of freedom of expression in the United States, libel and defamation are more serious and punishable offenses in French law compared to American law (Charon 2003).

percent between the 1970s and 2011: in 1973, it was 64.1 million; in 2011, the figure was 44.4 million (NAA 2012). There has also been a sharp decrease in the advertising revenues of print newspapers, due in part to the online competition of news websites and to the development of online classified advertising such as Craigslist. In 2012, print advertising revenue was less than half of what it had been in 2006 (Pew Research Center 2013). This has led to massive layoffs in print newsrooms: the total workforce employed in daily newspapers has shrunk from 56,200 in 2000 to 38,000 in 2013, a 32% decrease (ASNE 2013).

In contrast, the circulation of newspapers remained overall stable in France between the 1990s and 2010. Only during the past three years was there a decline in newspaper circulation and advertising revenue. The annual circulation of national daily newspapers was 619 million in 1990, 673 million in 2000, 616 million in 2010, and 608 million in 2011 (Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication 2013).[9] The annual sales of all daily newspapers were (in billions of euros) 8.72 in 1990, 10.64 in 2000, 9.33 in 2010, and 8.70 in 2012. This decrease (-18%) was mostly due to shrinking advertising revenues, which fell from 4.83 billion euros in 2008 to 3.30 billion euros in 2012 (INSEE 2013). This represents a sizeable 30% decrease, which is still less dramatic than the 55% drop in print advertising revenue in the United States between 2006 and 2012 (Pew Research Center 2013).

The number of "professional journalists" also dramatically increased in France between the 1970s and 2010s, though it leveled out in recent years: there were 13, 635 "professional journalists" in 1975, 33,314 in 2000, 37,415 in 2010, and 37,477 in 2012 (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2013). Journalists working for newspapers and magazines represent about two-thirds of this total number. The number of print journalists has only decreased slightly over

[9] Unfortunately there are no reliable figures on the daily circulation of French newspapers over time that I could compare with U.S. figures. When dividing these figures by 365 (days), I find the following daily circulation figures: 1.69 million in 1990 and 1.66 million in 2011. These numbers are surprisingly low compared to the U.S. ones.

the last ten years: 26,147 in 2004, 25,175 in 2009, and 24,741 in 2012 (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2013). These figures are again less dramatic than in the United States.

To summarize, there are still significant differences in the structure of the journalistic field between the United States and France: the role of advertising revenues and degree of market concentration, the array and amount of public aid, and the magnitude of the recent crisis of the printed press still largely differ between the two countries.

2) The journalistic workforce

I now turn to the journalistic workforce in the two countries. Overall, French and American journalists present fairly similar profiles and have witnessed consistent evolutions over time: journalists are now older, more educated, and more likely to be women.

France

The French data from the *Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse* provide a comprehensive picture of "professional journalists," that is, people who earn more than half of their income from news organizations.[10] In 2012, there were 37,477 "professional journalists" in France, of whom 66% worked for print media (newspapers and magazines), 14.8% for television, and 9.5% for radio (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2013).

In 2012, the average age of French journalists was 42.9 years old (43.3 years old for print journalists). This average age has been increasing during the past decade, especially in the print sector. In 2012, 46% of the journalists were women, against 40% in 2000. Women are more

[10] On the limits of such data, see Pilmis (2010).

likely to work for print media than broadcast media: 47.3% of print journalists are women, versus 41.2% in television (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2013).[11]

The percentage of journalists who studied journalism, either as undergraduates or postgraduates, was 43.8% in 2008; this percentage increased over the past thirty years (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2009).[12] The percentage of journalists with bachelors' and/or masters' degrees is widely believed to have increased over the last forty years, which seems logical given the expansion of mass higher education in France first in the 1970s and then in the 1990s (Beaud 2003, Chauvel 1998). Yet there has been no systematic analysis of this question to date (Lafarge and Marchetti 2011).

In 2012, journalists had an average income of 3,790 euros per month ($62,517 per year) (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2013). 73.7% of the journalistic workforce had a tenured position ("Contrat à Durée Indéterminée" or CDI), 17.5% were freelancing, and 3.8% had an untenured position ("Contrat à durée déterminée," or CDD). The percentage of journalists with temporary positions has been rising over time (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2013) and many critics have noted the growing job insecurity that characterizes the French media (Accardo and Abou 2007, Rambach and Rambach 2009).[13]

[11] There is no data on the percentage of ethnic and racial minorities in the French journalistic workforce. See Simon (2008) and Fassin and Fassin (2006) on the absence of ethnic and racial variables in French surveys and more broadly on the conceptualization of ethnic and racial questions in the French social sciences.
[12] Unfortunately the 2012 report only focuses on journalists who graduated from one of the 13 journalism schools that had been certified by the profession (see Lafarge and Marchetti 2011, Frőhlich and Holtz-Bacha 2003).
[13] By definition, many "precarious" journalists are not included in the data from *the Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse* since less than half of their income comes from news organizations.

The United States

In the United States, existing data come from the phone survey developed by Weaver and his colleagues and administered in 1982, 1992, and 2002 (Weaver 2007), as well as from the Newsroom Census conducted by the American Society of Newspapers Editors (ASNE).

The total journalistic workforce consisted of 116,148 people in 2002 (Weaver 2007), among which 70% worked for print media (51% for daily newspapers), 17.5% for television, and 11.5% for radio (Weaver 2007: 2). These figures are very similar to the French ones. Even though there are about three times as many journalists in the United States as in France, the breakdown by media type is highly similar in the two countries. The median age of American journalists also increased over time, from 36.5 years old in 1971 to 41 years old in 2002.

Women represented 33% of all journalists in 2002 (Weaver 2007: 8) and 36.3% of all daily newspapers journalists in 2013 (ASNE Census 2013). The percentage of women in journalism has been stable since 1999. Women are more likely to work in weekly newspapers (37%), news magazines (43%), and television (37%) compared to radio (22%) and wire services (20%) (Weaver 2007: 10). The percentage of ethnic and racial minorities in full-time journalism jobs increased from 4.9% in 1982 to 9.5% in 2012 (Weaver 2007). In daily newspapers, it changed from 3.9% in 1978 to 12.3% in 2012 (ASNE 2013).

American journalists have also become more educated over time. The proportion of journalists who are college graduates evolved from 58% in 1971 to 89% in 2002 (Weaver 2007:38). The percentage of journalists who majored in journalism or communications in college rose from 22.6% in 1971 to 36.2% in 2002 (Weaver 2007: 44).The median personal income of

journalists was $43,588 in 2001 (Weaver 2007: 97).[14] It grew faster than the inflation rate during the 1990s (Weaver 2007: 98).[15]

In sum, the journalistic workforce shares many characteristics in the United States and France. In both countries, the average journalist is now older, more educated, and more likely to be a woman that was the case two decades ago. Yet two important differences should be noted. First, the feminization of journalism is greater in France than in the United States. Second, the percentage of journalists who trained in journalism is also higher in France. These statistics are consistent with the characteristics of the 101 journalists whom I interviewed in the two countries, among whom there were larger percentages of women and journalism school graduates in France compared to the United States (see Appendix A).

3) The form of news

I now turn to the content of media production and predominant news style in the two countries and their evolution over time.

Traditional differences: engagement versus objectivity

As mentioned above, French journalists long understood themselves to be public intellectuals engaging in political and literary commentary rather than reporters concerned with the objective gathering of facts.

This self-presentation was accompanied by a literary and polemical writing style drawing on vivid metaphors, scathing attacks against political enemies, and persuasive appeals to the

[14] As a point of comparison, in 2008, the median income of French journalists was $ 51,697 (3,133 euros per month) (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2009).
[15] Unfortunately there is no data on the percentage of freelancers in the U.S. journalistic workforce.

emotions and sensibility of the readers (Ferenczi 1993). In the late 1880s-1890s, when the method of the interview was first imported into France, French journalists resisted it vehemently (Chalaby 1996, Palmer 1983). For example, Zola harshly criticized the "trivial news" provided by reporters and its deadly effect on in-depth political discussions. Many of Zola's contemporaries lamented the rise of scandals, crimes, and other "news" stories which, in their view, "polluted" the French journalistic tradition (Ferenczi 1993: 95).

Over time, however, reporting, interviews, and investigative journalism became more common in France (Marchetti 2000). Yet the differences between French and American journalistic style did not disappear. Until the 1980s, many observers described French news articles as being more flamboyantly written and passionate than their U.S. counterparts. French newspapers were said to have a more politically engaged, interpretative, and personal tone compared to U.S. newspapers, which mostly relied on a neutral, fact-based writing style with little room for interpretation or personalization (Padioleau 1985).

A double convergence and its limits

Do these descriptions still hold in the early twenty-first century? Recent studies indicate that differences between the two journalistic styles have somewhat faded due to a double process of convergence.

On the U.S. side, many newspapers altered their writing style in the 1990s, breaking down the hegemony of the impersonal style of reporting. In an effort to increase their circulation in a competitive media market, many newspapers gave more space to personalized "stories," reasoning that they appealed to a broader audience than hard "news" (Schudson 1978). The most striking example might be the *New York Times*, which published an increasing number of feature

articles, stories, and commentaries even in sections that used to be hard-news only. This tendency was subsequently reinforced by online news, where the boundary between hard news, stories, blog posts, and tweets has blurred. Online writing styles are also generally more casual compared to print publications (Schudson 2011: 86, 210).

On the French side, the number of journalism programs increased exponentially between the 1970s and the 2000s (Lafarge and Marchetti 2011). This contributed to a standardization of journalistic training over time (Bouron 2014, Ruellan 1993). In French journalism schools' core curriculum, the U.S. or broadly "liberal" model of presenting "facts" in an objective, impartial way is presented as an example to follow (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

Thus, French journalists now understand their role and professional tenets in ways that are more similar to their American counterparts than was previously the case. A comparative study of French and American journalism recently found that, despite previous differences between "objective" journalism in the United States and "engaged" journalism in France, journalists in fact understand and justify journalistic ethics in strikingly similar ways in the two countries (Lemieux and Schmalzbauer 2000, Lemieux 2000). Journalists working for centrist publications emphasize the importance of separating political convictions from the practice of journalism, whereas right- and left-wing journalists reject the notion of detachment altogether, both in the United States and in France.

Yet this convergence over time does not mean that the form of the news became completely similar between the two countries. In his quantitative study of media coverage of immigration in U.S. and French newspapers and television, Benson (2013) convincingly argues that American newspapers are more likely to rely on "personalized narratives" than their French counterparts. These narratives typically feature individual stories that help readers to develop an

emotional connection to the topic at hand. In contrast, French newspapers articles often offer "debate ensembles:" articles are more abstract and feature a more diverse set of voices that include public officials as well as academics and activists.

III. Digital developments

This last section focuses on the digital developments of the past twenty years in the United States and France.

The main stages of the early history of the internet are well known. Some of the most famous episodes involve the creation of the progenitor of the internet (ARPANET) within the U.S. department of defense research laboratories in the 1970s; the now-mythical story of Jobs and Wozniack inventing the first Apple computer in their garage in 1971; and, twenty five years later, the research project of Larry Page and Sergey Brin at Stanford University that would become Google (Battelle 2010).

Other episodes have now receded in the background, such as the counter-cultural and anti-hierarchical utopia that marked the early beginnings of micro-computers (Turner 2006), or, on the other hand of the spectrum, the quasi-monopoly of America Online (AOL) in the 1990s and its failed attempt to conquer "content" by merging with Time Warner (Wu 2011). The emergence of the internet in its current form can be traced to the early 2000s, with the development of broadband internet, the invention of mobile devices connected to the internet in the second half of the 2000s, and the growing dominance of Apple and Google (Wu 2011, Battelle 2005).

In the United States, the first news websites were created in the mid-1990s. Many different forms coexisted, from online versions of major print newspapers to web-only sites that tended to seek out more reader participation in the creation of content (Boczkowski 2005). The number of news websites rapidly increased. Between 2005 and 2012, online news organizations were the only ones creating new jobs at a time when print publications were firing employees (Pew Research Center 2013, 2014, ASNE 2013). On the consumption side, behaviors also evolved very quickly. In 2012, 50% of the U.S. population got news from one or more digital forms on an average day (Pew Research Center 2013).

Online news followed the same path in many Western countries, though not always at the same time: in France, there was a delay in the mass diffusion of broadband internet and daily internet connections compared to the United States. Thus, in 2000, 40% of Americans had access to the internet as opposed to 20% of the French (World Bank 2014). In 2011, the percentage of people with internet access was roughly similar in the two countries – around 78% – but striking age differences remain in terms of internet usage by age cohort between the United States and France: in 2008, 34% of Americans of 55 years old and higher used the internet daily, against 16% of the same age group in France (Christin and Donnat 2014).

This delay is partly due to the existence of an alternative technology in France, the Minitel (a videotext online service accessible through telephone lines), which was widely popular in the 1990s (Charon 2003). With the exception of *LeMonde.fr*, which was created in December 1995, news websites and news blogs started developing in the mid-2000s in France. On the reception side, online readership has been rapidly increasing in recent years. For example, the daily audience of French news websites increased by 16% between 2010 and 2011 (Centre

d'Analyse Stratégique, 2012). In 2012, 42% of the French population read news online at least once a month (AudiPress 2013).[16]

Many analyses indicate that the rise of online news contributes to a relative convergence and standardization of media content both within and between countries. Two main trends are taking place simultaneously. First, global market structures emerged not only for online news, but also, more strikingly, for online advertising. Second, the internet made possible a growing interconnectedness between journalists around the world, as well as more mimetic practices between news websites, which increased the amount of overlap between the content of news sites.

1) Media concentration in online news: the transformation of advertising

As discussed in the previous section, the process of media concentration that started in the 1980s in the United States resulted in the disappearance of many local newspapers and networks.[17] In France, the main wave of consolidation took place in the 1990s and was more limited. Did the internet reinforce this process of media concentration?

Concentration in online news

The advent of the internet is widely believed to have contributed to a diversification of the points of view and approaches in the media. The birth of the "blogosphere" and the development of "pro-am" (professional-amateur) websites have allowed new perspectives and new forms of

[16] Unfortunately there is no data on the daily consumption of online news in France.
[17] Even though the general correlation between concentration and diversity is still an object of debate (see Klinenberg 2007, Bagdikian 2004, Chan-Olmsted and Chang 2003, Bennett 2004, McChesney 1999, Baker 2007, and Peterson and Berger 1975, Peterson and Anand 2004).

collaborations (Benkler 2006) to emerge. Among many other examples, blogs and websites such as *Talking Points Memo* (created in 2000) or *ProPublica* (created in 2007) in the United States and *Bakchich* (created in 2006) and *Mediapart* (created in 2008) in France are independent organizations that specialize in critical, in-depth investigations of the political arena (Canu and Datchary 2010, Boczkowski 2005).

Yet, in spite of the proliferation of new independent sites, it is also important to note that the most popular news websites in both countries are still those of the large media companies (Tewksbury 2003, Klinenberg 2005, Wu 2010). According to comScore, the top ten news site in 2012 in the United States were, in descending order: *Yahoo! News*, *CNN*, *Huffington Post*, *NBC*, *CBS*, *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Fox News*, *Tribune* newspapers (*Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Time*, *Baltimore Sun*, etc.), and the *Washington Post* (Pew 2013). In France, according to the official figures of the OJD, the most visited news websites in 2012 were *L'Equipe*, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Parisien*, *Le Nouvel Obs*, *20 Minutes*, *Libération*, *Le Point*, *L'Express*, and *Les Echos* (OJD 2014). All of these websites are associated with a print publication or a television channel (except for *Yahoo! News* and *The Huffington Post* in the United States). Most of them belong to large corporations, some of which are multinational corporations. For example, *The Huffington Post*, an independent website at first, was sold in 2011 to AOL for $315 million and now publishes and adapts its content for eleven different countries, including France.

At most of these websites, "convergence" between print, broadcast, and web content is under way (Singer 2004, Deuze 2004, 2006, Klinenberg 2005, Dagiral and Parasie 2010b). In a corporate context where management decisions are driven by economies of scale, media companies increasingly reuse and reformat content across print publications, websites, and television and radio channels. In the "new newsroom" (Klinenberg 2005), the internet accelerates

this process by adding a new medium that needs to be frequently updated. Media experts have also emphasized how news websites are less likely than print publications to rely on the "wall" that used to separate editorial and marketing departments (Schudson 2011, McChesney and Pickard 2011).

The transformation of advertising

However, the most dramatic changes with respect to online news does not directly involve media companies but instead the market for online advertising, which is growing rapidly. In the United States, total digital advertising spending was $42.6 billion in 2013 (a 15.7% increase compared to 2012) out of which at least $500 million went to digital news sites (Pew Research Center 2014).

Online advertising has become increasingly concentrated at the global level. Whereas traditional advertising markets were largely national and insular (Fox 1997, Martin 1992), the internet dramatically increased consolidation on a global scale: Google is the dominant company at the world level. This is because Google not only sells ad space on its own search pages, but also plays a role as an intermediary in the digital ad market with its programs AdSense, AdWords, and DoubleClick. Understanding this process, which is important for later sections on the business decisions of online news sites, requires a brief description of how news websites sell advertising.

There are crucial differences in how advertising is measured and sold between traditional and online media. In traditional media (print, radio, or television), the inventory is sold based on the "cost per thousand," or CPM (Cost Per Mille). External agencies such as Nielsen or Arbitron estimate the average audience/readership/viewership of the media. In turn, the media outlet

proposes a given CPM depending on the size and the location of the inventory. Advertisers then rely on these figures to calculate what it will cost to ensure that a certain number of viewers or listeners will be exposed to their advertisement. In other words, in traditional media, advertising is sold based on "ad impression" (how many people will see or hear the ad) and not on "ad performance" (how many people then buy the product).

News websites still rely on impressions and CPM, but the system has become more complex (Graves and Kelly 2010). There are three main ways to sell online inventory, which differ for premium inventory, remnant inventory, and inventory based on key-words. Premium inventory is very visible (e.g., a banner advertisement on the site's home page) and sells for a high rate. The media owner is usually directly in charge of selling this space; websites typically rely on CPM or sponsorship packages for selling the premium space to prestigious brands. In contrast, "remnant inventory" (e.g., less prominent space on the website) sells as a much lower rate and though third-party companies that sell big packages of ads on different websites to advertisers. The rate for remnant inventory is not calculated based on the website's number of unique visitors but rather based on a performance basis, with the "cost per click" (CPC, also called "pay per click" or PPC, and "cost per action" or CPA): advertisers only pay the publisher when the ad is clicked. Third, inventory based on key-words is managed by Google's AdSense: Google administers, sorts, and maintains ads on the website depending on the presence in the articles of key-words that the advertiser wants to target, regardless of the prominence of the page on the website. The rates are determined on a per-click basis (CPC or PPC) based on a bidding system and thus vary depending on the period and the key-word.

For these three types of advertising techniques, Google has become a dominant provider for websites around the world. First, Google's advertising programs – AdSense and AdWords –

have become increasingly important in terms of market shares compared to their competitors Yahoo! Search Marketing and Microsoft's Bing Ads. In 2012, Google received around 33% of the world's $117 billion in digital ad spending (Efrati 2013). Second, many news website rely on Google's DoubleClick in order to gather detailed information about their readers' behavior online. DoubleClick is a program that installs "cookies" on the consumers' computers, gathers their online data, and uses this data to decide which ads to present to the reader when she browses through a website. Many online advertising managers argue that Google search, AdSense, AdWord, and DoubleClick operate in a complementary way (Geary 2012). Third, and more broadly, Google now operates as a "master switch" for online content (Wu 2010), which reflects Google's quasi-monopoly on online search engines in Western countries (Battelle 2005). Without in-depth knowledge of search engine optimization (SEO, or the art of appearing on top of Google's results for a given request) and a good ranking in Google's algorithm, news websites would lose a great deal of traffic, which is not an option when online advertising revenue is the only source of income (Ziewitz 2012).

Hence, in most Western countries (including the United States and France), news websites are increasingly concerned with search engine optimization, the pricing practices and functioning of AdSense, AdWords, and DoubleClick, as well as the techniques to attract more traffic in order to get more advertising revenue. Without encroaching on Chapter 4, which discusses the different types of metrics measuring online traffic, I note that news websites around the world rely on the same software programs to measure and analyze online traffic and audience demographics.

2) Connectedness and overlap in online news

Last, these structural transformations of the market for online news have been accompanied by greater interconnectedness between journalists and increasing editorial overlap among news websites around the globe.

Interconnectedness and the "global news style"

One line of research emphasizes the growing connections and awareness between journalists around the world. In this view, the last couple of decades have witnessed the emergence of a "global news style" (Berglez 2008), in which journalists in newsrooms across the globe use similar narrative forms and angles to cover topics of worldwide interest (Gurevitch and Levy 1990). This development of a global news culture is said to be strongly related to the transformation of the journalistic occupation around the world, as journalists become more educated, multilingual, and cosmopolitan (Reese 2010, Frőhlich and Holtz-Bacha 2003, Lafargue and Marchetti 2011).

Though communications media have witnessed many waves of globalization since the nineteenth century (Bielsa 2008), this growing interconnectedness at the global level reached new heights with the internet: the news media have become largely deterritorialized. Prestigious English-language news outlets with a strong online presence such as *The New York Times* have become increasingly important in assessing newsworthiness at the global level (Usher forthcoming). News websites that produce global news for a worldwide audience and social networking sites such as Twitter have become increasingly important communication channel for journalists around the world (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2012). For example, as of April 2014,

CNN Breaking News had more than 16 million followers and *The New York Times* 11.5 million followers on Twitter.[18]

The growing interconnectedness between journalists and the emergence of a "global news style" should also be understood in the light of the overall symbolic prestige and worldwide influence of the Anglo-American media system, with its objective style, information-oriented journalism, strong professionalization, and market-dominated organization (Hallin and Mancini 2004). According to Hallin and Mancini, many media outlets in Western countries are converging towards the "liberal model" represented by Anglo-American journalism (2004: 254).

Overlap and imitation between news websites

A second line of research, largely congruent with the previous one, argues that the amount of overlap in the content of the news is higher among news websites than among print newspapers.

Boczkowski provides a particularly compelling analysis of this process. Drawing on a quantitative content analysis of several newspapers and news websites in Argentina, he finds that news websites are more likely than print newspapers to imitate each other by selecting the same subjects for stories (Boczkowski 2010). According to Boczkowski, this is because web journalists update their websites incessantly depending on what their competitors have just published online, whereas print journalists are less likely to do so. Hence, the amount of overlap of hard news between publications is higher for news websites than for print newspapers over the period. These imitative practices result in a decrease in the diversity of information in online news (Boczkowski 2010: 90).

A recent study of the convergence between print and online news in the United States, France, and Denmark confirms that similar processes might be taking place across different

[18] See https://twitter.com/cnnbrk and https://twitter.com/nytimes

countries. According to Benson and his colleagues, news websites are more likely than print newspapers to have similar types of stories on their homepages. In all three countries, online publications rely on prominent advertising on the home page and feature a higher proportion of "light" news, "sensationalistic" stories, and opinion pieces compared to print publications (Benson et al. 2012: 32).

Taken together, these analyses indicate a growing convergence between the styles and content of news websites worldwide. Of course, editorial convergence does not necessarily imply that people in different countries read the news in the same way. As is well known in cultural sociology, consumers reinterpret cultural forms in highly different ways depending on the context (Hoggart 1998, Liebes and Katz 1993). Yet recent comparative research on online news consumption also documents strong similarities between readers' preferences in eight Western countries (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein 2013). Readers in all countries have highly similar taste for soft and sensationalistic news; they tend to prefer stories about sex, celebrities, crime, as well as practical advice pieces to public-interest stories about international news or politics.[19]

Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the trajectory and structure of the U.S. and French journalistic fields. Journalism in the two countries witnessed several waves of convergence and divergence over the past two hundred years. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, divergence predominated: the U.S. journalistic field became organized around strong market forces and high professionalization, whereas the French journalistic field was shielded from market pressure by the state and remained weakly professionalized.

[19] See Chapter 7.

Things have changed since the 1980s in ways tending toward greater convergence. The French media became more commercialized and professionalized over the past thirty years. At the same time, U.S. newspapers loosened the fact-based model of journalistic writing that had been their trademark for more than a century. In both countries, the journalistic workforce became older, more educated, and more feminized. Yet there are still significant differences between the two countries. The level of media concentration is higher in the United States. The amount of public aid is more substantial in France. The commercial crisis of the press is more marked in the United States than in France. In addition, news styles still differ: U.S. newspapers prefer to rely on "personalized narratives" whereas French newspapers are more likely to use abstract and multi-perspectival "debate ensembles." Nonetheless, recent digital developments add a new layer of convergence: not only have the online news and advertising market become more concentrated, but growing interconnectedness between web journalists and the mimetic practices of web journalists also increase the amount of overlap among news websites.

These macro-level changes set the stage for the rest of the dissertation. The next chapter turns to the micro-level in order to examine two websites founded by print journalists, *TheNotebook* in New York and *LaPlace* in Paris, who sought a way to transition into the digital age.

CHAPTER III

A Tale of Two Websites

How does innovation occur? Against grand narratives of individual genius, historians and social scientists have repeatedly shown that the invention of new cultural and scientific forms typically involves multiple trials and errors and complex networks of actors (Kuhn 1996 [1962], Merton 1973, Latour 1993, Knorr Cetina 1999, Collins 1998). The invention of online news is no exception: breaking from the routines of print newspapers and creating novel journalistic forms on the internet was in no way an immediate or easy process (Boczkowski 2005).

This chapter draws on interviews and archival material to compare the creation and early years of two news websites, *TheNotebook* in New York and *LaPlace* in Paris.[1] The two websites went through similar phases in their respective histories. Editors and staffers describe the early years of the websites as playful, "fun," and innovative, with low expectations of being a "normal business." After 2008, the two organizations faced stronger pressure to make a profit in a more

[1] The names of the websites have been anonymized in order to comply with the IRB protocol. See Appendix A in this manuscript.

competitive market. *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* then developed strikingly similar strategies in order to stay afloat financially. Yet I also describe differences between the two organizations: *TheNotebook* had significant financial means from its inception, whereas *LaPlace* was a more artisanal and politically engaged project drawing on strong connections between its members. This had important consequences for their respective editorial projects and managerial styles.

I. Creating *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*: the early years

Most of the journalists who were engaged in the early period of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* describe the period as a time of "fun," adventure, and strong emotional energy (Collins 2004) among the people who participated in the project. Yet the details of the creation of the two websites reveal a more complex picture.

1) TheNotebook*: an early innovator in the nascent field of online news*

TheNotebook was originally supposed to be print magazine, not a website. It all started with the project of a prominent journalist and editor, John, who wanted to create his own publication. In the early 1990s, John had a prestigious reputation as a political journalist. He wrote a widely read column for a liberal political magazine and hosted a political debate show on a popular television channel. In a press interview, John summarized his feelings at the time: "I was on [television], every night. I'd had about enough of that […]. I, like every other magazine journalist, wanted to start a magazine" (2013).[2]

[2] Most of this chapter relies on retrospective interviews that I conducted with editors and staffers at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. In rare cases I draw on articles and interviews published in the press about the two websites, such as

John was then in his mid-40s. He began writing nonfiction during his undergraduate years at Harvard. After attending Harvard Law School, he worked as a columnist and later as an editor for several liberal magazines. Twenty years later, John had an original project for a publication: he wanted to create a magazine that would "intelligently summarize the news" instead of focusing on soft news, which in his view had taken over traditional magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*.

Yet John soon realized that investors were more interested in the nascent internet than in his editorial project: they were willing to spend large amounts of money on online projects but not on print ones. John described the double financing standard that he faced when he tried to find money for his magazine:

> "Everyone had heard of the Internet, and nobody understood it, including me. I thought, if you go to someone and say, "I want to start a magazine," they'll say, "Come back with $40 million, or something like that, and we'll start a magazine." But if you said, "I want to start an Internet magazine," they'd throw money at you. I decided I would try and do that" (2013).

Being a pragmatic man, John reframed his project as an online magazine, even though he had no expertise in digital technology. A major tech company – called here TechCorp – showed interest in the project and proposed to hire John to develop it. TechCorp, a multinational corporation specializing in computer software and computer electronics, was at the time trying to develop a media presence. In addition to the online magazine with John – a drop of water in their budget given the large size of their operations – TechCorp started several other media projects, online and offline.

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this interview published in 2013. When this is the case, I anonymize the articles in order to comply with IRB regulations. I cite press interviews by providing a reference and a date between parentheses, as well as an anonymized notice in the bibliography. The block quotes that are not accompanied by a date come from my own fieldwork.

John did not hesitate for long. He accepted the offer and moved to the company's headquarters on the West Coast.

The slow beginnings of *TheNotebook*

John vividly describes his first days at TechCorp and the uncertainty that reigned about the internet: "I went out there. It was unclear what I was going to do. […] I think at that time, if you said the word "Internet," people freaked out. Everyone was trying to figure out what they were going to do with it and throwing a lot of money at the wall, see what stuck" (2013).

What would the online magazine look like? During his first months at TechCorp, John though about it and even drafted a memo summarizing his preliminary ideas. Ten years later, he recalled the original plan with "embarrassment:"

> "My original idea, believe it or not, was a publication that you would download and print out once a week. It would have been an inferior version of a print magazine – a bunch of pages stapled together (if you had a stapler nearby). By the time *TheNotebook* was launched, we had moved beyond that primitive once-a-week notion. I remember, with some embarrassment, the eureka moment when it dawned on me that an online magazine doesn't have to publish an entire issue at once. Pretty soon, I even figured out that you didn't need to have "issues" at all" (2006)

This quote parallels Boczkowski's analysis of the first years of the *New York Times* online (2005), in which he describes the time and effort that it took for journalists to abandon print routines. John originally thought of the internet as an inexpensive distribution channel rather than a new medium. The online magazine would be a free publication that readers could download, print, and staple at home every week. In this version, the internet's advantage was that there were no distribution costs. John acknowledges: "What interested me was you could put it out cheap" (2013).

It was only several months later that John realized that an online magazine did not have to be a weekly publication (what he calls his "eureka" moment). It could, in fact, be updated as often as desired. The project then moved forward quickly. John had asked several friends and colleagues to join him. Most of them were located in New York and Washington, D.C. They remember their excitement at the time:

> Sam (current editor-in-chief of *TheNotebook*): I came to *TheNotebook* before it launched, in early 1996. John was a journalist hero of mine. The internet… I didn't know anything about it… I had actually never been on the web before coming to *TheNotebook*. It wasn't unusual… I didn't know in any systematic way that the internet was the future of journalism, but it seemed like things were moving out in that direction. I was young and had nothing to lose… Why not go there? I was 26. I had been working for a local paper. I was kind of bored with the issues. So I was looking for a change of some sort. And the people at *TheNotebook* were great. They were just super people.

> Esther (former section editor): I was a freelancer at the time. I've always liked starting things, and it wasn't only starting a new magazine but starting a new form. That was in early 1995. John presented it to me as a grand experiment. He is an opinion journalist, so it was going to be an opinion magazine. The articles were to be short. It was really John's vision of journalism, it has been all along. [John] was the flagship hire, he was the most famous journalist. When he came there was a cover story in *Time* magazine… with his face on the cover. He was dressed as a sort of lumberjack; he might even be holding a fish… Well, it just seemed very exciting, and a lot of fun.

Sam and Esther both recall the moment when John told them about the project. A complex set of factors played out in their decision to join the team. First, the charisma and prestige of John were essential: John was a "journalistic hero," a "flagship hire" who had strong editorial views. Second, the project seemed like an exciting adventure, a "grand experiment" that might become the "future of journalism." Third, Sam and Esther were then unsatisfied with their positions: Sam was "bored" in his work for a Washington weekly newspaper and Esther was freelancing after disappointing experiences working for New York-based magazines.

A small team of around fifteen full-time journalists and editors started working for *TheNotebook* in 1995-1996. Most of the writers were prominent intellectual figures from the East Coast magazine world. At least seven of them had undergraduate degrees from either Harvard or Yale. Some of them moved to the West Coast; others stayed in New York and Washington, D.C.

The relationship between the Ivy League-educated writers and the computer programmers of TechCorp was not immediately productive. Many writers still remember a strong clash of cultures with the engineers:

> Esther: Essentially what happened is that a bunch of East Coast journalists were hired to work with a bunch of West Coast programmers, and it wasn't the best marriage of talents. It was complicated… I went out there for a month, to learn how TechCorp worked and to meet my colleagues. But I knew nothing about web design, so I just had to ask questions about what was possible. Now journalists learn how to program. But there was a big disconnect at the time, I think that hampered us…
>
> John: I found the engineers who worked for *TheNotebook* very nice people, but just like writers […] they were spoiled rotten. You could never get what you wanted from them. They got very angry at me when I say, "Why can't we do "X"?" This was after I realized that we had to reinvent the form to some extent. We couldn't put it out and let people print it out […]. It's all so ancient now. We were constantly stumbling over things related to their being engineers rather than writers (2013).

According to these accounts, programmers and journalists had trouble finding a common language. Journalists were ignorant of the technical aspects of computer and web-programming. They came up with new ideas for the design and organization of the website, but these did not seem realistic to the programmers and engineers, who had their own ways of doing things. Gradually, however, the dialogue became easier (John even eventually married an executive from TechCorp). Daily video conferences were organized between editors, journalists, and engineers in order to develop the website and the editorial project of *TheNotebook*.

"The voice of email"

What was the editorial line of *TheNotebook* during its first years of existence and how did the online magazine distinguish itself from its competitors?

When the website was launched, the online competition for news was almost non-existent. A handful of websites were already running. Yet the print journalists of *TheNotebook* were mostly hoping to compete with prestigious print magazines. No money was spared to reach this goal, as several columnists and editors illustrate:

> Aaron (former assistant editor and staff writer): We wrote for our own perceived audience, which, you know, we thought of as an audience… similar to *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*. We thought that our competition was *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, the competition was in that game… We just happened to be online. Because *TheNotebook* was owned by TechCorp, there was all this wasted money that was splashed around. And I remember Esther, who was the main culture editor at the time, she wanted to pay writers at a glossy magazine's rates. TechCorp made it clear that they had money to burn. We were giving people $1,000, $1,200 apiece […]. They would have gorgeous offices. I don't understand how it could be cost-effective…
>
> Esther: I think that we were trying to prove that we could be as good as a printed magazine. So we were chasing after the print journalists, assigning the kind of pieces that they could get elsewhere. We had more money, a little more money, than places like *The New Republic*.

Thanks to TechCorp, *TheNotebook* had enough money to hire good writers and develop innovative formats. Esther recalls her time as the culture editor at the website. During the first year of operation, the design of the magazine was still largely determined by print routines: there were pages, a table of content, and even a printed version:

> Esther: At the beginning the design was very imitative of a print magazine. We had pages, we had a table of contents, clicking through was sort of laborious. (…) And we also had a printed issue, did you know that? For several years, we would select and print the highlights and send it to a small list of influential subscriber… The idea was that if we wanted to have, as they called it, policy significance, we had to be printed, because people were not reading magazines on the web yet.

As Esther recalls, print magazines were still much more prestigious than online ones in the late 1990s. Thus, most "influential subscribers" did not consider news websites to be a serious source of information.

Over time, editors and journalists started experimenting with new formats. Among the many editorial innovations of *TheNotebook* at the time, Esther's main initiative in the culture section was the creation of a blog-like book club:

> Esther: We basically tried to come up with more and more features that were blog-like, before there were blogs. That's sort of where we were moving to. Daily dispatches, diaries that evolved into blog… But it took us a long time to get the confidence that we could maintain the quality control while allowing writers to be very spontaneous and immediate. […] We also had this book club… I called it "epistolary criticism," which was a fancy term for email exchanges about books. We thought that we had invented a new form of criticism. It was spontaneous and fun and it was like talking to people, it wasn't like the angst of writing. And I said to my boss, "this is the most fun I've had as a writer." We just let ourselves go. There was no limit and we could do what we wanted. I found that kind of spontaneous writing very fun.

Esther recalls the positive feelings of freedom, "fun," and "spontaneity" associated with this period. In the book club (as in other sections), the main innovation was to develop a free, fluid, and casual writing style that imitated conversations between people. Esther draws a parallel between this style and the emergence of "blogs" at about the same time (Boyd 2006, Boczkowski 2005). Another journalist who had his first position out of college at *TheNotebook* in the 1990s remembers his experience:

> Sean: I loved it because people were so smart! Smart and funny, I loved it. Also, it was a very non-hierarchical structure, so even if you were a in low-level job, if you had a good idea they would listen to you and pay attention to you. I was there for two years, and I got a lot of chance to write things. […] At *TheNotebook* I could make jokes, I could make any joke I wanted, or write any way I wanted, or be as sharp or biting as I wanted… and they liked it!

Sean fondly remembers the horizontal structure of *TheNotebook* in its early years, when everybody was invited to innovate. He later became a staffer at a large national magazine but left because he missed the more casual and fun writing style that he had discovered at *TheNotebook*.

Over time, the editorial line of *TheNotebook* crystallized around a witty and conversational take on current events. The current editor-in-chief, Sam, who was promoted in 2008, summarizes it as follows:

> Sam: There is a tone in web journalism, and a way of writing with direct address, a conversational, very "you-oriented" tone, which *TheNotebook* took on very early. That was our voice. […] It's not written down *to* a reader, it's a conversation *with* the reader [*his emphasis*], it's as though you're speaking to them. It's the voice of email, that's the way people write emails. […] *TheNotebook*'s competitive advantage in the world is a quality advantage. When you get to *TheNotebook*, the things you see will be smarter, funnier, more provocative than what you get elsewhere. Our advantage is that we are, like, smartypants.

Over the years, this editorial line – a casual and witty style, a provocative take on the subjects of the day – has been characterized as "contrarian" by many readers and critics.[3] Jane, a former assistant editor at *TheNotebook*, describes the current style of the publication:

> Jane: Every piece is supposed to have an idea. And hopefully the idea is a bit unusual. *TheNotebook* is caricatured as being contrarian… But certainly, if something was presented with a contrarian idea that was great! Yeah, when they zig we zag. Or sometimes it was, "this show you've never heard about is the best show in town!," that kind of thing. Or… defenses of things that are unpopular… […] So, I guess you could characterize it as "you think this, but you're wrong", or "everybody thinks this, so they're all wrong". That can be a lot of fun…

In the 2000s the staffers and editors of *TheNotebook* portray their editorial line as "smart," "fun," and "conversational." Thus, the main editorial innovation of the magazine was not so much to

[3] There is even a hashtag on Twitter, #TheNotebookPitches, which features funny contrarian headlines that *TheNotebook* should (and sometimes does) publish.

cover new topics or provide in-depth commentary of political issues. Rather, it promoted a spontaneous and casual writing style, which was described by journalists as the "voice of email."

"Charity kid" versus "real business"? The economic model of *TheNotebook*

At about the same time as *TheNotebook* found its online voice, journalists and editors began to worry about the future of the website. It had been understood with TechCorp from the start that the website would be losing money for several years before starting to make a profit. But things did not evolve exactly as planned.

John's original idea was to create a paywall and monetize content after having attracted a loyal readership. The paywall was created in 1998 and John soon realized his mistake: only 30,000 out of the 400,000 monthly readers subscribed, which was a low number compared to what TechCorp and John had expected. A year later, the paywall was removed. TechCorp continued to finance the online magazine, but editors and journalists felt that they were not one of TechCorp's priorities anymore. Sam explains the feeling of doom that marked the early 2000s:

> Sam: *TheNotebook* cost millions of dollars to run every year… And the revenue was maybe 10%, 20% of that. It wasn't really a business. TechCorp was making so much money and we were so prestigious that they didn't care. They were making billions and billions and billions of profit… and *TheNotebook* was only a few million dollars, so it didn't matter, especially if *TheNotebook* gave them good publicity.
> The first couple of years, TechCorp was investing heavily in content. But after 1998, they cut back those investments, they only kept [the web portal] but almost everything else they got rid of. *TheNotebook* was the only one sitting there, we were basically alone. We became totally irrelevant to the enterprise. I mean they were fine, they were perfectly nice to us, but they never tried to make it a business. So the period between 1999 and 2004… it was a bit depressing because they weren't investing in us. There was no sense that we could try new things, there was no plan.

After the failed attempt to create a paywall and TechCorp's decision to sell its other media companies, *TheNotebook*'s staff felt that the editorial impetus and financial means of the project had stalled: they had become "irrelevant."

Several prominent members of the founding team left for more promising venues. John – who had been named "Editor of the Year" for his work at *TheNotebook* by the *Columbia Journalism Review* – resigned in 2002 and started working for the *Los Angeles Times*. Esther left in 2001 for the *New York Times* book section. Another high-status staff writer started working for *U.S. News and World Report.*[4]

In 2004, TechCorp sold *TheNotebook* to a large media company, called here Newspapers Inc. Though the specifics of the deal were kept secret, media experts estimated the deal to be worth between $15 and $20 million (Carr 2004). Most of *TheNotebook*'s journalists and editors were happy about the sale. According to Sam, Newspapers Inc. was a more natural home than TechCorp for the magazine:

> Sam: It was only when Newspapers Inc. bought us that we began to become a real business. Truthfully, no one really liked the way TechCorp was handling it. We didn't want to be the charity kid, we wanted to be a real business. It's not sustainable to be somebody's toy, even if you're TechCorp's toy. We always had the idea that we had to be a great magazine that also supports itself. […] As a journalist, it is important to be independent from the whim of rich people. So it's very nice to have a rich owner who's going to lose money on you but it's much better to show that the work you do sustains itself on a market. And then you don't have to compromise your standards, you can do the journalism that you want to do. And that's what we've been doing at *TheNotebook*.

According to Sam, Newspapers Inc. gave *TheNotebook* the opportunity to become a "real business" instead of a "toy" or a "charity kid." Sam emphasizes the importance of being a

[4] These journalists had received stock-options from TechCorp in addition to their regular wages, which they typically sold when they left the company. Esther recalls: "I was a regular employee... But what was really nice is that I also had received TechCorp stock-options. I sold my options in 2000… before the tech bubble burst! I was pretty lucky… which made it quite easy for me not to work for a while. All the early staff, yeah, we got stock-options, it was a really good deal!"

"sustainable" business in order to keep an independent editorial line. Yet, in the case of *TheNotebook*, becoming a "real business" also came with new responsibilities that would eventually affect the editorial line of the website. I will come back to these evolutions after exploring the early years of *LaPlace* on the other side of the Atlantic.

2) LaPlace*: a conscious imitation of* TheNotebook

LaPlace was created in Paris in the spring of 2007, a decade after *TheNotebook*. Similar to *TheNotebook*, the website was founded by journalists. In contrast with *TheNotebook*, however, *LaPlace* was a collaborative and artisanal enterprise, since the journalists who launched the website provided most of the initial capital.

The American model

In the early 2000s, Philippe, Eric, André, and Adrien were mid-career journalists who worked for the same national, left-leaning daily newspaper located in Paris. Philippe was then the chief of the Washington bureau (2000-2006); Eric was the newspaper's correspondent in New York (2005-2007); André was the Beijing correspondent (2000-2005) before becoming deputy editor-in-chief (2006-2007); Adrien was a senior editor and an important figure of the Parisian cultural scene.

The four journalists knew each other well, without being close friends. They were all prominent, highly educated journalists whose careers had overlapped at different points in time. Philippe, Eric, and Adrien did their undergraduate curriculum at Sciences Po Paris (though not exactly at the same time and with different majors). Philippe and Adrien both attended

prestigious journalism programs (respectively the CFJ, in Paris, and the CUEJ, in Strasbourg). Philippe and Eric overlapped for a year in the United States. André, who had started his journalistic career working for a press agency, had been a foreign correspondent in South Africa and Jerusalem before transferring to the Beijing bureau and later coming back to Paris, where he overlapped with Adrien.

They all shared a strong interest in the internet. In the early 2000s, Philippe, André, Eric, and Adrien had started blogs that were hosted on their newspaper's website. Philippe wrote a blog about U.S. politics for two years; Eric later took over the blog. André's popular blog analyzed Chinese politics and economy; the blog was eventually censored in China. Adrien created an activist blog devoted to drug use and drug policy in France. The four journalists enjoyed the interactivity associated with blogging; they also appreciated the stylistic freedom and casual style of blog posts.

The four journalists were also avidly following the developments of the English-language blogosphere. For example, Philippe, *LaPlace*'s editor-in-chief, remembers his excitement when he first started reading blogs and news websites during his time in Washington:

> Philippe: When I arrived in the United States… I really discovered the internet there. Of course I was using it before, but there I started surfing a lot, I saw what was going on, websites such as *TheNotebook* or *Talking Points Memo* […] Everything new, interesting, everything counter-intuitive was there. And the blogosphere is very rich in the U.S., they even have conservative blogs… It was very lively, people talked to each other… In France it was less the case.
> I participated in the beginnings of a website, *TPM Cafe*, with Josh Marshall… I remember, he worked in a Starbucks… He would lock his laptop to the table so that he could grab a coffee once in a while! At some point he created a participatory platform. He asked to a couple of people, think tanks, foreign journalists, etc., to blog for *TPM Cafe*. I loved it.
> In 2004, my editor asked me to start a blog about the presidential campaign. I posted lots of stories, investigations, small bites about the American presidential campaign. It was meant for French people who were really into the American campaign. I was writing stories that I could never have written in [*the newspaper he was working for*] because we

> didn't have enough space. The blog was working well. Compared to today, it's nothing, but I had 1,000 visitors per day.[5]

Philippe describes his time in the United States as a period of intense discovery. He read blogs and websites such as *TheNotebook*. He blogged for *TPM Cafe* with Josh Marshall, whose work Philippe deeply respected. He created his own blog and for the first time was able to write stories that he could never have published in a newspaper. He discovered innovative formats, styles, and projects, which he describes as "new," "interesting," and "counter-intuitive."

When Philippe came back to Paris in 2006, he was disappointed by the limited capacity for change at the print publication he was working for. He explains how he felt at the time:

> Philippe: When I came back to Paris, I became the editor of the editorial and op-ed section. I wasn't happy. It was very traditional… I tried to put things online. I was thinking, "Now with the internet, we could publish more things." But it didn't really work out. I wasn't happy there, I was a bit bored, and I was already talking a lot with André and Eric. After the dot-com bubble, [the newspaper] had stopped investing money in the website. I remember, the editor-in-chief said, "we won't make any money here."

Philippe, André, Eric, and Adrien began to think about creating a news website together. They planned to invest their own savings and tried to convince friends and external investors to invest money in the project.

When defining their editorial project and business plan, the four journalists explicitly tried to replicate and improve on some of the innovations that they (mostly Philippe and Eric) had witnessed in the United States. They drew on the prestige of the American media and the novelty of the blogosphere to sell their project to French investors. *TheNotebook* was a particular source of inspiration. The four journalists admired the editorial line of the website, which they read every day. Philippe and Adrien also knew the journalists and editors of *TheNotebook*

[5] The translations into English are mine. I sometimes leave the original expression in French when some part of the meaning would be lost in translation.

(including Sam, the current editor-in-chief, who was at that point a section editor). Reproduced below is part of an email sent in 2006 by the four founders to a potential investor – also a friend of theirs – that introduced the project (see Appendix B, Table B-1, for the full email in French). By that time, the founders had not decided on the name of the website and called it "the X project."[6]

Email sent by Philippe to a potential investor
December 1st, 2006

Object: The X project roughly summarized
Dear [friend],
As I briefly mentioned on Thursday, we are thinking of launching a news site / online magazine. It would be exciting, original, and playful. It would be an (or "the"?) online reference for news, news analysis, and debates. It would rely on the participation of internet users.
There is nothing like this in France, in contrast to the United States (TheNotebook.com but also Huffington.com [*sic*], TPM Cafe)…
The idea is to break out from the current model based on emission and reception (breaking news, print articles posted online) and to create a community of "addicts" instead.
The website would encourage everything that print newspapers currently forbid: first person journalism, unrepentant subjectivity, a different angle ["*regard décalé"*], humor. It would respond to the strong demand for participation in the public debate.
[…]
Waiting to hear from you…
Best,
Philippe

Hence, *TheNotebook* was an explicit source of inspiration in the creation of *LaPlace*. Several editors at *LaPlace*, including Philippe, mention different items that they explicitly imitated from *TheNotebook*: the witty editorial style, the business model based on advertising revenue, and the development of specific formats (such as a column dedicated to the simple explanations of

[6] The rest of the dissertation uses boxes such as this one to reproduce emails, long interview extracts, as well as observation notes.

complicated phenomena, called "*Décryptage*" in French). For example, when I asked Eric, *LaPlace*'s current CEO, about the different sources of inspiration for the website, he explained:

> Eric: We had several different models for *LaPlace*… At the economic level, we wanted to create a free website; we didn't want to charge for access. We looked at the *Huffington Post*, *TheNotebook*, *Netzeitung*… At the journalistic level it was mostly *TheNotebook*… They have high quality content ["*haut-de-gamme*"], fairly classical, but without a strong participatory component. At the participatory level, we were mostly inspired by the blogosphere and its diversity, including our own blogs… We liked the participatory aspect, the interactions with the readers…

Between 2007 and 2009 a partnership was created between *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. Philippe negotiated the partnership with the journalists and editors of *TheNotebook*. Philippe even travelled to New York and video-taped *TheNotebook*'s newsroom and editorial meeting in order to show it to his team in Paris:

> Philippe: We had a partnership with *TheNotebook* for a while, because I knew the editor-in-chief, Sam. I even went to visit their newsroom! I have a video of it… I had a tiny video camera, I entered their newsroom during the editorial meeting. I wanted to show their newsroom to the staff here at *LaPlace*. At the beginning we had an agreement, we could translate some of their articles and put them on our website… and they could do the same. They never did it. We did it quite a lot. But… translating American articles for a French audience is not easy. They are too long… And it didn't work well in French, their pieces had to be completely re-written. One day, they told us that they were going to start a partnership with another website in France. My friend Sam was sorry, he said that he would have preferred to do it with us…

LaPlace published more than fifty articles from *TheNotebook* that were translated into French. They featured *TheNotebook*'s logo at the top and bottom of the webpage. The partnership ceased in 2009, when *TheNotebook* developed a partnership with another French website that was just starting (Website A, where I also conducted ethnographic fieldwork, see Appendix A). Philippe regretted the end of the partnership with *TheNotebook*, but he mentions that most of

TheNotebook's articles were in fact ill-adapted for a French audience and had to be entirely re-written.

Three years later, in 2012, most staffers and editors at *LaPlace* still emphasized strong feelings of affinity and admiration for *TheNotebook*. Journalists at *LaPlace* visited the website of *TheNotebook* and commented on it almost every day when I was doing fieldwork in the newsroom.

Experimental start-up or anti-hierarchical utopia?

After six months of discussions and negotiations, Philippe, André, Eric, and Adrien had gathered enough money to start the project. The founders provided most of the initial capital – one million euros – but relied from the beginning on several external investors who were labelled "Friends of *LaPlace*." André was the main investor, with 40% of the shares.

The four journalists contacted their friends and colleagues and told them about the project. Gabriella, who was the managing editor at *LaPlace* between 2007 and 2010, recalls the beginning of the adventure:

> Gabriella: In 2005, I was a freelance journalist in New York… And several of the founders were international correspondents there. Philippe and Eric were based in the United States and we were good friends. They started thinking about it when they were in New York… We kept talking about the future of the press, about online news. I knew that I would have to go back to France at some point and I realized that the only jobs were in online newsrooms. I was more interested in the experimental part of launching of a news website… The exploration, the search for a new model, the hesitations… I figured that it would be interesting.

In 2007, the four founders, Gabriella, and a handful of journalists who were interested in the project started meeting in the apartment – more accurately, the kitchen – of one of the founders, André. Most of the people who attended these meetings and worked at *LaPlace* during the first

years remember it as a time of innovation and experimentation. They all felt that they were changing journalism in a meaningful way. They established strong ties during these first few months. Most of them emphasize a blurring of boundaries between professional and private lives, work and leisure, colleagues and friends – a blurring that they associate with the "start-up" spirit. Jean (a former staffer) and Alexandre (former section-editor) emphasized similar feelings of excitement, freedom, and intense devotion to the editorial project:

> Jean: For a couple of months… we were inventing something new every single day. We didn't know how it was going to turn out. There were meetings, a lot of people were passing by… But we were only ten people in the team when we really started. It was great. We were creating a new media! We really wanted to be an independent website and we didn't want to follow the agenda of the other media. We wanted to mix videos, sound clips, everything. I knew how to use a camera… Two weeks later I was teaching André how to use a camera! André is really somebody ["*c'est quelqu'un*"] in journalism. It was great, I was a beginner in journalism but I could bring something specific to all these very skilled people. […] We had no weekends, nothing was planned, there was no morning meeting, no one knew who was working on what… We were only eight, underpaid, working all the time, 24/7.

> Alexandre: The beginning was very exciting… I was working with people whom I had admired for a long time… I had been reading Philippe's articles for years, I loved what he was doing, I really admired his work. It was exciting… A week before launching the website, I asked my cousin Didier to join us. At the beginning it was very artisanal. We were working in André's kitchen, we were only a handful. Every day, we were maybe seven or eight… and a total of maybe fifteen…

Most of the staffers and editors who worked for *LaPlace* during the first years reported similar stories. They were experimenting with formats and angles, playing with different technologies (written articles, as well as sound clips, videos, and photos taken by the journalists themselves) and innovative writing styles (Dagiral and Parasie 2010b). They were developing what they thought was a new way of interacting with their community of readers, breaking the traditional unidirectional flow of information between journalists and their audience (Boczkowski 2005).

They were also working long hours, in an unstructured way (no editorial meeting, no coordination among journalists, little or no hierarchy in the team), for very little or no money. Jean, who now works at a prestigious Parisian magazine, describes how little money he received during his four years as a staffer at *LaPlace*:

> Jean: André is a dreamer… which is a good thing, overall [*laughs*]! He told me that they would hire me at the same wage than what I was making at *L'Equipe*. It never happened… I didn't mind not being paid at the beginning. André and Philippe told me, "We're just starting, but we'll figure something out!" At the end of May, Eric hands me a check and says, "This is half of your wage." There was 500 euros! I laughed and said: "Is this half of half of the wage? I would like to stay but this is not going to work." They said "Ok, how much do you want?" "If I don't spend anything, I can live with 1,200 euros". They agreed. An hour later, Laurent came back and said 1,300. That was it. Later I got 1,500. When I left I was making 1,700 euros. I stayed four years…

After working without pay for several months, Jean received a minimal wage of 1,300 euros and later reached a maximum of 1,700 euros per month. As a point of comparison, the minimum monthly wage in France in 2007 was 1,280 euros (INSEE 2014) and the median monthly wage of French journalists in 2008 was 3,133 euros per month.[7]

In spite of the low pay, most of the staffers stayed because of the strong personal connections that existed with the founders and the other journalists. There was a variety of social ties within the team: family ties (the main computer programmer was a cousin of one of the staffers), friendship and romantic ties, but also relations of admiration and even adulation, according to Gabriella who emphasizes that the founders were like "gurus" and that the staff behaved like a "fan club:"

> Gabriella: The first employees came to *LaPlace* and worked for free for a while because they were fans of Philippe and André. The team is almost like a fan-club, you know. And it's really because they were fans and because they saw the founders as gurus that they could work 70 hours per week… Without them it would never have worked! If we had

[7] See Chapter 2. Questions of compensation will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

> had only standard employees asking for meal vouchers ["*ticket-restaurants"*]… It would never have worked! It was a mix of a start-up and a family…

This experimental atmosphere was largely due to the lack of financial means, the small team, and the new media used – what the staffers often call the "start-up" aspect of the enterprise. Yet the left-leaning ideology of the founders also played an important role in the process. In addition to renovating journalism, the founders wanted to transform the social organization of the newsroom, following their post-May 1968 convictions. André, the chairman, had been a Maoist in his youth and retained some of the anti-hierarchical ideology of this period (he certainly made many jokes about it during my days of observation). Philippe, the editor-in-chief, also acknowledges how important the counter-culture of the 1970s was in his trajectory:

> Philippe: I was very influenced by the episode of the free radios *["radios libres," i.e. pirate radios that were created in the 1970s to subvert the French state's monopoly on radio networks*]. It's something that I've been trying to recreate since… There was so much freedom! It was a new media, we could have the style we wanted, we could invite the audience to participate… I belong to the generation of the orphans of May '68. I was born in '62… When I was a teenager, the same spirit was still around, but I hadn't been part of the movement. With the free radios, we had the same spirit of counter-culture, we cared about freedom and we were trying to experiment. That's more or less my matrix.

Hence, *LaPlace* was characterized by an experimental, counter-cultural, and left-leaning line, both at the editorial and organizational levels, during the early years. These ideals led the founders to develop a politically engaged editorial line for the website, as well as draw on the daily participation of internet users.

LaPlace's editorial line: left-leaning and participatory

LaPlace's own editorial line developed in its early years around two central pillars, a left-leaning stance and a participatory approach.

In accord with its liberal and left-leaning orientation, the website became well known for several scoops implicating the then president of France, the conservative Nicolas Sarkozy. Whereas *TheNotebook* is also positioned on the liberal side of the political spectrum, *LaPlace* was much more politically engaged from the start and published highly critical coverage of the French conservative party ("Union pour un Mouvement Populaire" or UMP).

LaPlace's participatory approach was described by its managers from the start by means of a concept of "information with several voices": "the journalists, the experts, and the internet users." According to the website's FAQ page, "*LaPlace* relies on the collaborative work of three voices: the journalistic staff, which consists of experienced journalists and young reporters (…); a circle of specialists, experts, and eyewitnesses ("*témoins*") who shed light on the news; and internet users themselves, who participate in the life of *LaPlace* with their comments but also with their articles, links, photos, and videos." The name of the website stems from this participatory line: "we wanted a name that was a synonym of circulation, encounters, life, and café terraces." Editors describe blogs and "testimonies" (first-person pieces written by internet users) as an important part of the editorial project.[8] As of September 2012, 23% of the articles ever published on the homepage of the website had been written by internet users.[9] *LaPlace* currently hosts 76 blogs.

Yet the experimental euphoria of the early years did not last forever. Marina, the managing editor who replaced Gabriella in 2010, and Jean, who left in 2010, concur in their description of how many things became problematic and contentious over time:

[8] See Appendix B, Table B-2, which reproduces *LaPlace*'s methodological and ethical guide for its journalists.
[9] See Chapter 7.

> Marina: After the first years of euphoria when they were working all the time, partying together all the time, thinking that they were the pioneers of the news, well… there was a normalizing process. A normalization of life, first, because people had gotten older, they had girlfriends, they wanted to buy an apartment, these kinds of things. But the working conditions weren't changing. There was a lot, a lot, a lot of work! And the editorial project was fuzzy. At the beginning they were inventing and having fun, but the other media started doing the same. So they were having doubts.
>
> Jean: It became an open war at the professional level. We were still friends, we were having drinks together, but the discussions were heated. I kept telling them, I wrote super long emails saying, "listen, the journalists are leaving," all of the mid-career journalists who were neither founders nor young journalists. And it was because there was no plan of development in the business. And crappy salaries! I kept telling them about it, that they should hire other journalists, because we were all very tired, out of breath, really. And then I left.

External causes also help to explain this transformation of the working atmosphere at *LaPlace*, in addition to people getting older and wanting to move on. The founders of *LaPlace* gradually experienced a greater pressure from their shareholders to grow and increase revenue. In short, they had to start acting like a normal business, exactly like *TheNotebook* in the mid-2000s. This will be the focus on the second half of this chapter.

3) *The first years of existence of* TheNotebook *and* LaPlace*: a comparison*

What are the main similarities and differences that emerge from the first years of existence of *TheNotebook* in the United States and *LaPlace* in France?

Similarities and convergence

Regarding similarities between the websites, several elements stand out. First, editors and staffers who participated in the early years of the two websites evoke the positive feelings they experienced when joining the "adventure." They admired the founders and were honored to work

with them, work was innovative and non-hierarchical, and journalists typically created strong friendship ties with other staffers. This collective effervescence resembles Collins' concept of "emotional energy," this "feeling of confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative in taking action" (Collins 2004: 49) that is usually highly valued and ritualized in social groups. Innovation is associated in this case with high emotional energy and strong social ties.

Second, journalists expressed a conscious belief that they were building the future of the news when they started working on the two projects. Journalists at *TheNotebook* did not know what it would look like; they only gradually realized the new options made possible by the internet. Yet they believed that what they were doing was important. Ten years later, *LaPlace*'s journalists were more reflexive in their analysis of their contribution to broader changes in journalism. In both cases, the journalists felt that the online magazine project went beyond their own individual interests.

Third, staffers recounted the disorganization that reigned in the two teams during the early years. *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* had weak hierarchical structures: roles were not clearly assigned and everyone was encouraged to innovate. As Jean says, "No one really knew who was working on what." This absence of hierarchy and the multiplication of lateral projects are essential components of what Stark labels the "heterarchical organization," which in his view is the ideal-typical organizational form of the dot-com sector (Stark 2009, Neff and Stark 2004, Neff 2012).

In addition to general similarities in the organization of the two websites, processes of convergence between the two magazines should also be taken into account, since *LaPlace*'s founders explicitly imitated *TheNotebook* when they conceived the project. First, they relied on a similar business model based on advertising revenue. Second, at the editorial level, multiple

mimetic processes took place: staffers at *LaPlace* were inspired by the casual, witty style of *TheNotebook*; they also replicated a specific format of articles invented by the U.S. website ("*Décryptage*"). Finally, a formal partnership allowed them to translate and publish articles from *TheNotebook* on their website between 2007 and 2009. As in other cases of transnational circulations among professional elites (Dezalay and Garth 2002, Fourcade 2010, Hauchecorne 2009), *LaPlace*'s founders drew on their prestigious experiences abroad and the symbolic capital associated with the American news media in order to negotiate and improve their relative position in the French field of online news.

Differences

Yet there are also important differences between the early years of the two projects. First, the financial and technological resources of the two magazines were starkly different. The capital invested in *TheNotebook* was much greater – thanks to TechCorp and later Newspaper Inc. – than for *LaPlace*, where the founders provided most of the initial capital. Based on the descriptions of the founders and staffers, technology appears to have been more of a challenge at *TheNotebook* than at *LaPlace*. At *TheNotebook*, communicating with computer programmers and building the website was a complicated issue, fraught with misunderstandings and technical limitations. At *LaPlace*, in contrast, things went more smoothly. This is probably due to the ten-year delay between the founding of two sites: it was easier to build a news website in 2007 than in 1997.[10]

A second essential difference regards the role of emotions and personal connections in the creation and daily functioning of the two news websites. Despite the positive feelings of

[10] This changed in recent years with the necessity for news websites to build new and expensive systems for mobile users.

"fun," experimentation, and autonomy that staffers experienced at *TheNotebook*, the magazine was from the start a relatively "normal" business: people were paid, the magazine was integrated into TechCorp's corporate structure, and staffers worked in well-appointed offices. In contrast, *LaPlace*'s staffers were unpaid or poorly paid for years at a time, they started meeting in one of the founders' kitchen, and the general atmosphere of the team was alternatively described as a "fan club" or a "sect" where the founders were "gurus."

Finally, the left-leaning political engagement of *LaPlace*'s journalists was stronger and more explicit from the start than at *TheNotebook*. The New York website was always considered as a liberal site but with a more diffuse political line.[11] In contrast, it was not a coincidence that *LaPlace* was created in 2007, when Nicolas Sarkozy became president: "new presidency, new media," argued Eric, *LaPlace*'s CEO, in a press interview (2012). *LaPlace*'s editors and journalists turned the website into a platform against the conservative party and especially against President Sarkozy. This positioning was due in part to the leftist political histories of the founders.

Taken together, these differences reflect the distinct national contexts in which these two entrepreneurial projects took place (discussed in Chapter 2): stronger corporate and market forces in the United States, with more professionalized staffers; and a more artisanal and politically-engaged project in France.

[11] *TheNotebook*'s political line is often described as "smart centrism," even though most of its journalists describe themselves as liberals. See Lee (2005) for an overview of the debate on the political opinions of journalists and their effects on media coverage in the United States.

II. Becoming a normal business: 2008-2012

This section turns to a second phase in the existence of both *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*: the "normal business" phase. During this period, the two organizations faced stronger pressures to become profitable in a market that had become highly competitive. In both cases, though for different reasons, the pressure intensified in 2008-2009. The two websites then developed similar strategies in order to increase their revenues. First, they posted more content on the website and increased the frequency of content updates. Second, they started paying more attention to traffic and its related techniques, including search engine optimization (SEO) and social media expertise (SME).

1) TheNotebook*: an "old new media" in a competitive landscape*

In the first section, we left *TheNotebook* in 2004, when TechCorp had just sold the magazine to Newspapers Inc. At that point, Newspapers Inc. owned several major publications, including a national daily newspaper and its website, a prestigious print magazine, as well as a highly profitable company unrelated to news production. Newspapers Inc. was publicly owned but relied on a hybrid system in which the historical owners kept a majority of shares.

Buying *TheNotebook* was a significant addition to Newspapers Inc.'s online presence. *TheNotebook* had just received a National Magazine Award for its online coverage. It employed around thirty staffers and received 5 million unique visitors per month (versus 4.5 million for the website of the main newspaper owned by Newspapers Inc.). The website had even been briefly profitable in 2003.

Yet several issues arose concomitantly in the years following the sale. First, the collapse of the dot-com bubble in 2000-2001 had cut the price of online advertising. Despite original estimates that online advertising would quickly recover, the rates were still stagnating in 2004-2005 (Marketing Charts 2012), making it harder to reach financial equilibrium with a business model based only on advertising revenues. Second, new websites with large amounts of capital, innovative technologies, and aggressive traffic maximization techniques were launched, most notably *Gawker* in 2003, *The Huffington Post* in 2005, *BuzzFeed* in 2006, and *Business Insider* in 2009. These new actors encroached on *TheNotebook*'s share of traffic and advertising.

The field was rapidly changing. Yet it was not clear who the actual competitors of the magazine were. Contrary to the early years of the website, when the main rivals were print magazines such as *The New Republic* or *The New Yorker*, competition had shifted online. When asked about it in 2012, Sam answered:

> Sam: Our main competitors are… *The Atlantic*, *Gawker* maybe… But not really. And then tons of other places, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, *Business Insider*… Everyone's a competitor. *The Huffington Post* is in a completely different business, they're doing something completely different, they're amazing… I'm sure that they have advertising that we would love to have, and they have readers that we would love to have… but we're not in the same set anymore. […] I'm not saying that everything they do is bad, but their basic business is this quick aggregation, quick recapitulation of the news, and that's not our business. Our business is analysis, understanding, it's something richer than that.

The editor-in-chief sends ambiguous message about *TheNotebook*'s competitors. Sam starts by mentioning several publications that are well known for their prestigious print editions: *The Atlantic*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*. He also mentions web-only publications such as *Gawker*, *Business Insider*, and *The Huffington Post*. But Sam seems particularly ambivalent about *The Huffington Post*: he praises their traffic and overall strategy ("they're amazing"), while

at the same time establishing boundaries ("we're not in the same set," "[we do] something richer") and explaining why *TheNotebook*'s editorial approach is different.

Jane, a former assistant editor who started working at *TheNotebook* in 2008, summarized the ambiguity of the situation:

> Jane: We would have these conversations were we would say, "OK, who are our competitors? Are we competing with *Gawker*, are we trying to compete with *The Huffington Post*?" And then the editors would go, "Oh no no no no no, we're not competing with *The Huffington Post* and *Gawker*, we're a different sort of magazine, that's not what we're trying to do." And then thirty seconds later, they would be talking about how great *The Huffington Post* traffic was… I mean, this would happen all the time! "No, no, we're not trying to compete with *Gawker*. But, by the way, *Gawker*'s traffic is very good, we have to worry about that, because advertisers only want to buy space if you're growing, they want to be associated with success." So there was this mixed message, "No we're not competing… But obviously we are competing!"

Jane provides a vivid description of the mixed messages sent by the editors and the management to the staff: "No we're not competing… But obviously we're competing." Jane also describes the growing pressure to attract more traffic that *TheNotebook* faced: "advertisers […] want to be associated with success." Editors were aware of the existence of a growth imperative in the sector.

TheNotebook's editors reacted to this new situation by transforming the daily routines of the publication. They developed two main strategies: increasing the amount of content posted online and becoming more conscious of techniques to increase traffic.[12]

[12] A third strategy consisted in creating independent sub-sites devoted to specific topics. This strategy was pioneered by the website *Gawker*. *TheNotebook* followed suit in 2007 and created two sub-sites, one devoted to economics topics and the other one to gender and sexuality. The sub-sites were closed in 2010 because they did not attract enough traffic.

Publishing more, publishing faster: advocates and critics

A first major change consisted in a dramatic increase of the amount of content posted online. When asked about his tenure as an editor-in-chief since 2008, Sam explained that it had been one of his priorities:

> Sam: There has been this expansion in what we do, just… publishing more, doing a lot more. If you look since 2008, we've probably tripled the amount we publish. […] We brought in some young people, some highly energetic new writers who are super productive, so we have our culture blog, three people do it, they're very dynamic, they write a ton. We've been very aggressive in partnerships, so we publish their articles for free or for very little money.

Sam, the editor-in-chief, openly explains how he tripled the amount of content posted on the website between 2008 and 2012, without spending more money, just by hiring more productive people and developing partnerships. Jane, the former editor, provides an illustration of this increased rhythm of publication as reflected in changes in the layout of the home page. In the mid-2000s, when she arrived, only five stories could fit on top of the home page. In late 2011, when she left, eleven stories were promoted on top of the home page:

> Jane: *TheNotebook* really accelerated the pace of publication. You can even see it in the way the site is designed. So when I started there was what they call a cover image, you know, a fairly large photograph, and that was the cover story. And underneath that they would have four stories. So on a given day there were really only five stories "promoted". And you would have the little parts on the sides that would have some kind of promotional aspect. Now, there are three rotating cover stories and eight rotating substories. That tells you a lot about the direction the magazine took. So yeah, there is just a lot, lot more published now than there used to be.

Taking a step back, why does Sam (and many other online editors) believe that publishing more content necessarily attracts more traffic? Though Sam is not explicit on this point, other editors have developed sophisticated analyses of the correlation between amount of content and traffic

growth. In March 2013, Alexis Madrigal, editor of *The Atlantic Online*, proposed the following explanation:

"A Day in the Life of a Web Editor, 2013"

Alexis Madrigal
Senior Editor at The Atlantic.com
(Madrigal 2013)

"Let me give you this hypothetical. You are a digital editor at a fine publication. You are in charge of writing some stuff, commissioning some stuff, editing some stuff. Maybe you have an official traffic goal, or (more likely), you want to be awesome, qualitatively and quantitatively. (…) What do you do? (…)

One, you gotta take a lot of shots. Hypothetically, let's say you devote an entire month to one single story, betting the house on it. In the very best circumstance, a viral hit heard round the world with a big traditional media push, you'd do maybe 800,000 uniques. And then you'd have to do the same thing the next month. In practice, no one can do this. Because you can't predict that viral hit. While the best stuff tends to do far, far better than average, it is not always the best stuff that hits virally. (…) So, you need to post frequently to make luck more likely to strike you.

Second, you want to become a node. And to become a node, you need to do things that inculcate trust from your readers, and you need to keep doing that over and over. In the digital world, we build the distribution networks day by day, and if you don't feed them, they shrink. So again, you need some basic level of posts.

Third, you need to do great stuff. But hell, you're posting all the time! How do you do great stuff? You find ways to optimize between speed and quality. Everyone has their own coping strategies. And it's always gonna be a tradeoff."

In this blog post, Alexis Madrigal provides two explanations for the positive correlation between the amount of content posted online and traffic growth. First, publishing many articles multiplies the chances of producing "viral hits" (i.e. articles that are widely shared on social media and receive a large number of visits). Since it is impossible to predict which articles will go viral at any given moment, editors maximize their chances by posting as many articles as possible.

Second, editors argue that they have to update their homepage constantly in order to keep their readers "hooked" to the website and its Twitter and Facebook pages. This is what Madrigal refers to as becoming an online "node" by "inculcating trust [in] the readers." Web editors believe that internet users will move to other websites if they do not get enough daily content from their website.

Yet how does one multiply the amount of content published on the website without spending more money? In the quote cited earlier, Sam described the two strategies that he implemented at *TheNotebook*.

First, *TheNotebook* developed several partnerships. Partnerships are agreements with publications or non-profit organizations that share a certain amount of content with the news website for free. The most visible and durable collaborations initiated by *TheNotebook* include a partnership with a non-profit foundation and a state university; a partnership with a news agency; and a partnership with a well-known political figure who also hosted a show on television. The potentially problematic issue with partnerships is that *TheNotebook* then features content that is not primarily designed for the magazine and is sometimes at odds with the editorial line and writing style of the publication.

Sam mentions a second option: hiring staffers and columnists who write many short blog posts. In 2011, *TheNotebook* pursued this line of attack by firing three of its most famous staff journalists, who had been there from the start. It replaced them with younger bloggers who were less expensive and published more frequently. Noah, a former editor, commented on *TheNotebook*'s decision to fire the famous staff writers:

> Noah: The layoffs took place during the fall of 2011… They fired the people who were most expensive and least efficient. I mean, "least efficient"... The people who were the

> most expensive and the least productive. When you have to cut back and you don't have as many programmers as you want, and there are people on the staff who are making six-figure salaries and writing once a week… You could hire two or three people who are young and can produce 5 to 10 pieces of content a week.

Indeed, *TheNotebook* hired "highly energetic new writers who are super productive," according to the editor-in-chief. Among them is Martin, a blogger who specializes in economic topics, who was hired in 2011. His daily rhythm scared many of the other writers, who felt less productive, such as Sean, a former staffer who now freelances for *TheNotebook*:

> Sean: Martin… He writes thirty stories a day! That's barely an exaggeration. I could never do that, I don't have that in me… I wake up and he's already written three blog posts, written seven tweets… I'm just drinking my coffee! He's like a robot (*laughs*)! I mean, he wrote a blog post on his wedding day… not even about his wedding, it was about the economic environment… On his wedding day! A) it's crazy, B) I don't want to be like that!

Thus, *TheNotebook* apparently found ways to publish more high-quality content without spending more money. Yet many writers and editors emphasize that this strategy came at a cost. Staffers argue that this acceleration in the rhythm of publication went hand-in-hand with more superficial editing, as well as a decline in the length and overall quality of the articles.

> Jane: We had more blog posts, in contrast to essays… faster editing… The idea is that what we considered to be an article or an essay was a little bit more in-depth, longer, maybe had some reporting, and had to advance some kind of argument, or some kind of take. And a blog post was just like "this happened. Here is a video." Also, when I first got there, it used to be that two copy editors would read anything that went on the site. And then they changed that and it was only one copy editor. And you could really tell the difference, there were far more grammatical errors and infelicities on the site…

> Noah: During my time there they even cut copy-editing. Everything got two reads from the copy-desk, now everything gets one read, so the magazine is ridden with typos. There was an understanding as time went on that… no one cares if there are typos in the magazine. And there was also an understanding that with less curation you produce more content… This is certainly true across media, but at *TheNotebook* there was a shift while I was there. […] They've done away with any distinction between blog posts and articles

> on the homepage so people don't know when they click on something whether it's going to be someone sending out for two or three paragraphs or a researched article…

Senior journalists were even more vocal in their critique of the changes in the editorial line of *TheNotebook*. Former editors and writers Esther and Aaron expressed their disappointment about the current state of the website:

> Esther: I feel that *TheNotebook* risks, if it hasn't already, be tipping over to the… you know, chase for clicks over quality… It's still better than the *Huffington Post*, in my opinion… But at the time we were obsessed with generating original content. And now I feel that there are many more partnerships, appropriations, if not outright theft of material. […] And websites rely a great deal on young, unknown writers. There is a two-tier structure, with eminent bloggers and columnists on the right hand, and then you have these kids no one's ever heard of posting these 500 words so-called articles every five minutes, which are in my opinion really bad, unreadable. But here is something new up there every half an hour, and it's all written by these kids.

> Aaron: I think there've been changes over the years. It became harder for the magazine to compete… The idea of being a magazine where you had your regular political columnists, your foreign affairs columnist… It's much less visible and it's more like a big bazaar where you just click on it and if you don't like it you move on… They have to feed the machine […] *TheNotebook* is a real survivor… But it's not clear to me that *TheNotebook* will necessarily continue. I think that they've got good people, it's still one of the most prominent name brands among political journalists… but it lost its distinctive place. It's kind of worrisome.

Both Esther and Aaron argue that *TheNotebook* lost its distinctive editorial line and produces fewer articles with original content because of its "chase for clicks." While Esther associates partnerships with "outright theft" of material and worries about young bloggers writing "so-called articles," Aaron describes the current website as a "big bazaar" where quality varies widely because the journalists who are "feeding the machine" do not have enough time to write original articles.

Of course, former employees are more likely to be critical of the evolution of an organization after their departure. Yet current writers and editors also point out the dark side of

publishing more content while the number of writers remains stable. Benjamin, the current managing editor, also worries:

> Benjamin: If *TheNotebook* was only going in the direction of publishing more, publishing shorter, publishing more quickly… that would trouble me a little bit, because I don't want *TheNotebook* to become the *Huffington Post*, I don't want to just be reacting to the news. Traditionally *TheNotebook* has thought of itself as a magazine, not as a news site exactly, we like to bring perspective and point of view and hopefully surprising argument to the news… Obviously it's harder to do that if you're publishing more and publishing more quickly… with the same number of people [*laughs*]. We have expanded our staff a little bit but not in proportion to the number of stuff we're publishing.

"Publishing more, publisher shorter, publishing more quickly": Benjamin expresses his anxiety about the current evolutions of the *TheNotebook*, which might run the risk of becoming more similar to *The Huffington Post*.

An increased attention to traffic and its related technologies

In addition to producing more content, *TheNotebook* adapted to its competitors by investing heavily in two traffic-related techniques: search engine optimization (SEO, or the art of appearing on top of the results provided by Google and other search engines for a given query) (Ziewitz 2012) and social media expertise (SME or "community management," that is, attracting readers from Facebook and Twitter and developing loyalty on social media sites).

Regarding search engine optimization, the company hired a SEO specialist, Moira, a former employee of *The Huffington Post*, with the task of increasing the site's traffic. Several senior editors, including Sam and Benjamin, mentioned that Moira was their "data guru." In addition to working with the developers in order to improve the overall structure of the website and its visibility on search engines, Moira also organizes regular training sessions for *TheNotebook*'s staffers and contributors and teaches them the best techniques to get a better

ranking on search engines. Such techniques are now routinely used in the newsroom, as shown by the observation note below.

Observation
TheNotebook
October 17, 2012

Mary is a copy editor who has been working at *TheNotebook* for two years. I am sitting at her desk while she edits an article on Afghanistan.

On the right side of her computer, a sheet of paper is scotch-taped that says:

The 7 secrets of a SEO:
1. Think like a googler
2. Go after terms you can win
3. Word order matters
4. Get it fast, get it first, get it right
5. The ":" and the "?" are your friends
6. Use CAPLOCKS on media
7. Hyperlink keywords

The 6 SEO No-No's
1. Putting *TheNotebook* in the SEO line
2. Author's name in SEO line
3. Wordiness before key words
4. Don't be clever, be obvious
5. Only having one paragraph
6. Not considering SEO when you write the SEO line

I ask Mary about these rules, and she answers that it comes from her latest training session in SEO with Moira a couple of weeks before. She then finishes editing the op-ed on Afghanistan and says: "Now I'm adding some key words, "Obama," "Romney," "debate," to capitalize on traffic, since they talked about it yesterday." [*The observation took place the day after a presidential debate*]

This short document scotch-taped on Mary's computer indicates how deeply engraved in daily practices the search for traffic is. The rules are both cognitive ("think like a googler," "don't be clever, be obvious"), temporal ("Get it fast, get it first, get it right"), and practical ("The ":" and the "?" are your friends"). Above everything else, these rules should never be forgotten because

"not considering SEO when you write the SEO line" (i.e., the terms that will appear in the article's URL) is a "no-no."

These SEO routines differ starkly from the earlier period of *TheNotebook*, in the 1990s, when headlines were much more about the "artistry" of the editor than about getting high rankings in search engines, as Esther (the culture editor from the early years) recalls:

> Esther: At the beginning… We were not maximizing for search engines. I don't know when that came in, but definitely later. I'm realizing that I'm a dinosaur here. The article itself would have one title and that's where my artistry would come in. I love clever titles! It wasn't designed to maximize the search engines.

Contrary to what Esther implies, the "artistry" of writing good headlines has not completely disappeared; it has simply changed. Any given article published on *TheNotebook* has multiple headlines. The SEO headline, which is straightforward and "obvious" rather than "clever," only appears in the URL (the web address as indexed by the search engines) of the article. Another headline appears on the homepage of the website and is usually designed to attract the attention of the reader. A third type of headline appears on Twitter and Facebook.

Social media sites (mostly Facebook and to a lesser extent Twitter and Instagram) have indeed become a central source of traffic for *TheNotebook* over the last five years. Facebook, which was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, now attracts 1.23 billion active users per month (Rushe 2014). Twitter, which was created in 2006, attracts 241 million active users per month.[13] Instagram, founded in 2010, claims 200 million monthly active users.[14]

In order to tap into these new sources of traffic, news websites created pages on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. A new job appeared with the position of Social Media Editor (SME),

[13] https://about.twitter.com/company
[14] http://instagram.com/press/#

also sometimes called "community manager." *TheNotebook*'s SME is in charge of managing and optimizing the website's content on Facebook, Twitter, and to a lesser extent Instagram and Google Plus. According to Sam, the editor-in-chief, *TheNotebook*'s presence on social media is now a "great success."

Observation
TheNotebook
October 18, 2012

I am sitting with Josh, the Social Media Editor of *TheNotebook*. Josh explains that he "did a bit of everything" at *TheNotebook*: he started as an editorial assistant and did some writing, before being placed in charge of social media when it became a "big thing."

Josh is currently posting an article in *TheNotebook*'s Twitter feed. The article is about Mitt Romney's remark during the presidential debate on "binders full of women." I am surprised, because I noticed that this specific article had already been posted on *TheNotebook*'s Twitter account the night before:
AC: So you posted it last night on Twitter and now you're reposting it?
Josh: Yes, with a slightly different wording.
AC: Do you often do that?
Josh: Yes, two times, three times for each article. Depending on the time of the day, you get different categories of readers… and it helps if the headline is not exactly the same. It's the same thing on Facebook.
AC: What is most important, Facebook or Twitter?
Josh: In terms of traffic, Facebook is twice as important… but we have way more control on Twitter. On Facebook, traffic comes from organic sharing, not from our page. Also, on Facebook you can only post once per hour, even less, so you have to wait… It's because of their algorithm; it doesn't work as well when you post things too often. Whereas Twitter, you can post it as often as you want. I always change the headlines for Facebook and Twitter.

Josh then starts working on another article about a funny advertising campaign. The article was published the day before on *TheNotebook*'s website with the following headline: "The Cleverest Ad You'll See Online." Josh changes it for Facebook and puts instead: "No hyperbole, this is the best campaign ad you'll see."
Josh laughs: "Yeah, the word "hyperbole" always works well on Facebook!"

Social media is now part of the daily routines of the newsroom. Yet it is important to note that *TheNotebook* had trouble adapting to the rise of social media. Many editors and writers were reluctant at first to use Twitter and Facebook, as Noah recalls:

> Noah: When I started, *TheNotebook* was still a new media company… Even though it had been around since 96, most people thought of *TheNotebook* as a new kid on the block. But by 2007-2008, they started to have the sense that *TheNotebook* was an old media… There were other companies starting up that were structured very differently and we were in our ways… I could see the older people at *TheNotebook* saying, "I think Twitter is ridiculous." I could see myself aging into that category… Someone would say, "*TheNotebook* has to get into social media" and I would feel resentful of social media and threatened by it. The guy who ran the magazine, when Twitter was coming out, I remember that he called his assistant into his office and asked her to show him how to use Twitter. That really bugged me! Here is that guy who made his career convincing investors that he knows the latest technology and yet he has his 24-year old assistant teach him how to use the simplest internet tool. It makes you wonder whether *TheNotebook*'s efforts to "leverage Twitter" were based on any valid intuition about the internet… or on a pathetic grabbiness.

Noah's harsh comments highlight an interesting aspect of *TheNotebook*'s evolution over time: its age (and the age of its managers) turned into a liability. Instead of being considered as a "new kid on the block," *TheNotebook* in 2008 looked like an "old media" with old-fashioned routines, a view widely echoed by technology and media critics.[15] It took intense effort on the part of *TheNotebook*'s editors and managers to understand and use social media. They first dismissed it as "ridiculous" before understanding that it was becoming an essential central source of traffic. Then they desperately tried to master these new technological tools, which Noah criticized as "pathetic grabbiness." Yet this "grabbiness" might be described instead as the institutional evolution that have enabled *TheNotebook* to survive for more than fifteen years.

[15] For example, in a 2010 article that was widely diffused, a media expert explained that *TheNotebook*'s "founding date [was] also its biggest liability." Sam later characterized this analysis as "wrong" and overall unfair.

2) LaPlace*, the crisis, and the sale to LeGroupeMag*

LaPlace faced similar challenges to those of *TheNotebook* after 2008. Financial pressures increased in 2008-2009, eventually leading the four founders to sell the website to a larger media company called LeGroupeMag. Before and after the sale, *LaPlace*'s editors relied on the same strategies as *TheNotebook* to increase traffic. They also faced similar criticisms.

Financial difficulties and the sale to LeGroupeMag

Between 2008 and 2011, *LaPlace* experienced growing financial difficulties. In the spring of 2008, *LaPlace* raised capital from new investors, who brought 1.1 million euros in order to develop and expand the website. The four founders kept the majority of the shares (51%). The new investors soon began to ask when the website would stop losing money and issued a threat: if the website was not able to make a profit soon, they would have to fire several employees, which the founders refused to do. In parallel, the market for online news was becoming more competitive. Other news websites had been created that were successful, such as *Mediapart.fr* in 2008, which became well-known for its scoops incriminating Nicolas Sarkozy, *Website A* (anonymized) in 2009, with its focus on opinions and culture, *Owni* in 2009 with its emphasis on new media and digital innovations, *Atlantico* in 2011 (directly inspired from the U.S.-based *Politico*), and the French version of *The Huffington Post*, which was created in early 2012. *LaPlace*'s monthly traffic and advertising revenues were threatened by the entry of these competitors.

The founders tried several different strategies to mitigate these problems, all of which took a toll on the time and energy of the staff. First, like *TheNotebook*, *LaPlace* launched several

sub-sites, including a sub-site on the economy. The sub-site never attracted enough traffic and advertising to be sustainable and closed after a year and a half. Second, *LaPlace* created a printed monthly magazine, which demanded extra work from the staffers who were already busy writing for the website. The third and most durable initiative was to sell training programs to companies who wanted to train their employees in web journalism: *LaPlace*'s journalists and editors took turns teaching online search techniques and web writing. Several editors and staffers describe the stress and tension that dominated these years:

> Philippe (editor-in-chief): We were very anxious about money. We were really worried that six months later we wouldn't be there anymore… In 2007 the economy was good in France, the ads were working well. Then there was a crisis in 2008, the downturn last year [in 2011]… It was hard… We started the training seminars because the shareholders were worried and were asking us to fire our staff. We said no. We said that we were going to find something else, we started the training programs, and now it represents 25% of our revenue.
>
> Marina (managing editor): The founders were having a lot of trouble… They were worried, they were looking for money everywhere, the shareholders were causing trouble, the training programs had just started… They were all very tired and doubtful. We were starting the [*printed*] monthly, which was a great project but it was increasing the workload and people were frustrated.
>
> Jean (former staff writer): My feeling is… that it was great at the beginning, but that when we started dealing with a lot of money it became problematic. We made tons of mistakes. We had no money to develop… and the competitors were developing. When you don't develop you die…
>
> Sarah (staff writer): I was in charge of launching [a subsite]. It was exciting at first… but I got exhausted pretty quickly. It was the beginning of the crisis, I was writing a lot, editing a lot, the bosses weren't giving me any feedback… Three months later I was really depressed, so I talked to the bosses and told them that it couldn't go on like that. They realized that it was too heavy…

The editors and staffers describe the years 2009-2011 as a difficult period. Between the task of producing the website, the printed magazine, the sub-sites, and beginning the training programs, the staff was exhausted. The founders were never in the newsroom: they were spending most of

their time looking for additional capital instead of supervising the team. The management and the staff were anxious, tired, and pessimistic about the future.

In the face of continuing financial difficulties, the founders finally decided to sell the website to LeGroupeMag in December 2011. LeGroupeMag was then a mid-sized media company which owned a major political magazine and two specialized magazines. It had been created in the 1960s by a charismatic, left-leaning investor who, after making his fortune in another business, devoted himself to his media company, which he ran like a non-profit foundation. LeGroupeMag already owned shares in *LaPlace*. LeGroupeMag's chairman admired *LaPlace*'s editorial project and proposed to buy the website for about 7 million euros. The founders considered this to be a generous offer.

How was the sale received among *LaPlace*'s journalists? The staff had mixed feelings about the transaction. The sale meant more money: every journalist was given a 10% salary raise and LeGroupeMag promised new hires and increased technological means while reassuring the journalists about the continuing editorial independence of the publication. The sale also meant less anxiety and more stability for the upcoming years.

Yet the journalists also resented the sale, for several reasons. First, they disagreed with the ways that the negotiations with LeGroupMag had been conducted. The founders kept the negotiations secret until the last possible moment (they argued that they had sworn to secrecy about the sale) and the journalists learned about it a day before the public announcement. The journalists felt that, by not consulting the staff, the founders had disrespected their employees' long-term involvement in *LaPlace*'s project. Staffers underlined the significant sacrifices they had tolerated during the website's early years in order to secure the survival of this independent publication. They felt betrayed by the founders' decision to sell, as well as by the profit that the

founders realized in the financial operation. *LaPlace*'s journalists also resented the 10% raise, which they viewed as inadequate in comparison to their investment in the editorial project. Sarah, a staffer who had been at *LaPlace* for a long time, explained how she felt about the sale a couple of weeks after it was made public:

> Sarah: The main change is that we're going to have more money. LeGroupeMag arrived and said "We are going to raise the wages by 10%." The journalists wanted more, but this is over now. We also fought for other things, small things but it matters… We want the company to pay for our phone bills. We were also talking about trash cans [*laughs*]… People are complaining that it's dirty. Now that we have more money, maybe the cleaning company could come twice a week instead of once a week… I hope that, with the sale, the bosses will be able to spend more time in the newsroom. Because last year… André was spending most of his time looking for money and Philippe was always away… I hope that they'll have more time to talk about our articles […]. The bosses don't really care about money, which is kind of paradoxical given that they just cashed in a big bag of money. André is not going to buy ten expensive suits and drive a fancy convertible… It's not his style. But still, I don't forget that he got a million euros and that I participated… a lot… in the valorization of this business and that I didn't get a bonus or anything.

Sarah is ambivalent about the sale. On the one hand, the promise of becoming a "normal business" appealed to the staff: the journalists would finally have their phone bills paid for by LeGroupMag (they paid the bills themselves previously), the workplace would be cleaner, the staffers would receive higher wages, and the editors would be more present. All these were positive changes. On the other hand, Sarah notes that she "participated… a lot… in the valorization of the business" and did not receive any "special" money – for instance a bonus – for it. Gabriella, the former managing editor, concurs in her analysis of the sale:

> Gabriella: From the start there was an ambiguity at *LaPlace*… It's due in part to the personalities of the founders, they don't like conflict, but it was also because of the lack of financial means… The discourse was, "We're a participatory website, collaborative… This website is your website." When in fact, no, it's a private business, with founders who own shares! A business which became more valuable as the capital increased… There was this emotional blackmail about the survival of the company: "We could never

> have made it without you…" Well… When at the end you sell the company… In fact we all created, the unpaid bloggers created additional value for the founders' shares. That's it!

As Gabriella explains, the staffers, freelancers, and bloggers felt that they had been somewhat cheated by the founders. They understood their work for *LaPlace* as a pro-bono participation in an experimental, collaborative "adventure." They did not mind being underpaid because they were participating in an important editorial and political project. But in fact *LaPlace* was a for-profit business from the start; the founders made a significant profit with the sale to LeGroupeMag. With their non-stop work and their emotional involvement in the adventure, the staffers and the (unpaid) bloggers increased the value of a commercial asset. After the sale was made public, they all felt cheated; they complained that their contribution to the website was not adequately compensated by the 10% salary increase proposed by LeGroupeMag. *LaPlace*'s "ambiguity" had been unveiled by the sale.

Like Newspaper Inc.'s purchase of *TheNotebook*, LeGroupeMag had high expectations about *LaPlace,* which was expected to help them dramatically increase web traffic and online advertising revenue. After several months of relative peace, LeGroupeMap started asking for more traffic growth. The pressure to attract more readers started to be felt again by the staff and the management alike. Thus, they developed several techniques to increase traffic (some of which were already present before the sale but to a lesser extent). These strategies were highly similar to the ones developed by *TheNotebook*.

Publishing more and faster

First, similar to the process at *TheNotebook*, *LaPlace* developed partnerships with other organizations. *LaPlace*'s most durable partnerships included foreign magazines with

francophone content, hip artistic magazines, as well as several collaborations with journalism schools around the world. A second strategy was to increase the number of (unpaid) bloggers and encourage them to publish regularly. Bloggers were always part of the participatory project of *LaPlace*, even though the lack of payment became more problematic after the sale to LeGroupeMag.[16]

A third essential initiative was to increase the rhythm and amount of content published by staffers on the website. Staff journalists were encouraged to cover breaking news in real-time with short, witty articles. *LaPlace*'s staff resented this change and felt that the multiplication of short posts did not leave them enough time to focus on the long-form investigative articles that had made the success of the website in earlier years.

> Alexandre: It's something that I kept repeating from the start: we [*at LaPlace*] have to be independent from the agenda and rhythm of the other media [*l'agenda médiatique*]. I keep saying that we should spend more time on things, explore things that are not obvious, these kinds of things. I think that we're becoming more and more dependent on the rhythm of the other media and I find it sad. […] The problem is… that nowadays I end up having to write a lot of short articles on a daily basis… and it cuts into my longer investigations and my investigative articles.
>
> Jean: I thought that we were covering breaking news too much, because we wanted a larger audience. When you do a long investigation, you take two weeks to do it; [yet] it will be less read than the morning sentence that you just copy, paste, and comment. I know that there is an equilibrium to reach… You need to have an audience. But it's a bad idea to cover breaking news.
>
> Gabriella: News websites are becoming more and more like web portals… News websites tell the reader, "we're going to show you everything that's new, and you'll decide whether it's real news or not." […] Online news… It's true that it creates burnouts: it never stops. There is an ambivalence: you say that you don't want to cover everything… but you end up giving in to the temptation to do everything. That's what happened at *LaPlace*.

[16] See Chapter 5 in this manuscript.

Similar to what we saw at *TheNotebook*, *LaPlace*'s staffers argued that the new emphasis on faster, shorter articles contributed to a dilution of the editorial line of the website.

The pressure to post more content on the website increased after the sale to LeGroupeMag. The conflict between the editors and the staffers reached a peak in December 2012, when the editors sent an email to the staff entitled "the battle for the audience" ("*la bataille de l'audience*"), an episode to which I will return in the following chapter.

Traffic technologies

In addition to publishing more and faster, the editors and staffers at *LaPlace* began paying more attention to search engine optimization and social media expertise.

First, a new position was created: Gael, a senior editor, became *LaPlace*'s SEO specialist and SME/community manager. He trained the team to SEO techniques. In 2012, the two copy editors in charge of posting articles on *LaPlace*'s Content Management System (CMS) followed the same rules as the mantra of the copy editor at *TheNotebook* discussed above. During my days of observations at *LaPlace*, I sat with the two copy editors and observed the same routines as at *TheNotebook*: copy editors wrote different headlines for the homepage, the SEO line, the Facebook page, and the Twitter feed; they also carefully inserted key-words in order to increase the ranking of the articles on Google.

LaPlace also started relying heavily on social networks – mostly Facebook and to a lesser extent Twitter, which developed later in France compared to the United States[17] – to promote the magazine's articles.

[17] As of 2013, Facebook counted 26 million active monthly users in France, compared to 198 million in the United States. In 2014, Twitter had 4.5 million active monthly users in France, compared to 49 million in the United States (Tauzin 2014, Yarow 2013).

Gael and the two copy editors are in charge of posting articles on Twitter and Facebook using *LaPlace*'s accounts. They also answer comments and requests when necessary and track how much of *LaPlace*'s traffic comes from social media. Gael describes the diversification of traffic sources over time:

> Gael: The profiles of the readers are becoming more and more diverse. First, we have the internet users who read our articles on Facebook… It's a particular profile. They read our paper through their friends' links, or they "like" our page on Facebook, but they never go to the website directly… They're younger, 25 or 30 years old, whereas our average reader is more like 30-35 years old. But our returning readers, who are usually the ones who post comments all the time, every day or almost every day, well they hate Facebook because of its use of private data, because of its ideology… These readers are very important for our identity, they've been there from the start, but it's only 300-400 people whereas we're getting 80,000 people through Facebook… The numbers are just different. And then there are some readers, many of them actually, who go on the main page and maybe check out a couple of articles, but don't read the comments, not even the recommended comments, and they don't post anything.

Hence, editors at *LaPlace* are very conscious of the importance of social media for bringing traffic to the website. Overall, however, they were less involved in social media than *TheNotebook* at the same period. For example, it is only in the spring of 2013 – towards the end of my fieldwork – that *LaPlace*'s editors started reposting articles repeatedly on Twitter and Facebook and changing the headlines of the articles for the different social media sites. I had witnessed these practices at *TheNotebook* as early as the spring of 2012, twelve months before.

Conclusion

The parallel evolutions of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* are striking. The two websites started as experimental projects. In both cases, the small teams of the early years felt that they were reinventing the news. They innovated by trying new formats and writing styles. Their

organizational structures were not strongly hierarchical. *LaPlace* also explicitly imitated the editorial line and business model of *TheNotebook*, thus creating a built-in convergence between the two companies.

Over time, however, both *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* faced increasing pressure to become "normal businesses" and make a profit in a more competitive market. The editors developed similar strategies to stay afloat, such as publishing more content and paying more attention to traffic-related techniques. In both cases, staffers lamented this evolution and feared for the editorial identity of the websites.

In spite of these similarities, this chapter also documents the different styles of the two companies. Despite its conscious imitation of *TheNotebook*, *LaPlace* was more artisanal and politically engaged from the start. It relied on a stronger involvement of its core members, who worked non-stop and for very little money in order to secure the survival of the website. Given these tight emotional connections between the journalists and the founders, the sale of the website to a larger group, as well as the pressure to publish more, led to an open conflict between the management and the staff. In comparison, *TheNotebook* had been a "normal business" from the start: relationships between the journalist and the management were less personalized, less emotional, and less contentious.

Both *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* fixated on the tactic of publishing more content, faster. They became more aware of search engine optimization and social media websites. Yet how exactly did "traffic" become such a ubiquitous presence in the two newsrooms? The next chapter explores this question and compares the use and interpretation of internet metrics at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*.

CHAPTER IV

Counting Clicks:

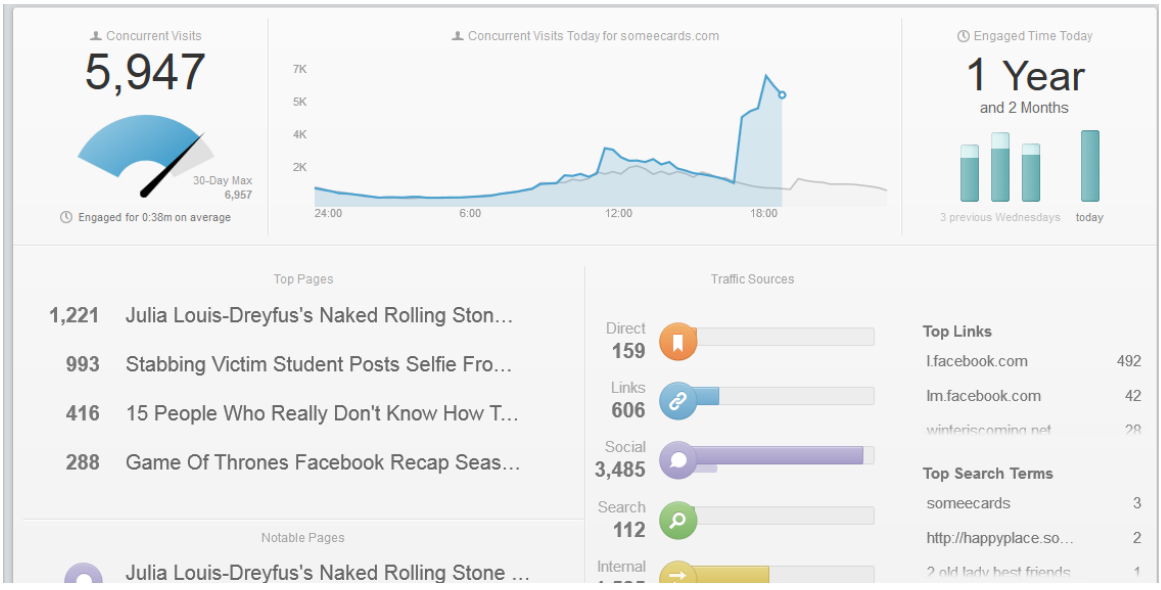
The Paradoxical Reception of Internet Metrics

at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*

I first encountered Chartbeat during an early ethnographic observation at *LaPlace* in January 2012. At the time, I was trying to obtain more information from the journalists about the sale of *LaPlace* to LeGroupeMag which had taken place a couple of weeks earlier. The journalists, in the middle of fraught negotiations with the editors and LeGroupeMag about a salary raise, were cautious. During their many cigarette breaks, they devised complex strategies to get what they wanted from "the bosses" ("*les chefs"*). During these negotiations, I was not invited to join them. Left to my own devices in a half-empty newsroom, I soon realized that the copy-editing table was a safe corner in the office: at least one of the two copy-editors was always there, correcting and publishing articles on the website. Copy-editors were in constant contact both with the top editors and the journalists. I was relieved to have found an unobtrusive way to observe the production of online news at the French website.

Chartbeat had come up in passing in several of my interviews, but until that point I had not focused on it apart from the flow of unfamiliar concepts that I absorbed during the first month of observation. Pronounced in French, the word sounded like "Shabit." From what I could glean when people mentioned it, I assumed that it was some kind of software program designed to publish content online (thus the "-bit"). It is only when I sat with the copy-editors in the semi-deserted newsroom that I first looked carefully at the software program (see Figure 1). The copy-editors kept Chartbeat open on one of their double computer screens, along with their Twitter deck, the Gmail chat program that they use to converse with other journalists, their Word documents with the "track changes" mode on, and the CMS (Content Management System) with which they published articles online.

Figure 1. Screenshot of Chartbeat[1]



[1] https://chartbeat.com/demo/# Chartbeat's official website also features a real-time demonstration of the software program.

Chartbeat is a mesmerizing program. It feels alive: numbers move constantly, accelerating and decelerating without warning. The position of the articles in the rankings changes rapidly, up and down, left and right, tracking the pieces that are "trending" and those that have not attracted the readers' interest. Articles with low numbers of readers seem to hide, out of shame, at the bottom of the page. Popular articles move up, and up again, until they reach the top of the charts. They fill the observer with a sense of joy and excitement: readers like the piece! Chartbeat also gives a sense of the large audience reading the website at any given moment. It lists the most prominent search terms and some of the tweets and comments that people write about the website's articles. The program represents the different bits and pieces of an ongoing, decentralized, and large-scale online dialogue. Every move in real-time of the speedometer-like counting device provokes strong emotional reactions, somewhere between thrill, excitement, sadness, and anxiety.

I quickly got used to the ubiquitous presence of Chartbeat at *LaPlace* and it lost its novelty for me. Nonetheless, some of the initial magic of this first encounter persisted. Several months after the end of my fieldwork, I still checked *LaPlace*'s Chartbeat numbers from time to time out of sheer curiosity, analyzing the success of different articles and imagining how the French journalists were making sense of it.[2] As an external observer who had never published anything online, I could already feel the power of Chartbeat. How would I react if I were a web journalist who actually wrote and published articles every day?[3]

This chapter delves into the subject of web metrics and their measurement at *TheNotebook* in New York and *LaPlace* in Paris. The two organizations started to use the same software programs – most prominently Chartbeat – at about the same time in order to gather more information about web traffic. Yet the uses and meanings assigned to web metrics differed

[2] *LaPlace*'s editors gave me the access codes to the program.
[3] The analytics program called Visual Revenue has the same visually mesmerizing quality as Chartbeat. See Appendix C for a screenshot.

widely between the two organizations. Drawing on 28 interviews at *TheNotebook* and 33 interviews at *LaPlace*, this chapter documents a puzzle involving a disjuncture between the organizational importance of web metrics and the interest professed by the journalists in these tools. *TheNotebook*'s editors make important editorial decisions based on Chartbeat, whereas editors at *LaPlace* have conflicted feelings about it. Yet, paradoxically, staff journalists at *TheNotebook* profess indifference regarding internet metrics, whereas staffers at *LaPlace* are obsessed with traffic numbers. This chapter and the following one will make sense of these different organizational arrangements and explore their ramifications in the daily routines of the two websites.

I. The bazaar of web metrics

Internet metrics, broadly defined, are all data that can be used in order to analyze and optimize web usage.[4] Some popular examples of web metrics include the number of page views, unique visitors, times the article is emailed, comments, and the average time spent by the readers on the webpage. Other metrics relate to the use of social media networks such as numbers of "likes," "tweets," "shares," and posts on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, Pinterest, and Instagram. Numerous companies offer analytics software that measures one or several web metrics; the most prominent of these are Nielsen NetRatings, comScore, Omniture, Google Analytics, Quantcast, Hitwise, Alexa, Xiti, Chartbeat, and Visual Revenue.

The data produced by these different metrics do not necessarily present coherent measurements of internet traffic. In fact, they often contradict each other. In their report for the Columbia Journalism School, Graves and Kelly analyze the "confusing world of internet metrics"

[4] I use the terms "web metrics" and "internet metrics" interchangeably.

and point out a surprising consequence of this incoherence: "What is by all accounts the most precisely measurable medium in history, in which every act of reading, watching or listening is a discrete, recorded event, is beset by a frightening tangle of incompatible standards for gauging traffic" (Graves and Kelly 2010: 6).

Take the example of *The Daily Beast*, the news and opinion website founded by Tina Brown. In October 2009, Nielsen estimated the site's audience at 1 million visitors, whereas comScore measured 2.2 million visitors. *The Daily Beast*'s own server data added yet another discrepancy, reporting 4 million visitors for the same period (Graves and Kelly 2010). Nor has accuracy improved radically in recent years. As an example, Nielsen and comScore respectively reported 58.8 million and 86 million monthly unique visitors for Yahoo! News in 2012 (Pew Research Center 2013). The difference between the two estimates is a non-negligible 27 million readers per month. This gap is due to the coexistence of different methods for measuring internet traffic.

1) Measurements and methods

The two main methods in order to calculate web metrics are called panel-based and census-based measurements (alternatively called user-based and server-based respectively).[5] Whereas panel-based measurements rely on the same methods used for older media such as radio and television, server-based methods are new.

[5] A third (and more recent) measurement method analyzes ISP (Internet Service Providers)-based data. For example, Quantcast, Hitwise, and Compete propose measurements based on traffic data from Verizon or Time Warner (see Graves and Kelly 2010: 15 for a presentation).

Panel-based data

Panel-based measurements will be familiar to sociologists, since they draw on statistical sampling. Companies such as Nielsen NetRatings and comScore recruit people to participate in their "panels." In the United States, Nielsen's panel consists of approximately 200,000 people.[6] In France, Mediametrie NetRatings (which is associated with Nielsen) recruits a panel of about 25,000 people.[7] Nielsen and comScore then install a metering software program on the panel members' home computers that tracks their activities click by click. The companies use weighting to adjust their samples to approximate the socio-demographic characteristics of the national population (Tewksbury 2003: 700).

Panel-based data present several obvious advantages. First, they provide detailed information about the socio-demographic characteristics of the users. News websites find this information very useful not only as a means to understand their audiences but also in order to sell advertising based on their audience's characteristics. Second, panel-based data facilitates comparisons between websites over time. It provides reliable information about a website's competitors and their respective evolutions over time.

Nonetheless, panel-based measurements also have limitations. First, it is impossible to distinguish between multiple people who are using the same computer. Second, and more importantly, panel measurements do not take into account what people do on computers other than their home computers – for example at school or in the workplace. Given that news websites' traffic typically peaks during the work day and subsides at night (Boczkowski 2010), panel-based measures tend to systematically underestimate news websites' numbers of unique

[6] http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/nielsen-solutions/nielsen-measurement/nielsen-online-measurement.html
[7] http://www.mediametrie.fr/internet/solutions/panel-mediametrie-netratings.php?id=8

visitors compared to other categories of websites that are more frequently visited at night, such as video-on-demand sites like Netflix.

Server-based data

A second measurement method draws on server-based data, also called census-based data because it captures each and every activity that takes place on a website's servers. When a reader visits a website for the first time, her computer is generally tracked by "cookies" linked to each website that recognize her each time she comes to the website. Cookies store data that can later be exploited to provide fine-grained information about the website's visitors (a cookie equals a unique visitor) for any given period. Companies and programs such as Google Analytics, Omniture, and Chartbeat provide web analytics based on server-based data.

One of the main advantages of server-based metrics is that they track the behavior of the readers in detail: how they came to the website, how they navigate through the different pages, time spent on each page, even their scrolling patterns on a single page. Yet server-based data also have limitations. For example, individuals who use several computers (one at home and one at their workplace) will be counted more than once. The same thing happens when people delete the cookies installed on their computers. Several users sharing the same computer will only be counted once. Finally, non-human visits by automated software programs called "bots" or "spiders" are also likely to be included in the count.

2) Web metrics from marketing to editorial departments

In addition to these different measurement methods, it is essential to distinguish between the marketing and editorial functions of web metrics in order to understand the radical novelty of programs such as Chartbeat.

Metrics in marketing departments

For most of the twentieth century, audience metrics have been an essential tool for the marketing departments of media companies. In the radio sector, Nielsen Audio (formerly known as Arbitron and before that the American Research Bureau) has been providing statistics about radio broadcasting audience for more than fifty years (Rossman 2012, Napoli 2011). In the television sector, Nielsen Ratings has been the dominant provider of audience measurements for several decades, which led several industry observers to criticize its monopolistic position (Napoli 2005). For print circulation figures, several providers coexist: the Alliance for Audited Media (formerly known as the Audit Bureau of Circulation), BPA Worldwide, Mediamark Research (GfK MRI), Simmons DataStream, and Scarborough Research. These different companies all provide data about the demographics and behavior of media consumers (Graves and Kelly 2010: 8, Napoli 2011).

Thus, it does not come as a surprise that Nielsen NetRatings became a major provider of online audience data for news websites' marketing departments. Marketing departments use online audience measurements in two main ways. First, they rely on web metrics in order to construct a data-informed portrait of the website's audience that they can then market to the companies who are interested in buying ad space on the website. For example, at *TheNotebook*

and *LaPlace*, sales representatives have a clear view that the websites' audiences are mostly male, urban, between 30 and 39 years old, and highly educated. They use a much more detailed version of this audience profile to attract advertisers. Second, marketing departments rely on web metrics to set the rate of their different online inventories. They can charge higher advertising rates for larger numbers of unique visitors; likewise, they can charge more for matching the target audience of the advertisers.

At present, news websites' marketing departments typically rely on a mix of panel-based and server-based data. They subscribe to panel-based data providers such as Nielsen NetRating, comScore, and Mediamétrie NetRating (in France) in order to know the number of monthly unique visitors and their socio-demographic characteristics. Marketing departments draw on server-based data such as QuantCast, Google Analytics, and Omniture in order to gather precise data about the behavior of the users on the website and assess the relative importance of social media traffic, which is highly valued by advertisers.

Metrics in editorial departments

Yet in terms of the production of the news, the most striking technological innovation among web metrics has been the development of analytics programs that are explicitly designed for editorial rather than marketing departments. These include Chartbeat, Visual Revenue, and recent real-time versions of Google Analytics and Omniture.

What kind of information do these different programs provide to editors and journalists? In this section I focus on Chartbeat, a software program created by a New York-based company founded in 2009. According to the company's website, Chartbeat is used in 78 countries and 80% of the largest publishers in the United States use the program. As of April 9, 2014, at 6pm, there

were more than 5.5 million readers active across all the sites tracked by Chartbeat and the company employed 67 people.[8]

The company's somewhat grandiloquent representation of their product, reproduced below, states their explicit mission to change editorial work.

Chartbeat
"What We Do"[9]

We are leaders of the real-time revolution.
We partner with doers – editors, writers, marketers, developers, those who create and build the content that users see and interact with online – to deliver the data they need, when they need it.
Our real-time information gives these front-line teams instantly understandable data on their users' emergent behavior – and the power to react to it.
It ends the command-and-control setup where higher-ups dictate tactical moves that the front-line should make.
Instead, it empowers the front-line to be autonomous. To take real-time action based on strategic guidelines. To take the right decisions, the right actions at the right time.

How we're different
[…] We're focused on unusual behavior happening across the social web and how that affects constantly changing content - the content that might not have existed yesterday, might not be looked at tomorrow but today is driving your site.
And to do that, we can't just rely on traffic or page views, like Google Analytics or the like does. Instead, we check in constantly (every few seconds) with your site's users to see where they are and what they're doing. Are they visiting a page you had totally forgotten about? Or reading your newest blog post? Are they writing comments or barely scrolling down the page?
This is the important stuff. Because this is the stuff you act upon. And when you can react to information in real time, you make a real difference. Reacting two days later or checking in against your quarterly goals spreadsheet at the end of the year doesn't get you anywhere.
Real-time data in the hands of those people who can do, who have the power to change and adapt right now.
That's the power of real time.
That's what changes businesses.
That's what leads industries.
That's revolutionary.

[8] This information was retrieved on the company's website on April 9, 2014: https://chartbeat.com/
[9] Retrieved on April 9, 2014, from https://chartbeat.com/company/

This statement is interesting in several respects. First, Chartbeat explicitly targets the "front-line" or the "doers": "editors, writers, marketers, developers, those who create and build the content that users see and interact with online." It is specifically designed for editorial departments instead of top executives.

Second, Chartbeat describes itself as the "leader of the real-time revolution" within editorial departments. Chartbeat provide data about the readers' behavior every few seconds. According to the company's online statement, having real-time data on the behavior of the readers is "revolutionary"[10]: it "empowers" editors and journalists who can make "autonomous" decisions and "take real-time action." The statement also explicitly envisions how Chartbeat empowers editors and writers at the expense of managers by drawing on a military metaphor: "It ends the command-and-control setup where higher-ups dictate tactical moves that the front-line should make."

According to one of Chartbeat's top executives, Bill, this software program is designed to accompany newsrooms through the digital revolution and help them adapt to their online environment. During the interview that I conducted with him, Bill explained:

> Bill: In the old world, when you published your article… that was the end of the job. Now it's only the mid-point! Journalists ask us: "how can I build traffic, what's the conversation, how can I promote my content?" We're trying to help them with these important questions. […] It's hard to predict the success of a story… but we know how to get to first base. We can't predict home-runs but we can help them.

What are the functionalities of Chartbeat? Figure 1 above and Figures C-2 to C-5 in Appendix C provide screenshots of Chartbeat's different pages. Chartbeat features a number of real-time statistics for each article published on the website: the number of visitors (the speedometer-like

[10] See also Figure C-1 in Appendix C for a telling visual representation of the "revolutionary" aspect of real-time metrics.

figure on the top left), changes in the number of visitors over time (positive or negative), number of "likes" on Facebook, "tweets" on Twitter, number of times the article is emailed (under the "social" tab). It also lists the sources of web traffic (if the visitors arrived at the site via another web page), the average time spent on the website, and information about the location of the readers (country and city). Finally, Chartbeat provides comparison with equivalent data from the previous week and month.

Other analytics programs provide different types of statistics for use by editors and journalists. For example, Visual Revenue, which was created in 2010, is a program specifically designed to manage home pages. It features A/B testing, meaning that editors can test in real-time the differential success of two different headlines and see which one attracts more readers (see Figure C-6 in Appendix C for a screenshot). Omniture, which was founded in 1996 and acquired in 2009 by Adobe, provides daily, weekly, and monthly statistics about section and author performances (see Figure C-7). Google Analytics, which was launched by Google in 2005, also allows editors and journalists to follow the evolution of traffic over time (see Figure C-8).

Thus, a variety of software programs currently coexist, all offering internet metrics to measure the audience for online news. Among these programs, Chartbeat differentiates itself by marketing detailed server-based data designed for editorial departments instead of marketing departments.

II. Editors' reception of internet metrics

After having introduced the main analytics software programs and their functionalities, I examine how they are used in in web newsrooms. *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* rely on similar

programs to measure internet traffic. Yet this does not mean that they interpret internet metrics in similar ways. This section focuses on the reception of metrics differs among the editors at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. At the former, trust in numbers is the order of the day. At the latter, the editors manifest conflict feelings towards traffic numbers.

1) TheNotebook*: trust in numbers*

TheNotebook currently relies on five different analytics programs. First, the marketing department started relying on analytics programs in the late 1990s: they used Omniture and comScore. The website began using Google Analytics as early as 2005, but it was only after Sam's promotion to editor-in-chief in 2008 that top editors started relying heavily on internet metrics. *TheNotebook* eventually licensed the Chartbeat software in 2011, after hiring a new director of technology who developed another in-house program. Sam states that careful attention to web metrics is one of his main accomplishments as an editor-in-chief:

> Sam: Anyone in my position would have done it, but now we have a new person who runs technology for us… So we're being much more conscious about data and using data. The first ten years that *TheNotebook* existed, we didn't really think very much about traffic in an explicit way, people were always very scared of it. So we really pushed on that. Now we get data from different places. There are four different major tools we use to measure traffic [*he shows me his computer screen and open several windows*]. There's Omniture, here. This is Chartbeat right here. These are the things I try to look at… We had a good day yesterday, and a good day today. Actually it's fine, we had a great day last week and this week. We also have comScore, which is something that advertisers follow… which I don't look at. And we have our tool, which is something that our people built.

Sam prides himself on being "more conscious about data and using data," which he understands as being a central part of his job as an editor-in-chief ("anyone in my position would have done it"). Sam contrast the early years of *TheNotebook*, when people were "scared" of traffic, to the

current period, which is much more data-oriented. The five different programs that are used at *TheNotebook* to gather information about traffic are Chartbeat, Omniture, comScore, Google Analytics, and an in-house program.

Internet metrics as an editorial tool

In *TheNotebook*'s editorial department, the measurement of internet traffic has become a complex exercise of balancing the metrics produced by different software programs. *TheNotebook*'s home page editor, Tom, explains the process:

> Tom: I use a lot of [*different programs*]! I use the big board on Chartbeat to get a sense of what's working well and how it's evolving. I use the main Chartbeat page to get extra info on the sources of traffic. We also have what we call our click-through rate tool that we developed in house. Then I have the overlay which is a mix of Chartbeat and our in-house program. And I use Omniture for the 24 hour cycle. I already have a lot of information.

Most editors consider internet metrics to be reliable, unproblematic "tools" that provide relevant "information" for making informed editorial decisions. An interaction with Sam illustrates this view:

> Sam: But the fact is… that what we see in our data is that the more we publish, the more readers we get.
> AC: That's interesting, where do you get this information from?
> Sam: From different places. Here, I'll just show you [*he opens the in-house software program that shows traffic trends over time*]. […] One of the things that we see here, and if you look here in particular… This is how much we publish. There is almost a direct link with traffic… There are some exceptions, I could explain why… The green line is the number of articles we publish. The red line is the number of blog posts…
> [*On the screen, the green line is stable, the red one is rising continuously over the past six months. A shaded area indicates the amount of traffic, which has also risen continuously over the past six months*]
> Sam: So we're trying to publish more. Because… More gets us more. All the evidence that we have from our own data suggest that the more we publish the more readers we get.

This passage echoes the findings reported in Chapter 3 about the pressure to publish more content in order to attract more traffic, as well as Alexis Madrigal's explanation of this editorial strategy.

Yet this interview extract is also indicative of Sam's trust in internet metrics. Sam starts by stating a correlation (more content correlates with more traffic) that he gathered from *TheNotebook*'s "data," which, in his own words, should be understood as a "fact" and a piece of "evidence." Sam makes editorial decisions based on this evidence, which is implied by the coordinating conjunction "so" in the following sentence: "So we're trying to publish more. Because… more gets us more." In the face of radical uncertainty about the determinants of online success, Sam makes decisions based on objective facts: traffic numbers.

Interestingly, Sam's attitude is analogous to the U.S. Army engineers who promoted quantitative calculations of cost-benefit ratios for expensive public works as a way to protect themselves from external criticism (Porter 1996). In his book *Trust in Numbers*, Porter also demonstrates how the engineers' esoteric statistical formulas, which were strongly criticized at first, gradually became routinized and taken for granted in the political arena.

Similarly, editors at *TheNotebook* who used to be "scared of traffic" now routinely rely on web metrics in order to reach editorial decisions. Indeed, editors constantly rely on internet metrics, either to get a better understanding of what is "wrong" with an article, or, on the contrary, to boost the popularity of a piece that is already doing well. For example, Emma, a section editor, and Benjamin, the managing editor, both describe their daily uses of metrics:

> Emma: I check Omniture… I do not diminish the importance of numbers. That's not all that matters… or we would only be doing cat videos [*laughs*]. But journalism is a marketplace. If no one reads your articles it's that there is something wrong, the packaging is wrong or the article is not good.

> Benjamin: When I edit a story, I want to do good traffic because it tells me that… that I was right, that it's the right thing that strikes a chord with our readers.

Emma and Benjamin do not overestimate the importance of numbers. Yet they assert that numbers have a clear meaning: when numbers are bad, it signals that the framing of the article or its content are flawed and should be fixed. Conversely, when numbers are good, it confirms that they were "right" about the article.

A sequence of observation with Tom illustrates how *TheNotebook*'s editors rely on web metrics to reach editorial decisions.

TheNotebook
Observation with Tom
October 17, 2012

Tom works in a separate office alongside the open space where most staffers are located. He is looking at two large computer screens in front of him. He constantly checks a program which is an overlay of Chartbeat and the in-house program. For each article on the homepage, the overlay shows a red or a green sign in real time, depending on how many people are clicking on each article compared to predictions based on earlier traffic.
Tom looks at the headline, which has a red sign, and says "ok, maybe it's time to change this one." He scrolls down the website.
Tom: So what's doing well? Yes, the post-debate thing about sexual dominance… [*laughs*] Well, this explains that, people click because of a base instinct… But I don't think that I need to promote it!
AC: Are there things that you never put on TAP 1 [*the top location for a headline*]?
Tom: Yes… There are things that are enormously popular but that won't do for TAP 1. For example our advice column [*a column that gives advice about sex, relationships, and family life*], it's very smart and fun, but it's not something that people need to read in order to become informed citizens of the world... In this case, the editorial value trumps the popularity. Same thing with a blog post, we won't put it on TAP 1, it's not our work, it shouldn't be there.

Tom constantly relies on internet metrics (specifically, the observed click-through rate compared to the predicted one) when deciding which articles to "promote," that is, to move to a better position on the homepage (TAP 1 being the top position). When a headline is not doing as well

as predicted, Tom's reaction is quick: "Maybe it's time to change this one." However, this interaction also indicates the limits of the technical editorial approach based on internet metrics: high popularity does not systematically translate into editorial promotion. For example, Tom notes that an article that is doing well on the website is a possible candidate for promotion to the top of the homepage. Yet Tom then realizes that the article is an analysis of the presidential debate in terms of sexual dominance. Tom explains that he does not "need" to promote this article, since people will click on it no matter what, "because of a base instinct." Here, Tom's editorial judgment overrides the traffic criterion. In a similar way, Tom points out that he never posts a "sex and gender" advice article on top of the homepage: these articles are fun and popular, but they do not deserve to be promoted, because the readers do not need this in order to become "informed citizens of the world."

More importantly, traffic numbers also provide sufficient justifications for cutting or reformatting entire sections at *TheNotebook*, as in the cases of the international and culture sections.

For example, *TheNotebook* ended its international coverage in 2011, when one of the senior writers who was writing and editing a section on international news was fired. Tom, the home page editor, commented on this decision: "It's true that we scaled back our international coverage… We didn't have the resources, and there wasn't enough interest among our readers." In this case, the preferences of the readers are cited as a reliable criterion for deciding – or at least for justifying *post hoc* – to cut the international section.

Similarly, the news site stopped covering large chunks of the New York arts scene, such as classical music, opera, and dance performances, focusing instead on television series and more

popular music genres. Esther, the former culture editor, recalls the pressure to do more "lowbrow" culture coverage in the early 2000s but also her daily resistance:

> Esther: I was aware that the culture section was the least read. I didn't take that personally, it was a political magazine. We had really good book coverage I thought… somewhat less good arts and music coverage… I think that in all magazines the culture section is the least read. There was a constant tension between highbrow and lowbrow culture. […] But I was definitely under pressure to do more lowbrow. And I just pushed back! I viewed it as part of my job to push back!

Eight years later, the magazine had stopped covering highbrow culture altogether. Instead it specializes in television series, a "niche" for series addicts who regularly visit the website to get updates, according to another former editor:

> Noah: The staff keeps paying attention to what is successful on the site. They realized that *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* blog posts were very successful. There are people who are obsessed about pop culture, about what you might think is trashy… And they want to find a magazine where there are smart people, so to speak, talking about the show. That's a sweet spot for *TheNotebook*. […] You get readers who are obsessed with the show, and then they become obsessed with having *TheNotebook* people writing about the show and they come back multiple times and are desperate for more…

According to Noah, the staff and editors realized that articles about television series were highly popular and decided to reorganize the culture section around television series, which are a "sweet spot" in terms of traffic for the publication.

Hence, entire sections can be dropped or radically transformed in order to attract a larger audience. In other words, *TheNotebook*'s editors rely on traffic numbers not only for daily editorial choices, but also when making decisions about the long-term editorial line of the website.

Internet metrics as a managerial tool

In addition, top editors at *TheNotebook* rely on internet metrics in managing their staff. First, they openly and strongly encourage staffers to increase the website's traffic. Sam explains the benefits of being "frank" with the staffers:

> Sam: We made a decision here, I don't think it was an explicit decision, I think it grew over time, to be very frank with our writers about what our business challenges were, about what we would do on the business side, and about what we needed to do, and not to try to hide that from people. We just say, "These areas are very profitable for us to cover, do you have ideas for how we can cover these areas better? Here are the needs that we have, we need to prove to the advertisers that we are a sufficiently large site, we need to get traffic, how do we do that, what can you do to help us?" And my sense is that people have been incredibly eager to do that.

In addition to openly asking the employees to help them increase traffic, the editors developed an array of strategies to make internet metrics omnipresent in the daily routines of the staff. First, a report is sent every morning to all editors, staffers, and contributors, with a ranking of the "top ten articles for the day" or month, the "most-emailed articles," the "most-shared" articles on Facebook and Twitter, etc. Second, a meeting is organized every week with the entire team in order to gather ideas about the best ways to use different technologies at *TheNotebook*. This meeting is not an editorial meeting: it is solely oriented towards improving the website and attracting more readers.

Moira, the data specialist, explains that her "mandate" is to attract more traffic. In order to do that, she tries to make journalists more conscious of traffic and traffic numbers, by giving them access to Chartbeat and sending them daily and weekly reports:

> Moira: At *TheNotebook*… they have a strong editorial voice, they do excellent journalism, and they have high standards. I didn't want to alter that core. My mandate was to get more traffic… but they didn't have a clear strategy about how to do it. One of my first moves was to make people more familiar with traffic and traffic numbers. Now everybody has access to Chartbeat… but I wished people used the programs more! When

> I arrived, people talked very differently about traffic. People saw it a threatening, debasing. That's not the case anymore. […] There was a lot of catching up to do.

In addition to giving access to Chartbeat and sending daily reports to the staff, top editors at *TheNotebook* also briefly tried to implement a performance-based compensation system for section editors. Each section editor would receive a bonus depending on his or her section's traffic numbers. Noah, who was a section editor before starting working as a columnist again, recalls these developments:

> Noah: You know this David Mamet movie in which a corporate guy is coming to a company and says: "Next week you're going to have to make as many sales as possible and we are going to have this board on the wall and the guy who makes the most sales is going to have a new car, and the next one is going to have steak knives and everyone else is fired." It reminded me of this […]
> Well, they said that there were going to break out traffic number by section. They had meetings with everyone and they said "Here is what your numbers are all like, your goal is 50% by next year." And I really got the sense that, well, if you don't make your numbers, you're in trouble. But I don't think that they really followed up on judging people by their numbers and everything, just because they're disorganized and they don't have enough time to deal with that. […] Also, once a month you had to write a memo explaining what you're social outreach efforts were. A $500 prize would be awarded to the journalist who had made the most impressive efforts.

This performance-based compensation system explicitly imitated *Gawker*, a website where writers and editors receive bonuses when they reach their traffic targets.[11] This measure was not implemented for long, at *TheNotebook*, mostly because, according to Noah, it required an amount of monitoring that was beyond the capabilities of management team.

[11] Gawker's founder Nick Denton started implementing this strategy in 2008 (Boutin 2008). In 2011 the system changed: editors and managers defined collective traffic targets for each site rather than for individuals. Editors later divided the collective bonus between the staffers. Yet *Gawker* still makes its data available, both at the site and individual level. http://gawker.com/stats/graph/uniques/monthly

2) Conflicted feelings about metrics at LaPlace

In comparison, *LaPlace*'s editors have a much more conflicted and ambivalent relationship with traffic numbers.

A simple observation gives a sense of the ambiguity that exists at *LaPlace*. On the one hand, *LaPlace* did not invest as heavily in analytics software programs as *TheNotebook*: *LaPlace* uses only two programs, Chartbeat and Google Analytics, compared to five at *TheNotebook*. According to Gael, *LaPlace*'s social media editor, they were "making do" for a long time by relying on Google Analytics and manually adding the number of visitors per article. Following the recommendation of a web developer, they decided to acquire Chartbeat in 2011.

On the other hand, one of the most striking characteristics of *LaPlace*'s website is that it prominently shows the number of visits that each article receives, along with the number of "likes" on Facebook, number of comments, and "grade" given by the internet users to the article. Figure 2 is a screenshot of traffic statistics as they appear on *LaPlace*'s homepage, below the article's headline and picture. Picture 3 is a screenshot of the more detailed statistics that appear at the bottom of each article.

Figure 2. *LaPlace*'s traffic numbers on the homepage



Figure 3. *LaPlace*'s traffic numbers on each article page



Thus, this specific article published on *LaPlace*'s homepage received 78,734 visits, 58 comments, and it was "liked" on Facebook 2,400 times. The internet users gave a grade of 1 out of 5 to the article. All the readers and *a fortiori* all the journalists have access to these metrics which are updated several times per hour. In comparison, *TheNotebook* does not provide much public information about the online success of their articles: there are no numbers on the homepage; at the bottom of each article, the reader can see the number of times the article was liked (771 times), tweeted (139 times), and commented upon (6 times) (Figure 4). *TheNotebook* does not provide the number of visits.

Figure 4. *TheNotebook*'s traffic numbers on each article page



LaPlace relies on fewer analytics program than *TheNotebook*, but it also makes public the number of visits for each article, both on the homepage and at the bottom of each page. This fact is suggestive of the ambivalence felt by *LaPlace*'s editors about internet metrics, which they both harshly criticize and obsessively follow, as the next section will demonstrate.

A limited editorial tool

At first sight, *LaPlace*'s editors are much reluctant than their American counterpart to use or even look at Chartbeat. Philippe, the editor-in-chief, explains:

> Philippe: I don't follow Chartbeat much… I try not to look at it. When you look at Chartbeat all the time, you make choices that might not be the best ones for the identity of the media… If we only cared about the number of clicks, about Chartbeat, it would be simple, you know, we would only write about celebrities. Celebrities… it always works.

> But the issue then is that we would become a celebrities website and that's not the kind of credibility we're looking for. In terms of advertising… The ads wouldn't go there. And even in terms of readers… In the long run, when it gets too trashy, people move somewhere else. So we don't write about celebrities. I mean, we do, but only when it's related to politics, to a scandal, but we don't write about celebrities just to write about them. We don't do that.

Philippe emphasizes his reluctance to follow Chartbeat and track the website's traffic numbers. According to him, paying too much attention to internet metrics naturally leads to publishing low-quality content (e.g., becoming a celebrity-oriented website). Such choices would ruin the identity of the website and maybe even its traffic numbers in the long run. Philippe draws a strong distinction between *LaPlace*'s editorial line and what a traffic-oriented website would do: "that's not the kind of credibility we're looking for," "we don't do that." This approach is very different from the one voiced by *TheNotebook*'s editor-in-chief, who insisted on the "facts" provided by internet metrics.

Yet *LaPlace*'s managing editor, Marina, has a more ambivalent position regarding Chartbeat. She explains indeed that she is a Chartbeat "addict":

> Marina: I'm a Chartbeat addict! I look at Chartbeat all the time. When I arrive in the morning, I start my computer, and the three screens that I open are *LaPlace*, Chartbeat and Gmail. I then see immediately how things are going […]. I need to feel what the internet users are reading. I need to feel what is going on in France and in the world and with our readers. Chartbeat is a tool that gives you the possibility to feel that. […] You see what's going well on Twitter, Chartbeat, Facebook, and you start moving your ass if nothing works. André, at 8 am, if he sees on Chartbeat that it's all flat, he posts a paper because he knows… when there is a scandal, something about sex, or something about corruption… We can't go below two million [*visitors per month*], we had less than two million at some point and it became really difficult to gain them back, to remain a media that matters, to stay in the race… That's my responsibility.

Marina does not seem to share Philippe's distrust of Chartbeat. Her understanding of Chartbeat is nonetheless different from the one developed by *TheNotebook*'s editors. She does not see Chartbeat as a "signal" providing "evidence" about the content of the website. Her affinity for

Chartbeat is much more impressionistic: it is a useful tool to get the pulse of a mass of readers, to "feel what is going on in France and in the world."

Nonetheless, even Marina has doubts about the relevance of clicks and comments as a measure of her professional value as an editor. Later in the interview, she explains that her confusion grows once the excitement caused by the frantic rhythm of online traffic wears down:

> Marina: When you start, you get super excited, you get a lot of comments and a lot of clicks on an article and you think, wow, it really worked well! But later you start thinking, 'Maybe it wasn't that good, maybe it wasn't that important…'

Of course, this difference between Philippe and Marina's evaluation of Chartbeat is convenient for the overall organization of the newsroom, since it allows Marina to focus on traffic whereas Philippe is in charge of the editorial prestige of the publication.[12] Yet it reveals that *LaPlace*'s editors have ambivalent feelings about Chartbeat.

Consequently, the French editors only use traffic numbers to make minor editorial decisions. Similar to *TheNotebook*, editors at *LaPlace* rely on Chartbeat when deciding which articles to promote: articles that are doing well are promoted as "headlines" ("*manchettes"*), whereas articles that attract fewer readers than expected are downgraded to a lower position on the homepage. Like at *TheNotebook*, there is a subtle equilibrium to reach regarding headlines. On the one hand, headlines have to attract as much traffic as possible. On the other hand, they have to be representative of the editorial line of the website. Philippe explains:

[12] Philippe and Marina's different openness to new criteria of value in journalism such as Chartbeat might be interpreted in light of their different journalistic careers and backgrounds. Philippe's father is a prominent French academic; Philippe studied law and graduated from Sciences Po before getting a Masters from a top journalism school. He then started his career as an economic journalist for an economic newspaper and later became the Washington correspondent for a prestigious national newspaper, before creating *LaPlace* with his colleagues. In contrast, Marina's career is more heterogeneous. Marina comes from a working-class background; her parents passed away when she was young. According to her, "I don't really know how I became a journalist… It's like the holy spirit!" She attended a second-tier journalism school. Several years later, she was hired by the same prestigious left-leaning newspaper as Philippe. She then participated in the launch of a trendy women's magazine. As she explains, "In my career, a lot of choices that I made were because of money. I needed the money. It's a different type of choice." She was hired as an assistant-editor at *LaPlace* in 2010.

> Philippe: We never put any article from the "sex and gender" section as a headline or a super-headline, I'm very careful about that. […] It's true that we're always trying to find a balance between "serious" and "light" articles, short and long papers… The second article for example, we call it PDLP for reasons that are, shall we say, that should remain confidential [*laughs*]… I don't even remember where it's from, I think that one day one of us said, "put it in the "whore's spot"" ["*place de la pute" or PDLP*], we laughed and it stayed. Because it's for whorish pieces ["*papiers putassiers"*], it doesn't have anything whorish really but it should be a racy article, either a polemical piece, or something very light, or something about sex. It's not the headline, so we can't be accused of having trashy headlines, but still it's at the top of the website. We don't put anything degrading… but it's true that we try to put fun, light things there.

Philippe describes the "balance" that they try to strike between "serious" and "light" articles on the homepage. Tellingly, they have exactly the same rule at *LaPlace* as at *TheNotebook*: "sex and gender" articles are never posted on top of the homepage.[13] These racy pieces, which are usually very popular, are put instead in the second most visible location on the homepage – a location called "the whore's spot" by the staffers. Philippe uses strong moral terms to characterize this fragile equilibrium: he develops an analogy with prostitution ("whorish pieces")[14] and emphasizes how they refuse to post "degrading" articles on top of the homepage because they do not want to be "accused" of being "trashy."

Yet, beyond these apparent similarities between *LaPlace* and *TheNotebook*, important differences also emerge. Most importantly, editors at *LaPlace* steadfastly refuse to cut articles and sections that are not successful. On the contrary, they understand it as their journalistic duty to provide important news about technical or demanding topics, even though the articles are not popular. Marina and Philippe explain:

[13] This is not a new phenomenon: Gans noted the exact same kind of equilibrium between serious and racy covers in his study of *Newsweek* and *Time* (Gans 1979).
[14] The same analogy with prostitution is often developed by U.S. web journalists (for example with the expression 'traffic whore') (Phelps 2012, Lyons 2014). Yet I never heard journalists at *TheNotebook* rely on this metaphor during the interviews or the observations.

> Marina: The headline… If it's something about Syria, well, our readers couldn't care less about Syria, there will be only 4,000, 5,000 clicks… This is not a lot for the headline, but we'll still do it. […] Some pieces are not read a lot online but they're super super important on the website. Articles that explain a complicated situation, long interviews… It's very important that they are here.
>
> Philippe: There is a credibility criterion to take into account. I'm going to give the readers what they want to see on their favorite website… They might not click on the page, but it gives some credibility to the website.

The editors see it as their role to post articles which are not be popular but provide some "credibility" to the website, are "important," or help building a community.

Hence, in contrast to *TheNotebook*, where the international section was cut down, editors at *LaPlace* keep posting articles about international news such as the civil war in Syria, even though they know that such articles attract little traffic. Philippe provides an interesting justification when he says that the readers might not click on the page but still appreciate seeing this type of articles on the website. According to the editors, having serious articles about demanding topics is also a way to maintain *LaPlace*'s credibility and audience in the long run.

The editors developed a similar strategy regarding the culture section, which is also fairly unsuccessful in terms of traffic. Marina praises the work of a journalist in the culture section:

> Marina: The papers that [*Agnès*] writes about hip-hop, graphic novels, etc., it's always around 5,000 clicks… But we really want to develop that, we're really supporting her. Sometimes she's a bit discouraged, she works for four days on something and she only gets 4,000 clicks… But I tell her, "No, listen, you're building a community, it's something that we value a lot."

According to Marina, traffic is not the sole priority for the culture section. Marina points out that a journalist's articles are not very successful, but argues that it does not matter because these articles attract a "community" of returning readers, which is something that *LaPlace* "values a lot."

Ambivalence about the use of Chartbeat as a managerial tool

*LaPlace'*s editors also use traffic numbers in a contradictory way when they manage their staff. On the one hand, *LaPlace*'s editors and managers repeatedly explain that traffic for the sake of traffic is not the goal of the website. They support and encourage staffers who are disappointed by the low popularity of their articles, as in the case of the international news and culture sections above. On the other hand, *LaPlace*'s editors also pressure the journalists to increase traffic, both at the individual and section level. This reached a climax in December 2012, when the founders André (chairman) and Philippe (editor-in-chief) sent several emails to the staff entitled "the battle for the audience" ("*la bataille de l'audience*").

First email, sent by André to the staff
December 19, 2012

The battle of the audience[15]
We have organized this lunch because we wanted to communicate with you at this crucial moment.
We have had a tough year. Between the sale to LeGroupeMag, the coverage of the presidential election, the decline in traffic, and a couple of months marked by new doubts and uncertainties [*sic*]. It is essential to communicate now and find paths for the future.
What is at stake today is the role of *LaPlace* as an independent site within LeGroupeMag, in the context of a brutal acceleration of the commercial crisis that touches all the media. In order to reach this goal, we have many assets, starting with our own team: the whole team needs to be highly mobilized. We need to be clear about our goals and willing to work together. […]
We need to realize that growing our audience is vital in this context of crisis. Reaching this goal depends on the behavior and mobilization of each and every one of us […]. Many recent examples show that we have much to gain from being more reactive and covering hot news ["*l'actualité chaude*"] right when it occurs. This is important for the editorial line of the website and in order to win the battle for the audience. […]
Every journalist has to participate in this daily catch by gathering information when

[15] André originally wrote these notes for a presentation in front of the staff during a lunch meeting. Yet several journalists did not attend, so he later forwarded the text to the entire staff.

he reads an article online, when he is on Twitter, or when his friends send him emails. […]. It only takes a couple of minutes of your time. […]
Each journalist should keep these goals in mind; they will be regularly evaluated by the management. […]
Given the current tempest that the press has entered, we have the potential to be one of the places where the future is being written. For this reason, we all need to work toward the same direction, with precise, concrete, manageable, and verified objectives. This is the point of these brief remarks.[16]

Second email, sent by Philippe to the staff
December 22, 2012

Object: The battle for the audience. A note from the management
Hi all,
During the lunch on the 19th we said how important it is for all of us to become more engaged in the life of the website. We need a method in order to maintain these good resolutions. The editors ["*rédaction-en-chef*"] will make sure that these objectives are followed […].
In January you will all be scheduled for individual meetings. We will talk about our goals and see where we stand. […]
The programmers are working on a program that we will use to track these objectives. Every month, the machine [*sic*] will send you a summary of your publications, as well as the total number of articles on the website. The email will also include figures about the evolution of the number of visitors.
Happy holidays to all of you,
Philippe[17]

These two emails directly contradict some of the previous assertions of the editors. Philippe, the editor-in-chief, had formerly explained that he refused to follow Chartbeat because it threatened the "identity" of the website. Yet in this email he explicitly writes that staffers will receive a monthly email including "figures about the evolution of the number of visitors," information about the total number of articles published on the websites, as well as a quantitative summary of their publications.

[16] Internal email, LaPlace, December 19, 2012, 12:07pm.
[17] Internal email, LaPlace, December 22, 2012, 1.23pm.

Why did Philippe change his mind about traffic? I first interviewed Philippe in February 10, 2012. About ten months later, he sent this email to the team. In the meantime, not much had changed in the financial situation of the website owned by LeGroupeMag; simply, the website's traffic numbers had levelled out (see Chapter 7). This stagnation in traffic was enough to exacerbate the contradiction between Philippe's discursive justifications and his actions as a manager (Jerolmack and Khan 2014, Vaisey 2009).

The main impression that emerges from the two emails is one of discipline: André and Philippe repeatedly emphasize how these objectives "will be regularly evaluated by the management" and how they "will make sure that these objectives are followed." Yet *LaPlace*'s editors did no go as far as *TheNotebook* in using traffic numbers as a management tool: to date, they have not instituted daily reports about traffic or created performance-based bonuses for section editors. However, traffic numbers are available for everyone to see on the home page, which might have similar effects on the staff.

There are areas of convergence between *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* regarding traffic numbers. In both organizations, editors rely on internet metrics to make minor editorial decisions, such as deciding which articles to promote on the homepage. In addition, the two websites rely on traffic numbers as a management tool: journalists are openly and repeatedly asked to participate in the collective effort to increase traffic.

Nonetheless, this section also documents important differences between the two websites. Editors at *TheNotebook* profess greater trust in internet metrics, which they understand as reliable technical tools providing objective "evidence" that should be used in decision-making. They did not hesitate to cut entire sections that were not receiving enough traffic. In contrast, editors at *LaPlace* have conflicted feelings about internet metrics. They condemn traffic

maximization techniques, which they compare to prostitution. Yet they also care about deeply about traffic numbers.

III. Paradoxical reception of internet metrics among the staff

How do staff journalists at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* make sense of traffic numbers? Surprisingly, I find that *TheNotebook*'s staffers profess indifference towards web metrics, which they do not appear to take as a measurement of their professional value. Conversely, *LaPlace*'s staffers have a more emotional attachment to traffic numbers. This section explores their reactions in turn.

1) TheNotebook's staff: internet metrics as an editor's game

Staffers at *TheNotebook* adopt a distanced attitude towards internet metrics generally, especially towards their own traffic numbers. Several of them mention that they do not pay much attention to the number of page views for their articles. For example, Martin, the "highly energetic young writer" introduced by Sam in the previous chapter, asserts that he does not check his numbers, since they depends on the article's location on the homepage rather than its quality:

> Martin: I don't look at traffic too much because… at the end of the day it doesn't depend on me but on the editors, it depends on where my posts are put on the website.

Similarly, Sean, who was once a staffer at *TheNotebook* and now has an annual freelancing contract with them, confirms this attitude:

> Sean: I have access to traffic numbers... They keep sending me links where I can log on and see all that stuff. In great detail (*laughs*)! Might be Omniture… I can't even remember which proprietary thing they use. So, I have access to something that shows all those stats… and I do not look at them. I just don't bother. It's not worth it to me. On the home page, they have a box with "top ten most read", "top ten on Twitter", "top ten most liked"… I'll look at those when my stories are up, like "Oh, is it catching on?" But that's it. I got a story that ran yesterday, and I clicked this morning to see how many people liked it or tweeted it. I saw that my story was on the top five most read and I was glad about that. But I don't go to Omniture or Chartbeat or whatever it is that they use. I don't go there and obsessively look at the stats. I find it kind of stressful and I try not to get too wrapped up in that. […] I would certainly prefer not to have to pay attention to that stuff at all and do good work and do stuff I'm proud of.

Sean's attitude is widespread among *TheNotebook*'s journalists, who often declare that they do not systematically check their traffic numbers despite being (repeatedly) sent links and passwords by the editors and the management. Sean acknowledges a feeling of pride when his articles appear in the "top ten most read" list but also expresses his preference for just doing "good work."

Staff writers' relative indifference about internet metrics was also made very clear during my days of observation at *TheNotebook*. With the exception of the home page editor (who has a separate office) and the social media editor (who has a desk in the main open space, slightly apart from the other writers and copy-editors), no one checked traffic numbers while I was there. Staffers spent a lot of time on *TheNotebook*'s homepage, writing emails, using the content management system, search engines, instant messaging, and social media. But none of them ever opened a window with Chartbeat or Omniture.

More generally, *TheNotebook*'s writers seem to understand internet metrics as a technical game that editors may have to master but one that does not have strong consequence for their professional identity.

Several writers concur in their criticism of the "gaming strategies" (Espeland and Sauder 2007) developed by the editors at *TheNotebook* to maximize traffic numbers. These strategies

included pagination, or breaking articles into two or three pages, automatically double or tripling the number of clicks compared to a single-page article. Another technique is to create slideshows, in which each image counts as a click. Two staffers spoke about this phenomenon in separate interviews:

> Noah: Traffic… I think that the web intensifies this story… I remember when *TheNotebook* started paginating, in '05 or '06. That was something I was clearly opposed to because it was so clearly... There is no way you could argue that readers would actually enjoy that. You'll antagonize your readers but you're doubling your traffic. Oh yeah! That's why everybody started paginating. And even when you click "single page" when you start reading the article, it counts as a click. When it's a three-page article, you triple your page views. But people don't really make it to page three, 10% make it to page three so it's kind of dismaying. So when you asked me "do you look at your stats"... If you get 70,000 unique users, you know that realistically only a third of these people have read through the end of your article. […] But there is a trade-off. If you're pissing people off, say you lose 20% of the readers but you get an 80% increase in traffic... It would be irresponsible not to make that trade-off.
>
> Jane: When I first arrived, we would get an email from Omniture every morning and we also had the most viewed and most emailed list. And you would kind of look at that and say "oh, look, it's on the top five". But the longer I was there, the more people were encouraged to dig into Omniture and think about the numbers. They started sending out lists of the most successful articles per month. Now there is definitely more pressure… which in itself is not necessarily a bad thing… I've never had to run a publication, but I can only imagine the conversations that they were having with the people who run Newspapers Inc… I guess they were really scared that the publication was going to be sold… like tomorrow! I think that everybody was really doing their best to make the publication survive… but in my opinion they were killing *TheNotebook* by trying to save it. […] We started publishing a lot more slideshows… At the beginning they were doing this fairly unique thing, they were essays with images. And then we moved to the same model than other websites have, where it's just about traffic, there is no real text, only captions. It's just that… You get more clicks. I mean, it's cheating.

Noah and Jane are very critical of traffic-oriented editorial strategies such as pagination and slideshows. Noah explains that pagination is annoying for the readers, whereas Jane concludes

by saying: "it's cheating."[18] In addition, Noah points out that, given that only 10% of readers get to the third page of each article, counting clicks may not give an accurate view of how many people actually read the article.

Both staffers also state that they understand the pressures faced by the editors to increase the number of page views. Noah agrees that there is a "trade-off" and that it would be irresponsible not to double the number of clicks via pagination. Similarly, Jane states that editors faced strong pressures from Newspapers Inc. and that they were only "doing their best to make the publication survive." Thus, editors appear to be simply "doing their job" when they handle traffic numbers, as another writer confirms:

> Sean: Editors… It's part of their job to know that stuff. It's part of their job to really understand SEO and make good SEO lines and understand what kinds of stories are going to do well and what kind probably aren't. Although… I'm pretty skeptical about knowing in advance what kind of story is going to do well. […] But I mean, they do have to look at those stats. Mary, my editor, whenever she's at work, all day she's on Omniture, Chartbeat, whatever this is, she's looking at that. But it's not my job to look at that stuff. My job is just to hand them my copy and hope that it's good.

According to Sean, there is an important difference between the editors' role, which is to keep track of metrics, SEO, and traffic, and his own role, which is to write good copy.

In sum, the staff at *TheNotebook* does not seem particularly affected by traffic numbers, high or low. They report that it is pleasant to see one's articles in the "most read" rankings, but it does not seem to have a deep impact on their professional identity. They identify the gaming strategies used by editors to optimize traffic numbers. Staffers criticize strategies that they believe compromise the editorial standards of the publication, but they understand that editors

[18] Now that the main metric of reference is "unique visitors" instead of "page views," these gaming strategies are less successful (though slideshows with racy images generally perform well). Yet they have been routinized in the newsroom. *TheNotebook* did not stop paginating articles, even though the motivation for doing so had disappeared.

are forced to make such trade-offs. In so doing, they draw strong boundaries between the respective roles of editors and writers.

2) LaPlace*'s staff: traffic numbers as a marker of professional value*

The situation is quite different at *LaPlace*. At first glance, *LaPlace*'s staffers seem critical and even cynical about traffic. They rely on strong moral terms and summary judgments when analyzing the types of topics that attract many page views.

For example, during a cigarette break in front of the office with two staff journalists, Francis and Edith, in February 2012, I asked them what kinds of articles were usually chosen as headlines for the website. Francis replied: "A headline piece… Well, when you have some sex, or Sarkozy, or a touch of racism, it works! (*they both laugh*)." Other staffers confirmed these views. For example, Louise explains: "We know the recipes to get more traffic… Kittens and sex, obviously! (*laughs*)." Yet, despite these critical comments, staffers care deeply about traffic numbers.

Ubiquitous clicks: the staff's strong reactions to traffic

During my days of observation at *LaPlace*, I realized that internet metrics and the question of traffic were omnipresent in the newsroom, to a much higher extent than at *TheNotebook*.

First, journalists are always highly conscious of the number of visits that their respective articles attract. Since the numbers are displayed on the homepage, it is difficult to ignore whether a piece is successful or not. Louise, a staff writer, explains that she does not look at Chartbeat but that looking at the number of visits on the homepage is almost a "reflex":

> Louise: It's hard not look at ["*on peut pas s'empêcher de regarder*"] the number of clicks, because it's very visible, you see. I don't look at Chartbeat, I don't want to check in real-time and everything… But I can't avoid the number of clicks and it's already a lot to deal with… Yes, I look at it. I don't think that I choose my topics based on it but I look at it and it makes me happy ["*ça me fait plaisir*"]. It's a stupid reward…When you see that a piece is working well you're happy… It's like a reflex ["*c'est presque du réflexe*"].

In addition to noticing the number of visitors who read their articles, many staffers and editors keep a window open on their computer screens to view the Chartbeat program. Each time that an article is posted online, writers and editors in charge immediately open the Chartbeat window and carefully follow the success of the article during the first minutes after its publication.

Observation
LaPlace
January 6, 2012. 11:14am

Lise and Vicente, two journalists in the sports section, just finished editing Lise's article. The article is about a French athlete who is prosecuted for assaulting a woman at his sports club. They edited the headline ("A brilliant athlete is prosecuted for assaulting a woman") and corrected the typos.

Vicente: We're going to post it…

Lise: I'm a bit scared… of everybody. The sports fans, the feminists, everybody… [*Laughs*]. I'm really stressed out!

Vicente: It's out! [*He then opens Chartbeat*].

Vicente [*to me: he comments on the webpage*]: You know this program? It's the hell of LaPlace ["*c'est l'enfer de LaPlace*"]… You can see how many people are visiting the website right now… see, around 1,500. Which articles they are reading, what country they live in, and also what they typed on Google that led them to the article. For example, Lise's piece… It's doing well! Here, a guy typed "video sexual assault"… [*Laughs*]. It's 11 am, and the guy is looking for a video of sexual assault! Today… 91% of the readers come from France, 3% from Belgium, 3% from Switzerland…

Vicente immediately checks Chartbeat after posting Lise's piece online. He is able to say, after ten seconds, that the article "is doing well." He describes Chartbeat as "hell," by which he might be indicating that it is a constant temptation to track the number of clicks for one's articles on Chartbeat.

The question of traffic numbers can also produce strong feelings of anxiety among staff writers, as exemplified by Agnès, who writes in the culture section:

> Agnès: When you have an important topic, a topic that matters… and you get 2,000 clicks… then you're really mortified. So okay, you know your way around, you know that's the way it works… but you have a ghost whispering at your ear, "not cool." On the contrary, it always makes me feel much better when I post a paper online and it gets 40,000 clicks. Then it's cool. So then you realize that it's important because you're very happy when your article has a large audience […]. Anyway, it's almost like a natural law, at least for me: after 10, 12 pieces that didn't work, you give yourself a break and you write a short piece that is going to be a hit! You don't sell your soul to the devil, no, but you just reset the scale…

Agnès describes the very concrete consequences of writing articles that are not popular online. She feels "mortified," she hears a voice whispering in her ear that it is "not cool," and she is "annoyed" and unhappy. According to her, everybody in the staff feels the same. Like Vicente, who used the metaphor of "hell," and Philippe, who compared the chase for clicks to "prostitution," Agnès also uses moral terms to describe the process that takes place when she decides to write a short piece that, she knows, will be popular.

An opposite case also illustrates how traffic numbers matter for the staffers' professional identity. For example, during a cigarette break in January 2012, Vicente draws on the criterion of online success to challenge what he sees as the editor-in-chief's lack of appreciation for his work. He explains to another staff writer:

> Vicente: I'm kind of annoyed because Philippe's tone this morning was a bit… It was like, "Stop posting your crappy pieces on my beloved news website"… But we are the

> ones bringing all the traffic to the website! In the "Most Read" articles, there are always two of ours… I think that they want us to write more investigative pieces.

In Vicente's opinion, the fact that his articles are among the most popular on the website should count for something in the evaluation of his work. He contrasts this online popularity with the editor-in-chief's criticism of their "crappy" pieces.

Traffic numbers are a constant subject of discussion, prognostication, dispute, and attention at *LaPlace.*[19] This quantitative criterion seems to matter deeply for the staff writers at *LaPlace*, who feel anxious and miserable when their articles are not successful enough.

"The battle for the audience": opposition from the staff

With this information in mind, we return to the contentious episode of the "battle for the audience" that took place in December 2012. Earlier, we saw the editors' email that informed the writers about their new quantitative objectives.

Unsurprisingly, *LaPlace*'s staff reacted negatively to these expectations. The journalists discussed the main points of disagreement among themselves. These conversations took place during several meetings of the "Société des Journalistes" (a representative body for the employees of a press publication) that the staffers had created in July 2012.[20] The staffers replied several weeks later with a collective email to the editors.

[19] See Chapter 5 for additional observation notes about traffic-oriented discussions at LaPlace.
[20] At the legal level, the "Sociétés de Journalistes" comply with and are defined by the 1901 law on voluntary associations.

Email sent by staffers to the management
January 18, 2013

Subject: Collective reply from *LaPlace*'s journalists

We received your email from December 21 entitled "*La Bataille de l'audience*."
We want to be part of this battle. Our work, our team, and the survival of our site depend on it. But your note distressed and surprised us. […]
-We refuse to follow quantitative goals regarding our production (number of posts, number of bloggers, etc.). If we have to define goals, we want to talk about it with you and define together the relevant criteria and some realistic objectives.
-We ask you not to send individual emails with quantitative measurements of each journalist's production. […]
-We need to know your editorial goals in qualitative and not quantitative terms for 2013. […]
We have concrete propositions at the editorial level and also regarding traffic numbers. We are available to discuss them with you.

We believe that the editorial risk is too high right now. We are being evaluated based on clicks, which mirrors a loss of identity [*of the website*]. This obsession [*with clicks*] is not only demoralizing; it is also counter-productive.[21]

LeGroupeMag did not buy *Yahoo! News* or *Le Huffington Post*. […]

LeGroupMag bought *LaPlace*, an independent website which invents, innovates, creates, entices, amuses, instructs, inspires, refuses to comply, and bears responsibility for its choices.

We need a young, innovative, independent, and different media now more than ever. This is what we want to read![22]

LaPlace's journalists strongly criticized the "quantitative goals" planned by the management, which they described as an "obsession" (with clicks and numbers) that was not only "demoralizing" but also "counter-productive." After this email exchange, *LaPlace*'s editors organized several meetings with the staff. They eventually abandoned the quantitative performance measurements but maintained the goal to increase the amount of content published on the website.

[21] The same paragraph, in French: "Il existe un trop fort risque éditorial. L'évaluation par le clic, comme principal critère, constitue pour nous le reflet de cette perte d'identité. Cette obsession est également démoralisante, et contre-productive."
[22] Internal email, LaPlace, January 18, 2013, 11:15pm.

LaPlace's staffers appear to be as ambivalent as their editors about the proper value and role of traffic numbers in the newsroom. On the level of self-conscious professional discourse and formal response to management proposals to increase traffic, they vocally criticize the management's focus on traffic numbers, which they compare to a mental illness ("obsession") that should be cured. They assert that they want to fight to protect the "young, innovative, and independent" editorial line of the website. Yet on the level of daily behavior, they constantly track traffic numbers, an activity that they compared to a "reflex." They also have strong emotional reactions – happiness or despair – depending on how their articles fare online.

IV. Discussion: cultural arrangements and the reproduction of difference

The first sections of this chapter documented a relative convergence between *LaPlace* and *TheNotebook* in their use of traffic numbers. The two organizations acquired the same real-time software program, Chartbeat, in order to get detailed information about traffic numbers. At both websites, Chartbeat is routinely used as an editorial and managerial tool. Editors change the positions of articles depending on their online success; they also openly encourage staffers to increase traffic numbers.

Yet a closer look at the uses and meanings given to traffic numbers reveals deep and paradoxical differences between the two organizations. Editors at *TheNotebook* trust traffic numbers in order to make informed editorial and managerial decisions, whereas editors at *LaPlace* are conflicted about the proper value of internet metrics. Consequently, traffic numbers are more institutionalized at *TheNotebook* than they are at *LaPlace*. The U.S. editors cut or reformat entire sections that do not perform well, send daily reports about metrics to their staff,

and even created a short-lived performance-based bonus based on traffic targets. Yet, paradoxically, staffers at *TheNotebook* assert their indifference regarding traffic numbers: they understand metrics as a technical game that editors have to master but one that has little impact on their own professional identity. In contrast, at *LaPlace*, the staffers have an emotionally charged relationship to metrics. They are very critical of "clicks," but they also see internet metrics as a signal of professional value and status in the newsroom.

How to make sense of these findings? I argue that *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* rely on different arrangements between qualitative and quantitative evaluations. After describing the features of the "separate" and "connected" arrangements at the two websites, I relate them to the history and structure of the U.S. and French journalistic profession.

1) "Separate" and "connected" arrangements

Before analyzing the different arrangements that prevail at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, a short discussion of the types of power and role of numbers in organizational settings is needed.

Organizations, power, and the role of numbers

A long tradition in organizational analysis explores whether organizations have specific "cultures" that influence and are in turn reproduced by the hierarchical structure and interactions taking place between members of the organization (Weber 1978 [1922], Kunda 2006).

Of particular interest here are the two recurrent ideal-types of organizational power that emerge from the literature, under several names: "despotic" versus "hegemonic" (Burawoy

1979), "utilitarian" versus "normative" (Etzioni 1961), "bureaucratic" versus "indulgent" (Gouldner 1964), or "sovereign" versus "disciplinary" (Foucault 1977).

In broad strokes, all of these authors differentiate between two main types of organizational power. First, the "despotic" or "bureaucratic" type of organization relies on clear hierarchies, centralized power, strict rules, little autonomy given to individuals, and clear and visible sanctions in cases of infringement of the rules. To the contrary, the "disciplinary," "hegemonic," or "normative" organization has no centralized power, no apparent hierarchy, fuzzy rules, and a greater autonomy given to individuals. In this type of power, rules and sanctions are not implemented by a centralized power; rather, they are internalized by the individuals themselves (Kunda 2006).

Depending on the type of organizational power at stake, the role of numbers in the management of the workforce can differ starkly. In their recent research, Sauder and Espeland (2009) draw on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) to distinguish between two kinds of power, "disciplinary" versus "sovereign." Sovereign power is centralized, visible, displays itself in public rituals, and has clear – and, in Foucault's analysis, gruesome – effects on its victims. In contrast, disciplinary power is neither centralized nor visible: it works through "capillarity," it is diffuse, constant, and meticulous. It is inscribed in objects, procedures, and bodies (Fassin and Memmi 2004). It tends to be taken for granted and forgotten (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Sauder and Espeland argue that quantification tends to operate as a discipline rather than a sovereign power. For example, in their study of the reception of rankings among law school deans, the authors show that there are no clear actors pressuring deans to act the way they do. Rather, deans internalize the rankings through different processes such as individualized anxiety,

phenomena of partial resistance, and strategies to "game" the system, all of which eventually lead to the broader institutionalization of rankings in the field.[23]

Yet it is an open question whether quantification is always disciplinary rather than sovereign in character. Depending on the organizational setting, on the nature of the relationship between managers and employees, and the system of rewards and penalties that managers put in place, metrics might participate in either disciplinary or sovereign power.

The two case studies presented here provide just such a revealing contrast. At *TheNotebook*, quantification clearly operates as a type of sovereign power: editors rely extensively on internet metrics not only to make editorial decisions but also to manage their staff. Yet such direct pressures are met by indifference and disdain on the part of the staffers, who do not feel threatened by the metrics. At *LaPlace*, in contrast, editors have ambivalent feelings about internet metrics. They are inconsistent in their attitudes towards traffic numbers: they assert that metrics are a poor criterion for making decisions, but they are also obsessed with traffic. Likewise, they often use metrics as an editorial and managerial tool (though to a lesser extent than at *TheNotebook*). The same ambivalence towards web metrics characterizes *LaPlace*'s staffers. Hence, at *LaPlace*, commensuration resembles discipline in that it is individualized, internalized, and expressed in strong moral terms.

A comparison of "separate" and "connected" arrangements

With these elements in mind, it is now possible to directly compare the "separate" and "connected" arrangements that characterize *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. Arrangements can be

[23] Interestingly, these phenomena depicted by Sauder and Espeland resemble Burawoy's description of "making out" in a hegemonic regime.

understood as sets of strategies, attitudes, cognitive categories, and organizational forms that are developed in order to manage conflicting expectations in a given social setting.

Table 3. Separate and connected arrangements at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*

	Separate arrangement	**Connected arrangement**
Division of labor between editors and journalists	Strong	Weak
Hierarchical structure	Strong, centralized, clear rules	Unclear, diffuse, "flat" hierarchy, vague or no rules
Sanctions and rewards	Material, administered by the central authority	Mostly symbolic, internalized and self-administered
Attitude towards metrics	Clear, consistent between discourse and action	Inconsistent, contradiction between discourse and action
Role of metrics	Measures of performance, initiated and controlled by the central authority	Unclear (measure of value), weak central control, individualized pressure
Type of power (related concepts)	"Despotic power" (Burawoy), "Utilitarian power" (Etzioni), "Bureaucracy" (Gouldner), "Sovereign power" (Foucault)	"Hegemonic power" (Burawoy), "Normative power" (Etzioni), "Indulgency pattern" (Gouldner), "Disciplinary power" (Foucault)
Example	*TheNotebook*	*LaPlace*

Based on the ethnographic and qualitative material presented so far, Table 3 describes the differences between *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* in terms of organizational structure ("division of labor," "hierarchical structure," "sanctions and rewards"), attitude and use of internet metrics ("attitude towards metrics" and "role of metrics"), and types of power.

First, the division of labor between editors and journalists is strong at *TheNotebook* and weak at *LaPlace*. As we saw, *TheNotebook*'s journalists establish clear boundaries between the editors' role, which is to analyze traffic numbers, and their own "job," which is to produce "good copy." *LaPlace*'s journalists never point out such differences.

Second, the hierarchical structure of the two organizations differs. At *TheNotebook*, the hierarchy was clear from the start, during the time that *TheNotebook* was part of TechCorp. The company's hierarchical structure has several layers: staffers and copy-editors, assistant editors, section editors, managing editors, editor-in-chief, and then general manager and chairman. Each position comes with a clearly defined role.

In contrast, the hierarchy was always much fuzzier at *LaPlace*. When the team started meeting in André's kitchen, editors were not considered as managers but rather as friends, family, and sometimes "gurus." The respective roles of the founders were never completely clarified over time. Officially, Philippe is the editor-in-chief, André the chairman, and Eric the CEO ("*directeur general*") of the company. Yet their tasks are deeply intertwined. They all regularly write articles for the website; André and Eric constantly give their opinion on the editorial line of the publication. They frequently edit articles while Philippe meets with investors who want to see him. Among the staffers, journalists themselves often serve as section editors even though they have no official title: they manage freelancers and bloggers, edit their pieces, and decide on their payment.

Third, the role of rules, sanctions, and rewards differs between *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. At *TheNotebook*, staffers know the expectations of the editors and managers: some of their expectations are qualitative (writing "good copy") and some are quantitative (publishing a certain amount of content and attracting large numbers of visitors). Staffers know that there

might be concrete consequences if they do not perform well on these different dimensions. For example, the three "least productive" (and most expensive, according to Noah) writers were fired in 2011.

In contrast, no one was ever fired or even downgraded at *LaPlace*: when people find the situation unbearable, they resign. This cannot be completely explained by the French labor laws and protection granted to journalists. When I interviewed editors and journalists working for other publications, many of them commented upon the fact that *LaPlace* never fired anyone despite its financial difficulties, which they found surprising. However, this does not mean that staffers are not conscious of what the editors think of their work. But staffers are not told exactly what is wrong. Instead, they experience the disapproval of the "bosses" in a deeply emotional manner (Kunda 2006). For example, Sarah (former section editor) and Gabriella (former managing editor) both explained in Chapter 3 that they went through phases of depression when their position at *LaPlace* was in peril. Gabriella eventually resigned, whereas Sarah managed to move to another position where she had fewer responsibilities.

Fourth, editors and staffers at the two websites have different attitudes towards metrics and are more or less consistent in their understanding of traffic. *TheNotebook*'s editors are highly consistent, in the sense that their discourses and actions about metrics coincide: they repeatedly underline the importance of traffic and use metrics accordingly as a trusted editorial and managerial tool. Similarly, *TheNotebook*'s staffers argue that they do not care about metrics and consequently do not check their traffic numbers. In contrast, editors and staffers at *LaPlace* are highly inconsistent: they are highly critical of metrics, which they morally condemn, but they also constantly look at Chartbeat. The most inconsistent might be Philippe, who explicitly states

that looking at internet metrics is bad for the editorial line of the website while sending emails to the staff stating that they will be evaluated based on the traffic they create.

Consequently, the actual role of numbers differs in the two newsrooms. At *TheNotebook*, metrics are an unambiguous editorial and managerial tool, whereas at *LaPlace* the relationship to metrics is highly individualized, internalized, and emotionally charged. As Agnès emphasized, having low traffic numbers is "not cool."

Hence, the type of power and the role of metrics in the reproduction of organizational power are different at the two websites: *TheNotebook* relies on a clear and centralized managerial authority, whereas *LaPlace* relies on diffuse moral authority. Drawing on Foucault, one might add that *TheNotebook* uses metrics in a sovereign way whereas metrics operate at *LaPlace* as a form of discipline.

2) Where arrangements come from

Why do we find these different arrangements at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*? I argue that these arrangements stem from the history and structure of the U.S. and French journalistic fields. Specifically, three interrelated organizational structures emerged over time within U.S. news organizations: a "wall of separation" between editorial and marketing departments, a strong division of labor within editorial departments, and the occupational role of top editors as "bridges" between editorial and marketing sections. These organizational forms did not develop in the same way in French news organizations.

United States: "walls of separation," division of labor, and the hybrid role of editors

The tension between market forces and professional norms in the U.S. media industry resulted in a specific organizational form and ideology designed to protect journalistic independence: the creation of a "wall of separation" between editorial and marketing departments (which journalists sometimes call "great wall," "Chinese wall," and jokingly compare to the "separation between church and state"). According to journalists and managers alike, commercial concerns should not – and do not – infringe on editorial decisions. Editorial offices are separated from marketing departments, both physically and symbolically. Within editorial departments themselves, observers have noted the further division of labor between editors and staff writers. Staff writers are said to be largely insulated from market pressures and expected to focus on their reporting and journalistic writing, whereas top editors, who are in charge of defining the editorial strategy of the publication, are also expected to connect the editorial and commercial departments of the media company.

Many historical and ethnographic studies of print newsrooms confirm these different aspects of news organizations. For example, Padioleau provides a fine-grained description of *The Washington Post*'s newsroom in the 1970s as a "sanctuary" where profit concerns did not enter (Padioleau 1985: 161). He introduces Benjamin Bradlee, the then-executive editor, as having two complementary functions. Bradlee is first described as an "awe-inspiring figure" who repeatedly protected his "heroic" reporters from outside interference and encouraged them to write only the "best" articles, regardless of time, cost, and risk, which made it possible to uncover the Watergate scandal (Padioleau 1985: 161-179). Yet Bradlee is also described as a manager who checked circulation numbers obsessively, analyzed audience segmentation and media markets,

and negotiated cost-cutting measures with Katherine Graham and the newspapers' publishers (Padioleau 1985: 144-149).

Similarly, Gans documents the existence of a strict "wall of separation" at *CBS*, *NBC*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*. He writes: "In the news media I studied, as in most other, editorial and business departments operate independently of each other" (Gans 1979: 214). Gans describes the marked division of labor that structures news organizations, which he compares to an "assembly-line" that has an "industrial" and even "militaristic" character (Gans 1979: 84, 93). He examines the strong hierarchical structures that organize editorial departments, which he compares to a "kingdom" or an "army" (Gans 1979: 97). Finally, according to Gans, top editors are in constant contact with the corporate executives: they met at least once a week with managers and marketing people, which is not the case for the rest of the editorial staff (Gans 1979: 95).

Popular textbooks in media management confirm these points. For example, Redmond and Trager's classic *Balancing on the wire: The art of managing media organizations* draws a sharp boundary between "revenue-generating departments" and "news coverage" departments, which "maintain an ethical separation so that journalism is not unduly influenced by business considerations" (Redmond and Trager 2004: 26, Artemas 2013). Journalists who work in editorial departments are described as being "often extremely concerned about ethical issues affecting telling the truth and not distorting reality" (Redmond and Trager 2004: 74). In contrast, advertising and promotions departments have to "sell and market space in the paper" (Redmond and Trager 2004: 26). Editors are represented as "boundary spanners" who need to know about the business challenges of the marketing and business departments and take them into account in order to help the publications survive (Picard 2004, Artemas 2013). Yet media experts also warn

editors against "selling out to profit motives" and letting "MBAs rule the newsroom" (Redmond and Trager 2004: 73, Downie Jr. and Kaiser 2003, Baker 1995, Underwood 1993).

Thus, the ongoing tension between strong market pressures and a high level of professionalization in American journalism resulted in a specific division of labor within media companies, including the "wall of separation" between editorial and marketing departments as well as the specialization of editors and staffers within editorial departments.

French newspapers between charismatic editors and "Sociétés de Journalistes"

The situation is different in French newsrooms. As Chapter 2 emphasized, market forces and the imperative for newspapers to make high profits were always less marked in France. As a consequence, news organizations did not develop the same industrial division of labor and institutionalized organizational forms as U.S. newspapers. It is always hard to document an absence: this section relies on a variety of sources in order to give a sense of the traditional structures of news organizations in France.

First, editors play a different role in French newspapers. In the late nineteenth century, the most prominent media magnates were not businessmen but rather public figures who relied on the symbolic capital that they had gathered in the cultural world or the political arena in order to promote their newspaper (Ferenczi 1993). For example, Fernand Xau, who founded and managed the highly popular *Journal* from 1892 until his death in 1899, was not only a well-known reporter but also a literary critic who asked his novelist friends to write for the paper: Léon Daudet, Maurice Barrès, Octave Mirbeau, and Jules Renard became regular columnists and contributed greatly to the success of the publication. In 1914, *Le Journal* was one of the four most popular newspapers in France (Ferenczi 1993: 62-63).

This tradition persisted in the second half of the twentieth century. French news organizations were then more concerned with prestige and intellectual aura than with commercial considerations. For example, in his analysis of *Le Monde* and *The Washington Post*, Padioleau describes *Le Monde* as a "national monument" more public than private (Padioleau 1985: 41) before contrasting it to the economic orientation of the *Washington Pos*t, where "news is business" (Padioleau 1985: 117). According to Padioleau, Hubert Beuve-Méry, the founder of *Le Monde*, conceived of the newspaper as a public service (Padioleau 1985: 65-66). Beuve-Méry, who had been a journalist at *Le Temps* before entering the Résistance during the Second World War, used his moral, intellectual, and political prestige to convince journalists and politicians that *Le Monde* was the main newspaper of the day. The newspaper's journalists, who were often critical of Beuve-Méry's decisions, also deeply admired him: they were nicknamed the "boy-scouts of Beuve-Méry" because of his strong moral authority among his staff (Padiolau 1985: 57).

This did not prevent *Le Monde*'s journalists from creating an independent body representing the employees that aimed to protect the independence of the newspaper from political and commercial interference. Beuve-Méry supported this initiative; he even acknowledged that "the real owner of *Le Monde* [was] its editorial staff" ("*Le vrai propriétaire, c'est la rédaction*") (Padioleau 1985: 75). In 1951, *Le Monde*'s journalists founded a "Société des Rédacteurs" which received 28% of the newspaper's shares (Champagne 1995, Eveno 2001). Similar processes took place at *Libération*, where the "Société des Rédacteurs" owned the newspaper between 1973 and 1981 (Samuelson 1979, Mongin 2006). Other newspapers, radios, and television channels followed, including *Le Figaro*, *Les Echos*, and *Ouest-France, TF1*, *AFP*,

Radio France and *France Télévision* (Charon 2003).[24] In all of these cases, the "Sociétés des Journalistes" voted on central decisions affecting the future of each media company.

How did the role of top editors and managers evolve over time within French news organizations? Top editors occupy uncomfortable positions in which they have to manage the conflicting expectations of the "Sociétés des Journalistes" and the demands of the management. This often leads to situations of open war with the editorial staff and the eventual resignation of the editor-in-chief, as the fall of Nicolas Demorand at *Libération* in February 2014 or the even more recent rebellion of the editorial staff against Natalie Nougayrède at *Le Monde* in May 2014 make clear. Editors have to make unpopular decisions, such as opening the news organization's capital to new investors, firing employees, and raising the percentage of advertising in the newspaper. Yet their legitimacy within the newsroom typically stems from their journalistic career and intellectual prestige rather than their economic and managerial skills, which results in them having a complicated role within the organization.

Among many possible examples, take the case of Claude Julien, a journalist who became the editor-in-chief and then managing director of *Le Monde* in 1969. Padioleau reproduces one of his speeches addressed to the "Société des Rédaction du *Monde*" at a time when he was engaged in a tough negotiation with the newspaper's printing unions. When addressing the journalists, Julien evoked his conflicted feelings: "I have been speaking as a manager so far, but am I allowed to speak now as a human being who decided a long time ago to become part of the splendid profession that is journalism? My greatest joy is not to cut operating costs or impose sacrifices […] on others. Like you, I am a journalist. Like you, I like to write, and I prefer to read

[24] The "Sociétés des Rédacteurs" and the main journalism unions (Syndicat des Journalistes and the CGT, CFDT, FO, and CGC) often work together, both at the organizational and the national levels, with the "Intersyndicale des Journalistes" – a collective body that negotiates benefits and subsidies for the journalistic workforce. See http://www.snj.fr/spip.php?article263 for a description of their primary functions.

Garcia Marquez […] rather than analyze accounts" (Padioleau 1985: 63).[25] Julien concluded his speech by asking for the "trust" of the journalists, without which he would not be able to perform his functions.

French news organizations thus differ from U.S. ones in several important ways. There is no official "wall of separation" between commercial and editorial departments. The authority of media managers is based on their intellectual legitimacy and prestige. Editors and directors who act as cost maximizers often encounter strong criticism from their staffs. As opposed to U.S. media companies, where the hierarchical structure is described as "militaristic," French newspapers are more horizontal, in the sense that everyone on staff participates in the "Société de journalistes," whose stated goal is to protect the independence of the publication.

The information presented here is impressionistic and the subject merits further exploration in depth.[26] Yet it gives a sense of the differing structures of news organizations in the two countries. In addition, it helps to understand the different arrangements that developed at the American and French news websites.

TheNotebook and *LaPlace*'s editors and journalists drew on the existing organizational forms, cognitive categories, attitudes, and editorial practices prevailing in their environment when making decisions about their respective websites. At *TheNotebook*, editors feel responsible for the commercial strategy of the publication and pay close attention to traffic numbers,

[25] The quote in French is the following: "Après vous avoir parlé en gérant, serait-ce déchoir que de vous parler brièvement, à titre personnel, en tant qu'être humain, qui, voilà bien longtemps, a choisi le superbe métier de journaliste ? (…) Ma plus haute aspiration n'est pas de savourer la folle allégresse, qui vous éprouverez peut-être à comprimer les frais de fonctionnement et à imposer aux autres des sacrifices et des économies. (…) Car, comme vous, je suis journaliste, comme vous, j'aime écrire, et j'ai plus de joie à lire Garcia Marquez ou Styron qu'à éplucher un compte d'exploitation."

[26] For example, it seems clear that "media management" as a concept in journalism schools and journalism associations emerged much later in France than in the United States. A Google N-gram search about "media management" (in English) and "gestion des medias" (in French) shows that the number of occurrences of the term in English language-books rose sharply starting in the 1970s whereas it only moderately increased in the early 1990s in French-language books.

repeatedly asking journalists to participate in achieving this objective. Yet these attempts are to a large extent countered by the staff's passive resistance. Despite editors' pressure to publish more and attract more traffic, the newsroom is largely buffered from market forces. Journalists draw on a strong professional discourse based on ideals of journalistic excellence and independence in order to shield themselves from the editors' demands. Web journalists at *TheNotebook* are able to adopt a distanced attitude towards metrics, but only because editors are the ones who bear the responsibility for maximizing traffic numbers.

To the contrary, at *LaPlace*, editors see it as their primary role to publish "important" pieces, even when they are not popular, which is consistent with the French public service ideal of providing political and cultural guidance to their readers. But they also realize that increasing traffic is essential for the survival of the website, given that the publication faces strong pressures from LeGroupeMag to grow a larger audience. The absence of specialization between editors and staffers left all of them ill-prepared to handle increasing market pressures and the strain of having to maximize traffic numbers.

Conclusion

Does quantification always go hand in hand with isomorphic convergence and the homogenization of organizations? In this chapter, I explored this question by analyzing the uses and understandings of internet metrics at *TheNotebook* in New York and *LaPlace* in Paris. I document processes of convergence between the two organizations, which began using Chartbeat at about the same time in order to count clicks in real-time. Yet paradoxical differences emerged in the ways that editors and journalists interpret traffic numbers at the two websites. In order to

make sense of these differences, I argue that *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* rely on different types of arrangements, which mirror the trajectories and evolutions of the journalistic field in the United States and France.

Hence, this chapter adds nuance to the idea that the introduction of metrics necessarily translates into a growing homogenization between organizations. Such a convergence might be the overarching plan of the people who introduce metrics or indicators in the first place, but what takes place within organizations often diverge from these grand intentions. Drawing on the specific case of web journalists, this article shows how and why the same metric, 'clicks,' is interpreted differently in distinct contexts.

Yet traffic numbers are merely one possible way to judge the work of web journalists. The next chapter focuses on the compensation practices of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* in order to better understand the conflicting ways in which journalistic value is assessed at the two news websites.

CHAPTER V

Which Bloggers Get Paid?

Journalistic Work, Evaluation, and Compensation

What are the cultural determinants of compensation? This chapter examines which writers are paid, how much, and why, at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. I argue that remuneration practices provide a perfect window for exploring "what counts" in given social settings. After delineating the central aspects of the "editorial" and "click-based" modes of evaluation coexisting at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, this chapter analyzes the differences between the compensation systems of the two websites. At *TheNotebook*, a strong separation between editorial and click-based decisions characterizes the website's journalistic production, daily routines, and compensation, the last of which varies greatly depending on the writer. At *LaPlace*, editorial and click-based evaluations overlap. This connected arrangement shapes the daily routines of the newsroom and undermines the website's rules for compensating freelancers and bloggers.

I. Evaluation and compensation: "editorial" and "click-based" definitions of journalistic value

This first section gives the theoretical frame for the rest of the chapter. Before exploring the question of compensation, I start by delineating two competing definitions of journalistic excellence – "editorial" and "click-based" – which coexist at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. After a brief overview of the literature on compensation, I analyze the ways that payments provide a material gauge for the more elusive and contradictory definitions of journalistic value.

1) Ideal-types of the editorial and click-based modes of evaluation

How do *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* define journalistic value? The concept of "mode of evaluation" embraces the cognitive and practical operations by which people in a given social setting categorize and hierarchize individuals, discourses, objects, and practices. Table 4 provides an ideal-typical description (Weber 1978) of the "click-based" and "editorial" evaluations that characterize the two news websites.[1] These modes of evaluation rely on different definitions of journalistic excellence, measurements of success, technological devices, temporal frames, and units of analysis.

[1] As the next sections of this chapter will make clear, this synthetic overview of the two modes of evaluation simplifies a reality which is much more complex.

Table 4. Ideal-types of the editorial and click-based modes of evaluation

Modes of evaluation	**Editorial**	**Click-based**
Definition of journalism	- Original reporting - 5 Ws and inverted pyramid - Background information - Blog posts are not valued - The news dictates the format of the article	- Communicating with the reader - Being "webby," "LOL," "reactive." - Long articles are deemed "boring" - Blog posts are valued - The audience dictates the format of the article
Signal of success and source of authority	-Being followed by the other media outlets and news agencies -Compliments by the editor-in-chief, colleagues, competitors, and important sources	-Number of page views, likes, tweets, -"Going viral," "organic traffic" - Compliment from the editor-in-chief but also from technology and data specialists (SEO, SME)
Device	N/A	-Analytics software programs
Time frame	-Long-term editorial strategy	-Instantaneous, real-time
Relevant unit	-Collective (section, publication)	-Individualized (writer, article)
Larger logic	- Qualitative - Professional	- Quantitative - Market

Different definitions of journalism

As seen in Table 4, the "editorial" and "click-based" modes of evaluation rely on different definitions of journalistic excellence, as well as distinct beliefs regarding best journalistic practices.

The editorial logic draws on traditional criteria of journalistic professionalism as they developed over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Schudson 1978). According to this editorial evaluation, a good article should be "relevant" and "newsworthy," that is, it should relate to current affairs of public interest or importance. It should include original reporting that is accurate and has been verified by sources and documentation. Articles should

have an original angle that differs from the approach taken by other journalists. They should provide some background to the story at hand. In the editorial definition, good articles should respect the traditional formats of journalistic writing: journalists have to keep in mind the five "Ws" ("who, what, when, where, and why") taught during the first year of journalism school. Articles also typically have an "inverted pyramid" structure in which the most relevant information is placed in the first paragraph of the text. Articles can be long if the topic is demanding: it takes space to present and explain complicated phenomena. Finally, according to this editorial definition of journalism, short articles, blog posts that merely link to someone else's information, and tabloid-like content (e.g., sensationalistic crime stories and gossip columns) are looked down upon.

The "click-based" mode of evaluation entails a much more eclectic definition of journalism. According to its advocates, journalism is first and foremost an act of communication with the reader: journalistic articles should provide food for thought for the audience by reporting bits of information that every reader can relate to. Articles should be "light" and "fun." A preferred strategy is to organize articles around life stories and personalized narratives rather than the "inverted pyramid" format or the five "Ws." Journalists are encouraged to use a personal voice and make jokes, in contrast to the impersonal voice that came to characterize most mainstream journalistic articles. According to the click-based criterion, background, context, and relevance to breaking news are not essential. An amusing bit of information (labeled "LOL," for "Laughing Out Loud"), or a moving life story, are enough to justify an article. Long, demanding, and theoretical articles are generally deemed "boring" or not "webby" enough. Conversely, short articles or blog posts that link to competitors' articles are valued, as long as the journalist is "reactive" and participates in an ongoing online conversation that might interest the readers.

These different definitions of journalistic excellence overlap to a large extent with the traditional opposition between "news" and "stories." According to Schudson, "news" is typically judged based on its "truth value," whereas "stories" have a "consummatory value" and should be enjoyable for the readers (Schudson 1978: 89). The format of "stories" first emerged with Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World,* which appealed mostly to a popular audience composed of recent immigrants. The newspaper relied on bold illustrations, attention-grabbing headlines, and sensationalistic stories. These editorial formats constitute the core of the paradigm of "journalism as entertainment." In contrast, Adolph S. Ochs' *New York Times* focused on "news": pure, factual information designed to appeal to wealthier and more educated audience. Such articles thus promoted an alternative paradigm of "journalism as information."

In an interview, Louise, one of the staffers at *LaPlace,* confirms that the distinction between "news" and "stories" still shapes journalistic practices in the digital age:

> Louise: Clicks… It's really about two different conceptions of what it means to be a journalist…One conception despises the other one because it's too sensationalistic ["*racoleur*"]… I mean, there is a vision according to which even a boring article should be done because we, as journalists, have a mission of public service, we have to inform people, we're here to answer the questions of the readers on complicated subjects… And the other vision, well, you take a tiny story in order to tell a big story ["*la petite histoire pour raconter la grande*"], you rely on interviews, testimonies, but without actually doing a lot of research…The tiny story gets many page views… more readers… and we all want our articles to be read! But with the first school, you learn that it is important to convey serious information… If you can do both, it's great (*laughs*). I mean, the first school is more news-oriented ["*c'est plus de l'information*"], journalists do more research… The second school is more like television…

It is clear from her description that Louise is more sympathetic toward the "news-oriented" (her words) or "editorial" (my term) definition of journalism.[2] She sees similarities between the

[2] Her educational background and career might help to explain why she identifies more with the "news" paradigm. Louise is 35 years old. She grew up in a wealthy Parisian suburb, where her mother was a lawyer and her father owned a small company. After high school, she was accepted in *classe préparatoire* at the Lycée Henri IV in Paris.

"click-based" definition of journalism and the one that predominates in commercial television programs, which are more likely to rely on personalized narratives and tabloid-type news in order to appeal to a larger audience (Gitlin 1994).

Different signals of success, sources of authority, and technological devices

The "editorial" and "click-based" modes of evaluation draw on different criteria of success and sources of authority. In the rapidly changing internet landscape, the two criteria also tend to be associated with different technological devices.

According to the editorial criterion, a good article is one that brings new information or a novel interpretation to the journalistic debate. In judging this, what matters is the opinion of other journalists, forming a kind of journalistic peer review, as well as the feedback from respected sources. Several classic descriptions of twentieth-century print newsrooms made this clear. For example, Gans argues that journalists at *Time* and *Newsweek* had "little knowledge about the audience and rejected feedback from it (…). Instead, they filmed and wrote for their superiors and for themselves, assuming that what interested them would interest the audience" (Gans 1979: 230). Similarly, when Darnton evokes his experience as a journalist for several daily newspapers, he explains that: "We really wrote for one another. Our primary reference group was spread around us in the newsroom, or "the snake pit," as some called it. We knew that no one would jump on our stories as quickly as our colleagues; for reporters make the most voracious readers, and they have to win their status anew each day as they expose themselves before their peers in print" (Darnton 1975: 176, see also Dauvin and Legavre 2008 about the

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She later graduated from Sciences Po and attended a prestigious journalism programs in France (ESJ Lille). Louise worked as a freelancer specializing in social and economic issues for twelve years and published a book based on her work, before joining *LaPlace* in 2011. Louise is a highly educated, highly professionalized journalist with an interest for social issues. Her trajectory and attitudes match the elite view of "journalism as information" rather than the popular definition of "journalism as entertainment."

French case). According to the editorial mode of evaluation, the opinions of editors, colleagues, competitors, and sources are the ones that matter.

In contrast, according to the click-based criterion, the most important signals of success come from the audience at large. Feedback is quantitative and includes the number of page views, comments, and whether the article went "viral" based on the number of "likes" and "shares" on Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks. As Bill, Chartbeat's CEO, emphasized in Chapter 4, "In the old world, when you published your article… that was the end of the job. Now it's only the mid-point! Journalists ask us: "how can I build traffic, what's the conversation, how can I promote my content?"" In this view, promoting one's work is part of the writing process, and obtaining a large number of clicks the measure of success.

This is not to say that the opinion of colleagues and other journalists does not matter in the click-based definition. Rather, peer esteem coexists with quantitative measurements of page views and the audience's feedback. For example, if a headline article on a demanding topic does not get as many page views as expected, the "click-based" logic would recommend moving it to a less prominent location on the website, whereas the "editorial" logic would insist on keeping the article in place as long as the article is relevant to the journalistic debate.

Consequently, the two modes of evaluation also invoke different sources of authority. According to the editorial logic, a journalist's editor-in-chief and senior colleagues have the last word in assessing the quality of a given article. This is also the case for the click-based mode of evaluation, but editors also take into account the opinion of data and technology specialists (SEOs, SMEs, and community managers), who know how to interpret traffic numbers.

These different evaluations also imply distinct uses of analytics software programs. Thus, journalists who follow the editorial mode of evaluation do not rely on specific technologies to

measure or visualize the success of an article. According to the editorial criterion, a journalist learns the most through interactions and conversations with his editors and colleagues, in the "snake pit," as Darnton vividly calls it.[3] In contrast, journalists who draw on the click-based definition of journalistic excellence rely on analytics programs such as Chartbeat, Google Analytics, and Omniture, in order to follow the preferences of the readers.

Time and relevant units of analysis

Finally, according to the click-based logic, journalistic work takes place in real-time. Journalists should be "reactive," aware of Twitter and Facebook updates, and follow traffic trends minute-by-minute (Bozckowski 2010, Anderson 2013). They should update their articles continuously. Every writer, article, and headline is scrutinized on Chartbeat. The location of an article on the home page changes constantly depending on the ups and downs of internet traffic. Communication scholars use the metaphor of the news becoming more 'liquid" to describe this evolution: "just like liquid modern society, [*the news*] cannot keep its shape or stay on course for long (Deuze 2008: 851).

The editorial mode of evaluation, in contrast, places less emphasis on continuous updates. If something new occurs, the journalist should start thinking about the best angle for a second article. If an article is updated or corrected, these changes should be acknowledged in the article. More broadly, the editorial logic's unit of analysis is more holistic and long-term: an editorial

[3] For example, Margaret and Sean, who both write for *TheNotebook*, emphasize the benefits of actual interactions with their editors and the other journalists in the newsroom:
Margaret: "Mary is a very good editor! She gets my ideas right away and she's great… It's a very collaborative process. (…) A good editor can tell very quickly whether a story is going to work… The other thing she's good at is taking a couple of sentences and saying, "Instead of saying this big thing you said that big thing," she gets to the heart of it very fast!"
Sean: "It's good to go into the office. I find it helpful to be around. People will tell you, "Hey, did you see this?" And you'll be like, "No, I never heard of that." And you never know when you're going to get a new angle or thought by talking to people… It might also help if you start talking about it with your colleagues."

line is built over time, as a team, either at the section or at the publication level: it does not depend on single articles or specific headlines. This differs from the click-based mode of evaluation, in which the unit of analysis is individualistic and instantaneous.

So far I have proposed an ideal-typical summary of the "click-based" and "editorial" modes of evaluation that coexist at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*. Before turning to the more complex ways in which the two websites manage the tension between these two modes of evaluation, I briefly emphasize why the question of remuneration provides a perfect window for analyzing the coexistence of different value systems within a given social setting.

2) The case of compensation

How do cultural processes shape prices and remuneration? Recent research in economic sociology underlines the connection between evaluation and pricing practices (Beckert and Aspers 2011). When deciding on prices, people need to reach an agreement about "what counts" and why. Thus, processes by which prices are determined are important for understanding the interplay and possible tension between different criteria of evaluation. As Beckert and Aspers emphasize, "valuations according to different scales may lead to conflict over the assessment of the value of a good or an activity" (Beckert and Aspers 2011: 6, Mears 2011b, Velthuis 2005, Fourcade 2011).

Among pricing practices, the case of remuneration is particularly interesting, since it entails a collective agreement about the worth of an individual as a worker. Earlier research on compensation is divided into largely contradictory approaches. First, scholars inspired by the work of Marx and Gramsci underlined the role played by specific remuneration practices (e.g.,

fixed piece rate) in securing workers' consent in a capitalistic system characterized by hegemonic domination rather than sheer coercion (Burawoy 1979). Others analyzed the role of culture in shaping capitalistic production. For example, Biernacki's study of compensation practices on the shop floor of textile plants in England and Germany examines how remuneration mirrored national definitions of labor (Biernacki 1995). On the other side of the political spectrum, a large literature in human-resource management compares the efficiency and merits of different types of compensation: scholars draw on human capital theory to describe the incentives attached to fixed- versus variable payments (Lazear and Shaw 2009, Baker, Jensen, and Murphy 1988, see Sørensen 1994 for a review). A third line of research focuses on the role of market and social closure in securing higher wages for professionals and elite occupations (Larson 1977, Paradeise 1984, Karpik 2000, Weeden 2002, Godechot 2007, Grégoire 2009, François 2010, Rivera 2012, Steiner 2013, Piketty 2014). But there is little analysis of how compensation directly relates to the question of evaluation, despite repeated calls for further work on the topic (Zelizer 1996, Bourdieu and Heilbron 2005, Beckert and Aspers 2011, Vatin 2009).

One instance of research directly explores the connection between evaluation and compensation (Stark 2009). Stark documents the coexistence of two principles of evaluation – a socialist one and a capitalist one – in a large Hungarian factory in the 1980s. The "official" socialist payment decided by the plant manager included regular wages and bonuses, but workers considered it to be disconnected from 'real' professional worth. Dissatisfied with this system, the workers created a semi-private organization operating within the firm that could sell its products on the open market. The workers then developed a different system of compensation, a "payment according to work," where they negotiated what they thought was a fair payment. Yet this

system was hard to implement, mostly because people under- or over-estimated the amount of work to be done.

The key finding in Stark's research is that the workers' efforts to manage the tension between socialist and capitalist definitions of professional value were unsuccessful. Whereas most of the disagreements between workers were ostensibly about compensation, he shows that such disputes in fact reflected question about the proper order of worth in the firm. In a later installment of his research, Stark emphasized the benefits of "heterarchical" organizations where different valuation principles coexist (Stark 2009).

Stark's ethnographic research stakes out a promising path of inquiry, revealing not only the deeply cultural underpinnings of compensation practices, but also the reasons why compensation might be the most tangible, objective instantiation of people's value in an organization. The broader literature on pricing and Stark's work on compensation and evaluation frame the main question that will be explored in the rest of this chapter: do compensation practices at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* mirror the separate and connected arrangements between modes of evaluation that characterize the two organizations? If so, what are the practical consequences of these respective systems for the remuneration of writers working for the two websites?

II. *TheNotebook*: a marked separation between the two modes of evaluation

This section examines the strong boundaries that separate editorial and click-based modes of evaluation at *TheNotebook* and emphasizes their effects on the U.S. website's remuneration practices.

1) TheNotebook's *editorial strategy*

How can a news website maintain editorial excellence while at the same time attracting many page views? *TheNotebook*'s editors found an ingenious solution for publishing more content while maintaining the editorial identity of the publication.

"Fast Notebook" and "Slow Notebook"

Since 2008, *TheNotebook*'s editors have established a clear distinction between the "fast" and "slow" parts of the website.

The "fast Notebook" consists of short pieces of text that often concern breaking news and "fun" stories. These pieces typically draw on the aggregation of content published elsewhere. They are written by staff and freelance journalists and are called "blogs."[4] "Blog posts" are typically shorter than articles (approximately 500 words long, whereas articles are about 1,000 words long). They are more "reactive" in the sense that journalists are expected to write and publish them quickly, usually on the same day as the event or information motivating the post. Writers do not have to go through the full copy-editing circuit when they do blog posts; they are often allowed to publish the posts themselves, which accelerates the publication process. *TheNotebook* features blog posts about a variety of subjects, including breaking news, the economy, politics, TV series, food, and gender and sexuality. Everybody at *TheNotebook* explains that blog posts have relatively low editorial value but are very successful in terms of traffic.

[4] As this chapter will make clear, the meaning of the term "blog" varies widely depending on the online publication under consideration (Anderson 2013). In its original form, a blog – the word is a contraction of "web log" – is an online site consisting of discrete entries posted in reverse chronological order. Blogs are usually associated with a more casual writing style, short and frequent posts, and an interactive component involving the readers (Boyd 2006).

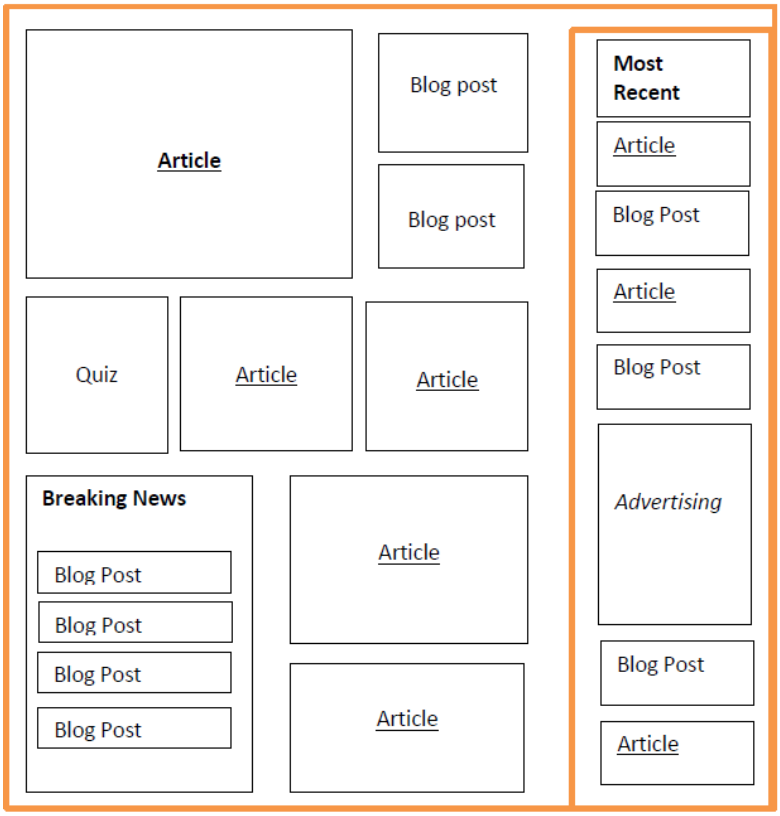
In contrast, the "Slow Notebook" is made up of longer pieces with higher editorial value. These longer articles are more carefully researched and edited. They are intended to mark the reputation of the website as a smart, original publication that has a distinctive voice about subjects ranging from politics to culture.

"Slow" and "fast" articles appear mixed together without any clear label distinguishing them on the homepage of *TheNotebook*. This led several contributors and observers to denounce the website as a "bazaar" where one never knows before clicking on an article whether it is going to be a full-scale piece or a short blog post[5].

Figure 5 provides a diagram of the website's homepage on the morning of April 18. Out of the 18 pieces featured on the home page, only 8 were full-sized articles; the remaining 10 pieces were blog posts. Blog posts are never featured as the large article on the top left of the home page.[6] Apart from this rule, they can be posted everywhere on the homepage.

[5] See Aaron's citation in Chapter 3.
[6] See Tom's citation in Chapter 4.

Figure 5. Homepage of *TheNotebook*



Homepage of *TheNotebook*, April 18, 2014. 11:30am

Despite the absence of a clear separation between "articles" and "blog posts" on the homepage, most of *TheNotebook*'s staffers and freelancers know where they stand in this distinction between "slow" and "fast" writing. For example, Jack, who writes short blog posts for the breaking news section, describes his typical work day:

> Jack: I wake up at 7, I start reading the news. If there's some kind of breaking news I'll sit down at my desk right away. If not, I'll start working one hour later. The idea is to be the first responder when something important happens. At *TheNotebook*, when something happens, the writers think about it, they write a piece… and they react six hours later with a thoughtful, great piece. My role is to put something out there immediately. Not six hours later. It's important for the readers to know that they can come to *TheNotebook* or stay on *TheNotebook* for this kind of breaking news. […] On an average day, I write say 6 or 7 posts. […] We use the same software as the rest of the staff, Adobe Feature, but we're on our own, we have to be faster. It's not like them, they're slower, they take more time editing.

Jack draws on the click-based mode of evaluation when he explains how speed and reactivity are an essential part of his work routine. He also explicitly mentions the readers, whose expectations should be taken into account when deciding what to publish. Jack distinguishes his work from the rest of the articles featured on *TheNotebook*, which he describes as "thoughtful" but "slow."

In contrast, journalists who write for the "slow" part of the website repeatedly draw on the editorial mode of evaluation when describing their work. For example, under the direction of the current editor-in-chief, *TheNotebook* started a program for long-form journalism: every journalist on staff can take up to six paid weeks in order to do research and write longer articles that they might turn into books subsequently. Sam, the editor-in-chief, and Benjamin, the managing editor, explain the benefits of this long-form project:

> Sam: We also did a lot of long-form journalism… It's something obviously I'm very proud of. Some of these projects are incredibly innovative, some of them are just really good reported stories. But we made an explicit investment in long-form journalism. It is our belief that for *TheNotebook* to make a difference we can't be, we can't serve little nuggets all the time, we need to show them longer stories. (…) If you do only blogs… I think that we would start to diminish our brand, so we have to go in depth in issues. And sometimes these longer series do have economic value… sometimes they don't… but they have a huge morale value for the staff… People like it and it's an opportunity that they really wouldn't get at a lot of other places.
>
> Benjamin: Hopefully everything we do is thoughtful… But long-form pieces can go places that a shorter piece can't. One of the most, if not the most successful long-form piece we did was Emma's project. She started covering that beat almost like a newspaper reporter would have. Eventually she wrote a 10,000 words essay that then became a central element of her book. It was great for *TheNotebook*: the readers were really interested in it… It was wildly successful in terms of traffic. That's the best-case scenario… But in addition to that, Emma became the go-to expert on [the topic]. She was on television multiple times and when she goes on a show it says, "Emma, senior editor at *TheNotebook*" so there is growing brand awareness…

Sam and Benjamin provide a set if interesting justifications for the long-form series. Sam first draws on the editorial mode of evaluation: he explains that he is "proud" of these "incredibly innovative" and "really good" stories." He also emphasizes the "morale value" of long-term pieces for the staff. Yet he also keeps in mind the economic aspect of this long-form project. Sam describes it as an "investment," which is good for the "brand" of the magazine and sometimes – but not always – has immediate "economic value" (by which he means traffic). Benjamin echoes this view: he argues that long-form pieces are great for *TheNotebook* because they increase the prestige and the "brand awareness" of the publication while also being successful in terms of traffic (though he admits that Emma's piece was a best-case scenario). Thus, even when they draw on the editorial logic, *TheNotebook*'s editors keep in mind the long-term economic benefits of the project.

In addition to staffers dedicated alternatively to the "fast" and "slow" parts of the website, several staffers explain how they manage to write for both sides of the publication:

> Noah: So there was this idea that *TheNotebook* would have a "fast" and "slow" component and that we needed to figure out the right mix. But some people on staff are just "slow Notebook," they don't want to do the fast stuff. And they are some people who are only fast. And some people are a mix.
> I was more of a "slow Notebook" but I have kind of a trashy mindset. In a way, I'm a bit of a hybrid, which explains why I was able to stay as long as I wanted to stay. I don't like content for the sake of content, it really annoys me when people just throw things up without working hard, I could never dash off a piece in an afternoon instead of researching and reporting for a day and a half... But on the other hand, I wasn't super slow. The stories that would interest me get a lot of clicks. I am interested in weird news, things that are little bit twisted, and I'm not interested in serious things. (…) I think my aesthetics were sellable but in terms of temperament I was "slow Notebook."

> Margaret: I write two pieces for *TheNotebook* every month and then I blog for them weekly. Well, the difference is really length… A longer piece is going to be 800 words and up and a blog post is going to be, typically, less than 500. And blog posts are less… You can make a single point in a blog post and that's fine. So it's not just a question of length, it's also the topic that's dictating the length. There is also more of a high bar for one than the other…

> I hadn't done blogging before and I kind of enjoy it. You are forced to stay on top of the news. And there is an instant satisfaction… you know, sometimes you slave over a piece for five days and it gets no attention and then you toss up a blog entry in an hour and a half and it gets tons, tons of attention and comments and you don't even think it's that good! So you try not to measure the worth of things based on how many readers' comments and "likes" you get… but it can be gratifying to put something up and get tons of responses.

Noah is very conscious of the distinction between "slow" and "fast" writers; he is able to categorize other writers as belonging to one or the other category. Yet he describes himself as a hybrid: "slow" by "temperament," but interested in "salacious" topics that are successful online. In this self-presentation, however, he predominantly draws on the editorial mode of evaluation to justify his position, for example when he criticizes writers who "just throw things up without working hard." If we believe him, he occupies a privileged middle point: Noah is part of the "slow Notebook" (and receives some of the prestige associated with the editorial logic) while also inadvertently reaping the benefits of the "fast Notebook" (and the quantitative success associated with the click-based criteria). Noah argues that this double strength is what allowed him to stay at *TheNotebook*.

In contrast, Margaret, who is a freelance writer for *TheNotebook*, does not know (or at least does not mention) the official distinction between "slow" and a "fast" parts of the website. Yet she comes to the same conclusions as Noah. Margaret explains that the "bar" is not as high for blog posts: it is possible to make a "single point" in a blog post whereas an article has to elaborate a more complex argument. She implicitly draws on the editorial criterion to emphasize the lesser value and shorter length of blog posts. However, she also relies on the click-based mode of justification when she describes the "instant gratification" of blogging: one can get "a ton of attention" (e.g., page views, likes, and comments) without "slaving" over a piece for more than an hour and a half.

Hence, *TheNotebook*'s editors make explicit efforts to distinguish between traffic-oriented blog posts and more prestigious feature articles. By establishing a clear distinction between the "fast" and the "slow" parts of the website on the production side, editors largely separate the click-based mode of evaluation from the editorial mode of evaluation: blog posts which attract many page views and comments are less prestigious than feature articles and long-form pieces.

This constitutes an extension of *TheNotebook*'s "separate" arrangement described in Chapter 4. The U.S. website relies on a strong division of labor between editors and staffers regarding their use of web metrics; the roles of the staffers and the writing process itself are also highly specialized. Editors make sure that staffers and freelancers know where they stand in this distinction between the "slow" and "fast" parts of the publication.

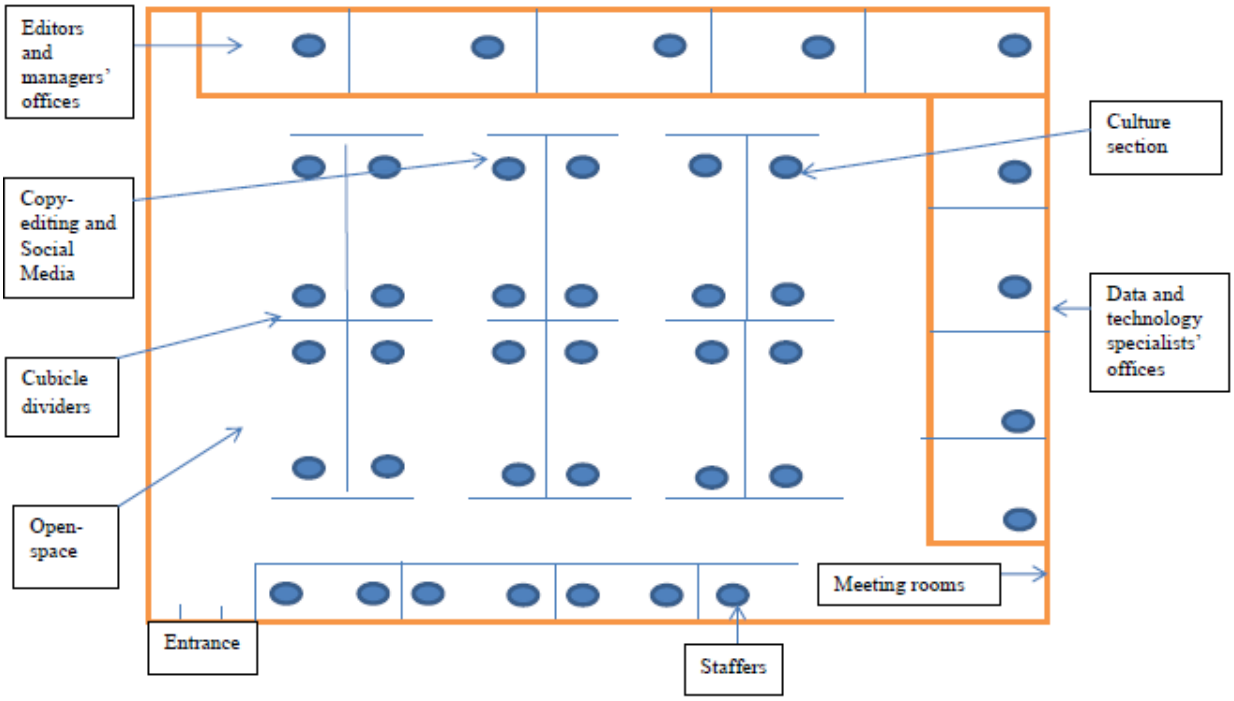
Workplace routines at *TheNotebook*

My ethnographic observations at *TheNotebook*'s offices support this idea of a separation between the click-based and the editorial modes of evaluation. First, the separation between the two modes of evaluation is inscribed in the material organization of *TheNotebook*'s offices.

Figure 6 is a schematic plan of *TheNotebook*'s offices (the dots represent people). The newsroom is organized around a large open space, where all of the staff writers and some of the section editors sit. There are closed offices for top editors, managers, and data and technology specialists on the top and right sides of the open-space. Hierarchical relations are clearly materialized in the spatial organization of the office: top editors and managers have individual offices with windows; data and technology specialists have individual offices with no window; section editors, copy-editors, and staffers are in the open-space, which is divided into about ten

different cubicles. Cubicles are loosely organized by section (culture, law and politics, video, etc.) and function (copy-editing, social media editing, etc.).

Figure 6. Map of *TheNotebook*'s offices



During my days of observation at *TheNotebook*, I noticed that the interactions that take place between staff writers and section editors in the open-space differ from the interactions that take place between top editors in the closed offices. The most traffic-oriented interactions take place in the closed offices, when top editors and data specialists meet to talk about data and traffic.[7] For example, there is a dedicated "traffic meeting" every Thursday at 11am with all the editors. There is also a meeting at 3:30pm every day that takes place in Tom's office in order to decide which headlines will be promoted on top of the home page. This meeting usually includes Tom,

[7] The group of people who most often discussed traffic includes Moira, the data specialist; Josh, the Social Media Editor; Tom, the home page editor; Benjamin, the managing editor; Mary, the deputy-editor; Sam, the editor-in-chief; as well as a couple of other editors and copy-editors.

Benjamin, Mary, and sometimes Sam and Josh. For half an hour, the editors mostly talk about traffic numbers and decide which articles to promote based on how they are faring online. Examples of sentences and interactions that take place during this editorial meeting include:

- Tom: "I'm on Chartbeat… On top of our ranking is "He's not ready for marriage," with 7,616 readers" (March 20, 2013)
- Mary: "The podium is not killing it right now… Maybe we should put the article about Obama" (October 17, 2012)
- Tom: "What about the explainer about China manipulating its currency?" Mary: "It's the first pitch I ever did when I first arrived at *TheNotebook*… and no one wanted it because no one reads it, it's boring" Tom: "Too bad, because it's doing really well right now." (October 18, 2012)

In contrast, most of the interactions that take place between staffers in the open space do not involve traffic. Journalists communicate both directly, by talking to each other, and through a collective emailing system. When they chat directly, they banter about the behavior and statements of politicians, make critical comments about books, movies, and TV series, and send videos or pictures, but they very rarely mention traffic. I also observed the group chat that staffers use to communicate over email: the exchanges that I witnessed never involved traffic-related comments.[8] Similarly, I attended two weekly editorial meetings during which traffic was not mentioned.

[8] For example, I observed Josh (Social Media Editor) on October 16, 2012. From this observation note, it seems that Josh draws solely on the editorial criterion when he emails editors and staffers, whereas in his email exchange with Moira, the data specialist, he draws on the click-based criterion. I noted: "*Josh*: "Now I'm going to watch the video of Obama in the rose garden, to see if he really said "acts of terror" or not. We've been having this debate about it [*over email, with Emma and others*], I believe we should be accurate about the facts, and I think that no one really does that. *Josh read a thread and then emails back Emma, Tom, and Will*: "Obama did say "an act of terror". *Then Josh shows me another email with a picture of many people dressed as pandas and entitled*: "Sam's worst nightmare." Josh: "This is an email from a former intern, it's a running joke, Sam hates pandas." *Josh then clicks again on the group email and says:* "Now I think I'm the only one to think that Obama wasn't being weasely." *He*

This impression is confirmed by the declarations of several staffers and columnists, including Sean and Jack:

> AC: Do they often talk about traffic at the office?
> Sean: During the day… Chatting around the office and stuff… I don't think so. Sometimes you'll hear… I would say, much more often you'll hear people say, "Oh I really liked that piece" or "I thought that was a really smart take." And once in a while you will hear someone say, "do you know how well that piece is doing?" Once or twice when they mentioned the traffic it was kind of a surprise, it was an outlier, they may talk about it, like "oh my god, look at the traffic, this piece is blowing up." Once in a while you'll hear that. But much more often they talk about the journalism itself.
>
> Jack: My [*breaking news*] posts are doing great in terms of traffic, it has been a success, and the content is very good so the editors are happy. I'm aware that the management is happy with it. But with the staff… It's different, they don't care. When a video goes viral and gets many more page views than a long-form article… Well, no one at *TheNotebook* will think that it is of better value. I've never seen that.

This description of the material organization of *TheNotebook*'s newsroom and the publication's daily routines support the idea of a separate arrangement. At *TheNotebook*, metrics operate in a contained zone: they involve specific people (editors and data specialists), a specific part of the website (the "fast" Notebook), and specific times and locations (the 11am weekly meeting and the 3:30pm daily meeting, which both take place behind closed doors). In contrast, staffers only rarely mention metrics: discussion about traffic numbers are not part of the daily routine of the open-space office. In sum, *TheNotebook* established strong symbolic boundaries – material, organizational, and temporal – separating the click-based mode of evaluation from the editorial mode of evaluation in the daily functioning of the newsroom.[9]

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goes back to Social Flow and works on re-titling articles: "These anonymous SWAT team prank calls on celebrities really got out of hand." He receives an email from Moira: "The post on the war veterans is really going well. Maybe we can put it up later when the debate is winding down."

[9] Symbolic boundaries are defined by Lamont and Molnar as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to distinguish people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 168, see also Gieryn 1983)

2) Compensation at TheNotebook*: variation and autonomy*

I now turn to *TheNotebook*'s compensation practices and analyze whether they mirror the separate arrangement of the organization. This section focuses on freelance rates, which provide a clear illustration of the connection between remuneration and evaluation.

Freelance rates and their evolution over time

I interviewed 12 journalists who had worked for *TheNotebook* as freelancers as some point between 2011 and 2013. Many freelancers explained that they had been paid between $100 and $500 for their articles, the most common rate being $300. Freelancers who wrote blog posts for the "Fast Notebook" part of the website were typically paid $75-$100.

> Mara: The editor was very straightforward. When he said he would take the pitch, he told me it was $300. Then the second piece I wrote I didn't ask. You know, I was very happy with the $300. It's the most an online outlet has paid me for anything, even though it's a bit hard to judge because it's a long piece and everything. And then when I wrote about the cheerleaders for them, I didn't ask about the rates because I was happy with what I had gotten before but he then offered me an extra $100 to help with the slideshow.
>
> John: The small ones [*blog posts*] are all $75 apiece. The larger ones… the first one was $200 and the second one was $300. I don't know why it's different. I was so busy that I didn't even ask. And when I realized, it was like three month later, so I didn't ask about it. I'm trying to pitch another article so we will see how it goes…

Mara, 26, was paid $300 each for her two pieces on high school sports. John, 29, wrote two articles about science for *TheNotebook*: he was paid $200 for the first one and $300 for the second one, although he does not know why the rate changed (and did not ask).

Several editors and freelancers also emphasized that *TheNotebook*'s current freelance rates are very low compared to what they used to be.

> Sam: A story that we paid $1,200 for in 1996… we might pay $200 today.
>
> Aaron: When I began writing this column, I was paid $1,200. And then around 2003 they cut my pay, and also cut the pay of all contributors who were making… a lot. But they assured me that they had grandfathered me in because I had been around for a long time… I still had a pay cut but I was getting $800, while the average person would get $400 or $500. I mean, I was still getting more than the going rate. Then a few years later I convinced them to go up to $1,000 on the basis of inflation alone. They kind of relented… and then this fall they cut it again, down to $500.

Sam's assertion is blunt: *TheNotebook*'s average rate for freelance pieces has been cut by a factor of six – from $1,200 to $200 – between 1996 and 2012. Aaron's interview confirms this decline. Aaron, who is a tenured professor at a public university, was first paid $1,200 for his history pieces in the late 1990s. Fifteen years later, in spite of his repeated negotiations with *TheNotebook*'s editors, he was paid $500 for the same pieces. Thus, *TheNotebook*'s freelance budget decreased dramatically over time.[10]

Deciding on freelance rates: a large amount of variation

TheNotebook does not have a flat freelance rate. Hence, how do editors decide which freelance rate to offer a writer? Sam, the editor-in-chief, explains that remuneration tends to be highly idiosyncratic:

> Sam: So the actual rates now… I mean it varies, there are certain people who are under contract with us who make more and others who make less… it depends on the… particulars of it.

[10] Several staffers also noted that the number of full-time employees with benefits had shrunk over time For example, when Jane was first hired as an editorial assistant in 2008, she was a full-time employee with standard benefits. Four years later, the newly hired editorial assistants were paid $10 the hour and did not receive benefits. Jane: "My salary was bad but it was actually better than was other places offered me for the same title. And I got full benefits, you know, 401(k), dental, all that stuff. But the editorial assistant we hired in the last months I was there was paid, I think it was $10 an hour, and he had no healthcare, no benefits of any kind. And there were hiring more and more people in that bottle."

Citing the "particulars," Sam describes the most striking aspect of *TheNotebook*'s compensation system: the fact that there is no single rule for deciding on compensation. Senior editors have a great deal of autonomy in deciding of the right rate to apply on a case-by-case basis. For example, Emma, a senior editor, says that she offers varying rates to her writers. She explains that she takes different criteria into account when deciding on the rate:

> Emma: The contributors who contribute episodically… They're not paid a lot… $100 or $200 for the legal pieces, and up to $400 for the gender pieces. It depends on the time they spend on the article, and also whether they are journalists who are supporting themselves with their writing. The legal pieces are paid less because it's only lawyers and judges and they don't care about the money. On the other hand, [*a writer*] who writes on sciences and technology, she's paid more, $400, because her articles are really great, she's been with us for a long time, it's exactly the line of *TheNotebook*, and also she does well on traffic.

According to Emma, the contributors in her section are paid between $100 and $400 for their articles. She describes the complex set of determinants that enter in her decision: the time spent on the piece, the quality of the article, the writers' fit with the editorial line of the website, whether the writer is supporting herself with her writing, and how long the writer has been working for *TheNotebook*. Emma also notes the importance of traffic. When explaining why a specific writer is paid more than the others, she lists several arguments belonging to the editorial mode of evaluation, before concluding: "and also she does well on traffic." In other words, Emma weights the relative importance of editorial and click-based criteria depending on the writer.

In some exceptional cases, editors may decide not to pay a writer. Benjamin, the managing editor, and Alyssa, a section editor, explain:

> Benjamin: There have been occasions where we're working with someone who has a new book and they are willing to essentially trade work for the exposure. But there are also cases like that where we paid people for their work… It's on a case-by-case basis.
>
> Alyssa: I work with 70 writers. [Rates] are a complicated thing… It depends on what they were paid before. I ask the previous editor or the other editors and I pay them the same amount. For people who are not professional writers… like tenured professors, they're used to writing all the time, we don't pay them. But that's only a couple of people. Also we don't pay people who have a book coming up, it's like promotional material, an excerpt from the book. And the others are paid a couple of hundred dollars.

Benjamin and Alyssa explain that there are exceptional cases where people are not paid for their pieces. Such cases include people who just published a book, since they consider this to be "promotional material" for the writer. In addition, tenured professors who "write all the time" are sometimes not compensated for their publications on the website.

In other cases, editors decide to pay freelance writers at a much higher rate than average. For example, Sean and Margaret, who both write for *TheNotebook*, describe their remuneration:

> Sean: Each year I produce… about thirty stories, plus four multi-part features or longer articles… That's about 50 articles. I'm on contract. […] My high point was in maybe 2006-2007, I was making $72,000 from *TheNotebook*. It's $65,000 now, something like that.
>
> Margaret: It gets all lumped in one sum, which is $1,600 a month. I get that for blogging two times a week and writing two articles. So it has never been clear to me what is for what but I would estimate that it's $600 for each piece. So that's 1,200 and 400 bucks for the blogs… a month.

Sean and Margaret both started to work for *TheNotebook* as occasional freelancers. They were soon proposed annual contracts. Sean, who is 38 years old, was formerly a staff writer at a large national magazine. He is now paid $65,000 for about fifty articles per year, which amounts to approximately $1,300 per article. Margaret, 36, is a former staff writer and editor at a leading national daily newspaper. She is now paid $1,200 for an article and $400 for a blog post. These rates are much higher than the ones described by Sam, Emma, Alyssa, and Benjamin: Margaret

is paid four times more than regular freelancers for her articles and five times more for her blog posts.

Yet these high payments also make sense given the previous criteria brought forward by the editors: Sean and Margaret support themselves with their writing: they do not have another job and they have been writing for *TheNotebook* for some time. Likewise, they are both mid-career journalists who were at some point on staff at prestigious publications. Finally, they have an annual contract with *TheNotebook*, which means that the editors can count on their weekly articles and blog posts.

Do freelancers know how much variation there is between the different rates? Knowledge about compensation is highly hierarchized. Top editors and section editors have a panoptical view of the different rates and the different circles of contributors to the website. Regular contributors who are on contract and receive higher rates than occasional contributors know that they are privileged. Occasional contributors who receive a higher rate than average, like Aaron, also know that they are paid more than the average but not exactly how much. Younger freelancers like John and Mara do not have any information about the compensation structure at *TheNotebook*.

In sum, *TheNotebook* relies on a two-tier compensation system. Most freelance writers are compensated, but the rates vary significantly: the ratio between the highest freelance rate and the lowest rate is 13: 1 ($1,300 for Sean compared to $100 for Emma's lowest paid feature articles). Editors have high levels of autonomy in deciding which rates to propose; they describe how they rely on a mixture of editorial and click-based criteria when deciding on compensation. The exact balance between the two is at the discretion of the editors, who emphasize the

singularity of each situation. As the next section will make clear, *LaPlace* developed a different system.

III. *LaPlace*: a constant overlap between conflicting modes of evaluation

LaPlace does not rely on the same division of labor and specialization as *TheNotebook*. This section examines how the connected arrangement prevailing at the French website has significant consequences for its editorial content and remuneration practices.

1) *Daily editorial routines at* LaPlace*: fuzzy boundaries*

Contrary to *TheNotebook, LaPlace* does not make a clear distinction between "fast" and "slow" sections. Even though the French editors and staffers also distinguish between "articles" and "blog posts," the meanings attached to these terms differ. In this section, I describe the editorial taxonomy at *LaPlace* before exploring how the click-based and editorial modes of evaluation are intertwined in the daily routines of the newsroom.

Multiple editorial formats

Editors and journalists at *LaPlace* rely on many different categories to describe the content published on the website. The main terms are "articles" (usually called "*papier*" in French), "Lookout" pieces ("*Vigie,*" also called "HuffPo,"), blog posts ("*post de blog*"), and "testimonies" ("*témoignages"*).

The first category, "article," is fairly similar to what we saw at *TheNotebook*. Articles are original journalistic pieces that are 1,000 words long on average (a length that corresponds to 5,000 characters or "*signes*" in French), which is about the same length as at *TheNotebook.* Articles are mostly written by staff journalists and freelancers, but *LaPlace*'s top editors (André, Philippe, and Marina) also frequently contribute. As of September 2012, the writer who had published most of the articles on the website was André (the chairman), with 2,408 articles. Philippe came in fifth, with 1,851 articles.[11] The copy-editing circuit for articles involves at least one senior editor (usually Marina or Philippe) and one copy editor. Only senior editors and copy editors can publish articles on the home page of the website.

The second category is "Lookout" pieces, which are also nicknamed "Huff Po" pieces in reference to the kind of articles published on *The Huffington Post*. "HuffPo" pieces are short articles (three paragraphs maximum, about 500 words) that summarize and provide a new angle on a piece of information published by another news organization. Philippe and Alexandre describe this editorial format:

> Philippe: We have a format of paper that's called a "HuffPo," in our slang. A HuffPo is when we steal… when we write a paper based on someone else's information, with a link.
>
> Alexandre: We're also supposed to write HuffPo pieces. It's called HuffPo because *The Huffington Post* invented this model… It works like this: you see some important news in another newspaper, *Le Parisien* or whatever... You use this information, not by saying "*Le Parisien* said that" and summarizing it, but you write "this news revealed by *Le Parisien* is interesting because" and then you give a new angle, a new point of view, it's quick and easy to do.

"Lookout" or "HuffPo" pieces are written by staffers and editors. They are lightly edited; staffers can publish the posts themselves. "HuffPos" can either be published in the central column of the homepage or in a dedicated column located on the left size of the homepage (see Figure 7 below).

[11] See Chapter 7.

As was the case at *TheNotebook*, there is no easy way for the reader to distinguish between "HuffPo" pieces and full-sized articles. "Lookout" pieces are *LaPlace*'s equivalent of *TheNotebook*'s "blog posts."

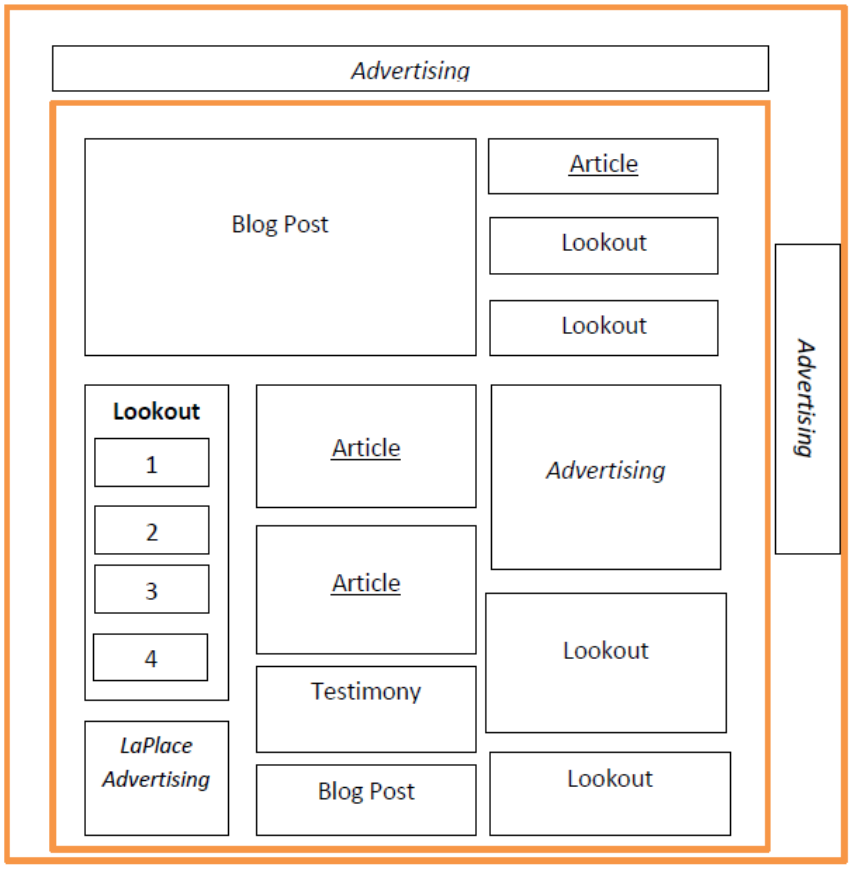
Interestingly, the term "blog" takes on a different meaning at *LaPlace*. "Blogs posts" constitute a third important – but vaguely defined – editorial format. Blog posts are articles which are part of an ongoing series of pieces written by a single individual (the "blogger") who is not a professional journalist. According to the staffers' description, "bloggers" are amateurs or experts (academics and politicians, for example) who want to share their opinion with a larger audience but do not intend to make a living based on their writing. Contrary to *TheNotebook*, "blog posts" at *LaPlace* are typically not shorter than regular articles.[12] They are always edited by senior editors and copy editors. Editors rely on a simplified Content Management System (CMS) to publish the posts online. Blog posts are usually published in the central column of the home page; they also sometimes appear on top of the home page.

The last editorial format consists of "testimonies" ("*témoignages*"). Like "blog posts," "testimonies" are written by non-journalists, but they are not part of a series of articles. Internet users are invited to share their experience and opinion about a specific subject. If *LaPlace* is interested in the piece, senior and copy-editors help edit the piece, which is later published on the home page. Many testimonies appear on top of the home page. They are highly popular online in terms of traffic.[13] As editors and staffers repeatedly emphasize, "blogs" and "testimonies" are part of the "participatory DNA" of the website.

These different formats coexist on the homepage of the website, often without clear distinctions between them.

[12] They are on average longer than regular articles, see Chapter 7.
[13] See Chapter 7.

Figure 7. Homepage of *LaPlace*



April 18, 2014, 1:15pm

As can be seen in Figure 7, out of the 14 articles that appear on *LaPlace*'s homepage on April 18, 2014, only 3 are full-size articles (compared to 8 out of 18 for *TheNotebook* on the same day); 6 are "lookout" or "HuffPo" pieces (compared to 10 out of 18 at *TheNotebook*); and 2 are blog posts.

In contrast to *TheNotebook*, there is no division of labor between staffers at *LaPlace* regarding "slow" and "fast" publications. Every journalist (including the editors) alternates between writing long feature articles, producing short "HuffPo" pieces, and managing several blogs relating to her area of expertise or beat (see "the battle for the audience" email in Chapter

4). There are more editorial formats at *LaPlace* than at *TheNotebook* due to the participatory component of the publication.

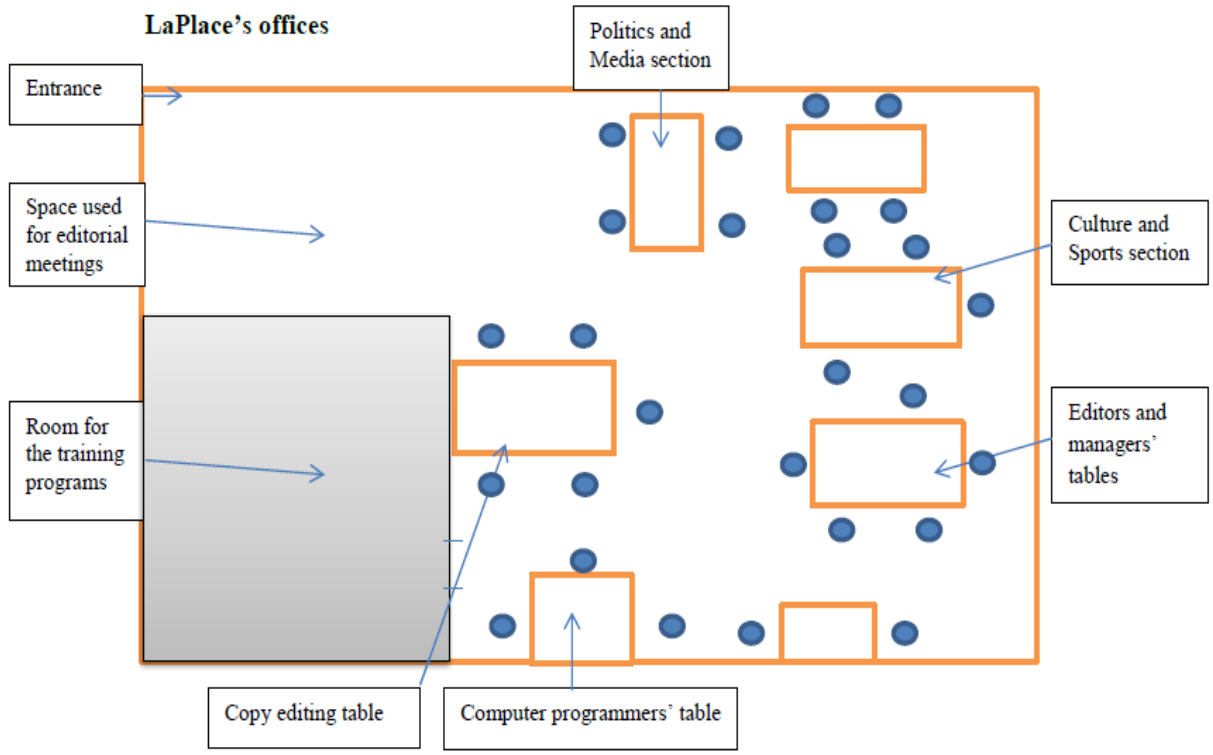
The daily life of the website: overlap between editorial and click-based evaluations

LaPlace is a much noisier newsroom than *TheNotebook.*[14] Journalists are constantly chatting and making jokes. They stand up and move to other tables to talk with their colleagues. Editors frequently walk to the staff's tables or the copy-editing table to discuss issues about articles. Staffers and editors often go out for cigarette and coffee breaks on the rooftop of the building, which has a panoramic view of Paris and is used as an informal meeting place.

The high noise level is due in part to the spatial organization of *LaPlace'*s offices, since everybody – staff writers, editors, management, computer developers, and administrative and marketing staff – works in the same open space (see Figure 8 for a schema of the newsroom; the dots represent individuals).

[14] This impression was confirmed by a French journalist, Audrey, whom I interviewed in New York. Audrey had worked at the two news organizations and explained: "The main difference is that here [*at TheNotebook*] no one talks… It's crazy, no one talks, they do everything over email, even when it's with the person who's right in front of them, in the same office! It's an American thing… In France, the editors growl [*grognent*] when they're not happy… A real newsroom, in my opinion, is a place where you hear people live, talk, discuss… "

Figure 8. Map of *LaPlace*'s offices



As can be seen in Figure 8, *LaPlace*'s office is an L-shaped open space; seven large tables occupy the main space. There are no cubicle dividers and no separate offices (except for the grey zone in the diagram, called the "dead room," where journalists organize the training programs in web journalism). The "bosses' table" ("*la table des chefs*") is located in the middle of the space, in between the staffers' tables, the computer programmers' table, and the copy-editors' table. Given the structure of the newsroom, people can overhear everything that is spoken at a normal conversational volume in the open space.

The interactions that take place among staffers and editors in *LaPlace*'s office are highly diverse. One striking aspect is how often journalists talk about traffic and "clicks" ("*clics*" in French). Contrary to *TheNotebook*, where the click-based mode of evaluation is largely absent

from the open-space, *LaPlace*'s staffers and editors constantly switch back and forth between editorial and click-based justifications when discussing each other's articles. The following observation illustrates this phenomenon.

Observation *LaPlace*
February 2, 2012

Marc, a student at Sciences Po who is doing a six-month internship at *LaPlace*, specializes in science, technology, and internet-related topics. In the morning, Marc finished writing an article listing several different ways to erase one's traces on the web. The article uses an amusing style while providing helpful advice and a critical analysis of the monitoring devices on the web. The first sentence of the article is representative of the style of *LaPlace*: "Surfing on the web is like jumping in wet cement: it leaves indelible traces (almost) everywhere." At several points during the day, Marc's article becomes the center of the editors' attention.

11:30am
Marina (managing editor) to Lucie (copy-editor): "What about the headline… "The little guide to the web"? No, it sounds too condescending. "The guide to…" And what about the image? [*the image shows footprints on melting snow*]
Lucie: I like it. It's beautiful, melting snow…
Marina: Yes, but it's only melting snow… [*To Marc*]: This image… it's cute but it doesn't connect to the topic… The rest is great. I don't know anything about these things and I found your paper very clear.

3pm
Lucie to Marina: Marc's piece is doing great… I'm looking at Chartbeat and it gets a lot of visitors… Should we turn it into a super-headline [*a banner that fills the entire top third of the homepage*]?
[*Several staff writers who overhear the exchange stand up and come to Lucie's table to check Chartbeat with her. Marina comes close as well*]
Marina: I like the new headline, "Surfing incognito on the web."
Lucie: Should we do it? Come on, let's do it!
Marina: But then we need a PDLP [*the second space on the homepage, where the article was originally located*[15]]… Do we have an extra one? No? What about you guys in the sport section? Nothing? Never mind. Sure, let's do the super-headline.

5:30pm
André (Chairman, who just came back from a meeting): That's a great headline piece! And it's doing well too, the number of visitors is huge, even without Google… Maybe we only

[15] See Chapter 4.

get readers who feel guilty about something they did online ["*des lecteurs qui ont quelque chose à se reprocher*"]… But we don't have to feel guilty about anything ["*mais nous on n'a rien à se reprocher*"]. Already 20,000 visitors…

Marina: But it's not only a guide to erase your dirty secrets… I mean, it's also about privacy. What if the CIA forces Google to give up all of its data?

Marc: Yeah, well not really, but there is some political relevance to the piece…

6pm
Vicente (staff writer, who is coming back from an interview): Hey, great article! It's a hit! ["*ça cartonne*"] I feel super incognito right now! [*he laughs and several staffers make jokes about what he might have to hide*].

As of April 2014, Marc's article had received 251,009 visits and 233 comments.

These interactions about Marc's article are telling because they reveal the multiple registers used by *LaPlace*'s editors and staffers. Marina and Lucie start by discussing the best headline for the article. Marina tries out different headlines and congratulates Marc about the article. She wants to change the picture, which in her opinion does not "connect" with the topic. Marc's article is posted at 12:33pm on the second most visible spot on the home page.

Later in the day, Lucie, one of the two copy-editors, mentions to Marina that she is looking at Chartbeat and that the article is doing well in terms of traffic. Based on this new information, Lucie asks Marina whether they can promote the article as a "super-headline." When discussing this, Lucie's voice registers excitement and is higher pitched than usual. Several staffers hear that something is going on and gather around Lucie. Marina joins them at the copy-editing table and looks at Chartbeat. Lucie then begs Marina to promote the article ("come on, let's do it!"). Marina first asks whether they have a new article to move into the second spot to replace Marc's article, but she decides to follow Lucie's advice and promotes Marc's article as a super-headline regardless.

In the late afternoon, André, *LaPlace'*s chairman, comes back from a meeting. He enters the room and immediately comments on the super-headline, without even sitting down, which means that he had checked the article's number of page views before coming back to the office. He warmly congratulates Marc. In so doing, he draws both on the editorial mode of evaluation ("it's a great headline piece!") and on the click-based criterion ("And it's doing well, too!"). He immediately starts to analyze the article's success ("maybe we only get readers who feel guilty about something they did online") but adds that they do not have to feel guilty about promoting this article. Marina concurs: this is not just a piece for people who want to hide their online behavior, but rather an article with important political relevance, since it concerns privacy and could apply to the CIA and Google. Marc seems more dubious about such broad claims but agrees about the political element of his article. This conversation constitutes a subtle negotiation about the status of Marc's article: is it a how-to article or does it also have editorial value? André and Marina draw on the editorial logic to justify the value of the article; Marc does not disagree.

Later, Vicente, a staff writer who is coming back after a long interview to drop his laptop at the office, also congratulates Marc: not only is it a "great piece" piece but also a "hit" – "*ça cartonne*" – one of the expressions that staffers and editors use repeatedly to talk about traffic at *LaPlace*.

This ethnographic observation reveals that *LaPlace*'s editors and staffers switch back and forth between click-based and editorial modes of evaluation. Contrary to *TheNotebook*, where editors were the only ones openly discussing metrics during their daily and weekly meetings, traffic numbers are a public affair at *LaPlace.* Editors, managers, copy-editors, and staff writers constantly analyze and comment on traffic in the newsroom. Hence, the editorial and the click-based modes of evaluation are deeply intertwined in the daily interactions that take place at the

website: "good" articles (journalistically speaking) are also articles that "do well" (quantitatively speaking). In contrast, articles that are "flops" (quantitatively speaking) face the editors' suspicion (journalistically speaking): if the article fares poorly online, it must mean something about its journalistic quality. Yet this is rarely made clear by the editors and everyone at *LaPlace* navigates between editorial and click-based definitions of journalistic work.

The following observation of a weekly editorial meeting ("*conférence de rédaction"*) at *LaPlace* illustrates how rapidly journalists switch between the two modes of evaluation, as well as the lack of division of labor between editors and journalists in this regard.

Observation at *LaPlace*
Weekly editorial meeting
January 12, 2012. 9:30am

Ronan (intern): I'm thinking of writing a piece about the fines you get when you travel to Italy… In fact when you're French you don't have to pay for them because you can ask for a fair trial in French and they don't have the means to organize that… I find it interesting.
Philippe (editor-in-chief): Great […] That could make the headline ["*manchette*"]. What an internship, Ronan! You've already written two headlines, three soon, with thousands and thousands of clicks! We're going to hire you, you know that!
Alexandre (staff writer): You know how much we care about the number of clicks! [*laughs*]
Edith (copy-editor): There's also this fun topic… [*A former French president*] wants to be buried in his private garden, but it's not allowed in France, except in Corsica.
Sarah (staff writer): I can feel that this is a 100,000-click topic [*laughs*]!
Marina (assistant editor): Well, funeral laws are really interesting…
Edith (copy editor): The last idea is about the monthly private budget of Sarkozy…
Philippe (editor-in-chief): This would be a 3 million-click article!

During editorial meetings, staffers, writers, and interns pitch their ideas for the upcoming week in front of the editors and the rest of the team. The group then reacts to the different ideas, critiquing or praising them and proposing ways to improve the angle of the article or streamline the investigation.

As shown by this conversation, *LaPlace*'s editors and journalists react immediately to article proposals by commenting about the number of page views that such an article is likely to attract. Hence, Philippe welcomes Ronan's proposed article on the best way to evade fines when travelling to Italy, since it is a headline that will attract "thousands and thousands of clicks." Philippe then jokes and says that Ronan will be hired at the end of his internship because of the success of his articles. Alexandre, a staff writer, agrees but with a fairly sarcastic tone. To the contrary, the idea of writing an article about funeral laws in France is dismissed – and will not be executed, despite Marina's positive reaction – because it will not attract many page views, as Sarah's ironical exclamation indicates ("I can feel that this is a 100,000-click topic!"). Hence, the click-based mode of evaluation is omnipresent at *LaPlace*: traffic numbers are constantly predicted, discussed, and joked about in the newsroom.

2) *Compensation at* LaPlace*: rules and exceptions*

I turn to the compensation system developed at *LaPlace*, which is very different from the one at *TheNotebook.* Compensation at the French website is organized by two central rules. First, there is a flat rate for freelance pieces. Second, non-professional journalists ("bloggers") are not paid. Yet, drawing on 14 interviews with *LaPlace*'s freelancers and bloggers, I find that there are many exceptions to these official rules.

Staffers, freelancers, and their payments

The first central rule lays out the flat freelance rate that *LaPlace* proposes to freelancers: 120 euros for all freelance pieces, regardless of their author, length, quality, or online success.

This flat rate is highly unusual in the French media landscape, where most publications, online and offline, pay by the page or "*feuillet*" (usually between 50 and 80 euros per page).[16] Anne, Alice, and Gabriella illustrate how it works:

> Anne: The rate used to be 100 euros. Now it's 120 euros. It's not very well paid, because it's 120 euros for the whole package, whether it includes photos, sound bites, everything… When you work with a photographer, you have to share, so that's 60 euros each, it's really not much. But I knew that when I started to work as a freelancer for them. They don't have any money.
>
> Gabriella*:* I know that a freelance piece for *LaPlace* will be paid way under the market rate. They don't use the regular freelance rates, which are rates by the page ["*paiement au feuillet*"]. Instead, they have flat rates, 120 euros for the article, whatever the length. Well, it's not okay.
>
> Alice: I'm paid by *LaPlace*, I earn a very tiny fixed sum of 200 euros per month. They proposed this system a couple of years ago, in exchange for which I have to write two pieces every month[17]. It's a ridiculous compensation ["*c'est ridicule comme rémunération*"].

Even though they have different levels of experience and seniority, Anne, Alice, and Gabriella are paid the same amount. Anne, 29, graduated from a mid-level journalism school three years before and began her career as a freelance foreign correspondent in Senegal. Gabriella, 42, was *LaPlace*'s managing editor between 2007 and 2010, after which she resigned and started freelancing again. Alice, 56, was a staff journalist for fifteen years at the same prominent daily newspaper as *LaPlace*'s founders; she became a freelancer in 2000 after moving to the United States with her husband.

The flat freelance rate resonates with the salary scale within the organization as well. The salary range at *LaPlace* is highly compressed: the chairman only earns 2.5 times more than the

[16] It should be noted that the unit of payment for freelance pieces is different in the United States. U.S. freelancers are paid by the word (typically 26-50c per word, according to the National Writers Union) or by the hour (typically $40-50 per hour). Yet flat rates (like the ones proposed at *TheNotebook*) are becoming more prominent in online news. See the rates suggested by the Editorial Freelancers' Association: http://www.the-efa.org/res/rates.php

[17] Alice is paid 100 euros instead of 120 euros per article. This discrepancy is due to the fact that the rate for freelance pieces increased by 20 euros a couple of weeks after I interviewed her.

secretary. Among staff writers, the variance is even smaller: the least well paid journalists earn 1,800 euros per month and the highest paid journalists earn 2,500 euros per month.[18]

The "official position": "Journalists are paid, bloggers are not"

In addition to the flat freelance rate, the second important rule organizing compensation practices at *LaPlace* is that whereas "freelancers" ("*pigistes"* in French) are paid for their pieces, "bloggers" ("*blogueurs*" in French) are not compensated.

Journalists frequently insist on this rule-like criterion distinguishing between journalists and bloggers at *LaPlace*. For example, Philippe, the editor-in-chief, explains the "official position" of the publication:

> Philippe: So the official position here is to say that when an article features journalistic work… reportage, interviews, investigations… we pay. And when the bloggers are people who have another job and a wage… academics, for example… then it's like people who write op-eds in newspapers. So we don't pay them. In exchange, they don't have a lot of constraints, in terms of deadlines, formats, length, etc. They're free… as they would be on any blog.

According to Philippe, people who have another position and a regular source of income are not compensated, whereas people who do "journalistic work" are paid as freelancers. Philippe compares *LaPlace*'s unpaid bloggers to people who write op-ed pieces in newspapers: they are "free" to write whatever they want, with few constraints.

[18] Yet, as Sarah, one of the staffers, mentions, wages do not constitute the only source of income at *LaPlace*: the bosses and several staffers who had shares in the company received part of the proceeds of the sale to LeGroupeMag in December 2011. Sarah explains: "The wages in the newsroom… The difference between the highest wages and lowest is very small, between Lorie [*the secretary*] and André it's 2.5… It's nothing. We talked about our respective wages in the newsroom and the range is 1,800 euros to 2,500 euros per month… But I'm also telling the bosses that, well, it's true that they're underpaid, it's true that they're working a lot… but they also got a bag of money ["*un magot"*], and most of the newsroom didn't. Gael got shares, Alexandre got shares, they received money but I didn't, and I make sure to remind them once in a while. André is going to get a million euros…"

LaPlace's staffers justify the distinction between paid journalists and unpaid "bloggers" in two main ways. First, drawing on the editorial definition of journalistic work, staffers establish a strong distinction between journalistic work and "blogging" and insist that bloggers do not "deserve" to be compensated for their work. In explaining why bloggers are not paid, journalists strongly insist on the strict professional skills associated with good journalistic writing:

> Alexandre: A blogger who writes a lot because he thinks about the news… It's not journalism, it's an opinion! Whereas there is a real added value from journalistic work… Say there is an environmental catastrophe. A journalist will go to the place, interview people, and take risks. While a blogger will write a post, saying "We saw it coming, it's so dangerous, we've been waiting for this to happen for years." That's it. No journalistic work.
>
> Sarah: But she [*a blogger*] doesn't deserve to be paid ["*elle mérite pas d'être payée"*], it's not interesting enough. It's really a blog.

Staffers associate journalistic work with several distinctive criteria linked to the editorial definition of journalism. These include specific methods, including reportage, interviews, analysis, and an "interesting" angle, as well as professional ethics dictating that journalistic work should be objective and value-neutral.

Indeed, *LaPlace*'s staffers also elaborate strong moral criticisms of bloggers' methods and professional ethics. Alexandre makes it clear in the following interview extract:

> Alexandre*:* Bloggers and journalists… it's just not the same job. Journalists have a responsibility… To me one of the most important things with journalism is ethics ["*déontologie*"].
> Let me give you an example. In 2010, there was a rumor saying that Carla Bruni-Sarkozy was cheating on her husband. Parisian journalists had known about this rumor for a long time but didn't say a thing. One day, a blog hosted by the *Journal du Dimanche* posted a statement: "Gossip: Carla is sleeping with Biolay." The day after, many foreign newspapers wrote "the prestigious French *Journal du Dimanche* says…" But what we should remember is that the one who posted this post was a young guy, 21 years old, an employee in the marketing division of the media company. His job was to create buzz on his blog, to get as many hits as possible. So he posted the news on his blog and then went

> back home at 11pm, saying "good day of work, it worked well". His boss found the method perfectly fine.
> These people are not journalists. A regular journalist would never do that, would never publish gossip. It's libel ["*c'est diffamatoire*"].[19]

Alexandre and Sarah's quotes provide a clear case of "boundary-work," in which journalists highlight symbolic differences between the bloggers and themselves (Gieryn 1983).[20] Using Gieryn's terms, this is a case of "expulsion," in which journalists sanction bloggers by underlining their lack of professional legitimacy (Gieryn 1983).

In addition to this clear emphasis on the lesser professional value of bloggers, journalists argue that bloggers also benefit from their participation in *LaPlace* in terms of exposure: even though bloggers are not paid, their blog posts are widely read and diffused.[21] Gael, *LaPlace*'s Social Media Editor, explains:

> Gael: I disagree with the idea that bloggers should be paid. Bloggers contribute for lots of different reasons … Because they want to participate in an ongoing debate, because they want to be more visible, to share their expertise… A couple of bloggers make a living out of it, they're invited everywhere and they are paid for what they do… But it's rare and it doesn't make much sense to me. You also have students who want to see their articles online, who want to improve their writing skills; you have experts with other jobs… They have different priorities.

In all of these instances, the staff at *LaPlace* insists on the rule-like distinction between journalists and bloggers. They draw on the editorial mode of evaluation to justify the fairness of

[19] Alexandre's strong sense of "libel" makes sense, since he was being sued for libel at the time of the interview. As of May 2014, the judicial procedure was still under way.
[20] Gieryn (1983) coined the concept of "boundary-work," defined as "the attribution of selected characteristics to the institution of science (…) for purposes of constructing a social boundary that distinguishes some intellectual activities as 'non-science'" (Gieryn 1983: 782). Gieryn reports how scientists have tried to demarcate science from its rivals by emphasizing shifting characteristics of the discipline over time. He defines three types of boundary-work: expulsion (when a rival authority threatens the legitimacy of the group), expansion (the monopoly over a new jurisdiction), and the protection of autonomy against outside powers.
[21] See Chapter 6 in this manuscript for an analysis of the idea of "exposure."

this compensation system. Yet is the line between journalists and bloggers' compensation really so clear?

Bloggers at *LaPlace*: a large range of compensation practices

Paying close attention to bloggers reveals a more complex picture: there are many exceptions to the rule distinguishing between paid journalists and unpaid bloggers.

First, contrary to the staffers' description of bloggers as "academics or politicians," many of the writers who have an unpaid blog on *LaPlace*'s website are in fact at the edge of the journalistic profession, in the sense that they did not go to journalism school and have never worked in a newsroom, but want to become journalists. As media experts have noted before, journalism is not a clear-cut profession with strong barriers to entry such as law, medicine, or architecture (Abbott 1988, Larson 1977). It is better described as a "fuzzy" or "open" profession without clear external boundaries (Ruellan 1993). In the case of *LaPlace*, the figure of the blogger at the edge of journalism appears more frequently than the figure of the blogger with another job who has no plan to become a journalist.

Bloggers strongly contest the "official rule" distinguishing paid journalists from unpaid bloggers at *LaPlace*. They all insist on the fact that writing blog posts for *LaPlace* requires a lot of time and effort. They argue that what they do is actual journalistic work. For example, Chloe, an economics PhD candidate who wants to make a living as a writer, contrasts her work for *LaPlace*, which she finds demanding and time-consuming, with her writings for her other blogs, where she is completely free to do as she wishes:

> Chloe: They're incredibly demanding at *LaPlace*; they read and edit all the articles… It's not like the other blog platforms I'm working with. I want to work in journalism, so I prefer to post good articles on *LaPlace*… It's a very demanding form of blogging. It's

> almost like a newspaper article, and incidentally they use my articles on the homepage […]. I knew from the beginning that I wouldn't be paid. But when I spend a month writing a piece… (*laughs*)… I can't do that every other day, right, because I'm not paid!

According to Chloe, the fact that *LaPlace*'s editors publish her articles in the central column of the home page (where the articles of staffers and freelancers are also published) proves that what she does is "almost like a newspaper article." Similarly, Hugo, who blogs for *LaPlace* but has a full-time day job, challenges the distinction between bloggers and journalists and argues that no specific training or method is needed to become a journalist.

> Hugo: Well, the main difference between a journalist and a blogger is that one gets paid, the other doesn't. The principle of blogging is that you're completely free to write what you want. I appreciate that. But the better the blogger, the more professional he becomes, either because he has a large audience or because newspapers contact him to write articles because of his blog… At some point he becomes more like a journalist. It's easy to become a journalist, there's no specific training to become a journalist… For example, my blog on *LaPlace*, it's in between a blog and a journalistic article. It's in between… ["*c'est de l'entre-deux*"].

In addition to criticizing the distinction between journalists and bloggers established by the staff at *LaPlace*, bloggers also reveal that they are almost all compensated for their work, whether monetarily or by other means. Different types of non-monetary compensation appear. For example, Rose, a blogger, explains:

> Rose: I have a blog and they [*LaPlace*] don't pay me. I think… that when you pay someone you acknowledge that what she does is valuable. I think it's important… So I asked them to pay for my books. I talked to Marina, I said that I was planning to write a piece about [*this topic*], there is a book about it, a really expensive book. Marina agreed and they're going to pay me back for the book. It's a start. It's a way of saying 'we're ready to spend money.'

Rose is a PhD student in economics; she wants to become a full-time journalist. She is particularly conscious of the role that alternative forms of payment play in her relationship to the

staff at *LaPlace*. According to Rose, compensation is more about acknowledging the value of her work than about the expenses involved. She negotiated with Marina to have *LaPlace* pay for an expensive book for her research.

Similarly, Hugo explains that he receives many free video games, whereas Chloe negotiated a discount on one of the training programs in web journalism organized by *LaPlace*:

> Hugo: I accepted to blog for *LaPlace* for several reasons, but mostly because… since they have a large audience I can ask the video games companies to send me some material. I buy video games myself but it's expensive, and with the *LaPlace* label I can ask the companies to send me the video games before they are released. […] My own blog lacked credibility, I usually only have 2 000 visitors. *LaPlace*… It's a different ballgame.
>
> Chloe: When I opened the blog, Sarah clearly said… Well, the whole story is that when I took the training program [*LaPlace offers training programs in online journalism*], they gave me a discount. It was part of the deal, Sarah told me "you do the training program at cost price and in exchange you'll write pieces for us".

Hence, bloggers who are at the edge of the journalistic profession challenge the clear-cut distinction between blogging and journalism. They think that they produce journalistic content for *LaPlace* and they would like to be paid for it. In the meantime, they negotiate alternative kinds of compensation with the news organization.

"Paid by the click": When compensation is independent from editorial value

If the analysis stopped here, it would not really contradict the official account of staffers and editors at *LaPlace*. Indeed, staffers and editors could argue that since these bloggers are half-journalists (so to speak), they are half-paid. But a third situation occurs in which bloggers are paid based on the traffic that they bring to the website, independently of the journalistic value of their work.

Compensation based on the number of page views
Sarah, staff writer and section editor,
and Celia, journalist and blogger

Celia works as an editor at a women's magazine. She used to be an unpaid blogger for *LaPlace*, but her status at the website changed in late 2011, when she started to receive a freelance rate for her articles. I conducted two distinct interviews about her situation: one with Sarah, who is the section editor in charge of Celia's pieces, and the second with Celia herself.

Sarah:
Celia will now be paid as a freelancer. Whenever the bosses think that a piece is worth it, that there is some journalistic content, she will be paid. So she changed status, from blogger to freelancer… For a long time the bosses relied on the same argument, "she writes for fun". But they realized that she brought them so much that they had to pay her. She writes pieces that are hits… The best example is the XXX [*product name redacted*]. We wrote the piece together, but she gave me the idea and she had the sources. The bosses realized that this piece had brought 7,500 euros with Google ads because whenever people search for XXX online our piece comes second… So internet users come to our piece first and then click on the website of XXX… so it was 7500 euros of benefits. I didn't tell her… but when Philippe told me that, I thought: "It would be nice to find a hundred euros for her from time to time, wouldn't it?" [*Laughs*]. I mean… She brought a lot of traffic and a lot of money to the website, her pieces are long-tail pieces, they are well referenced on search engines, and she writes about topics that get searched a lot online. But she doesn't know the mechanism… I told the bosses, "Come on, make an effort…"

Celia:
Now I'm paid. It has been… a month. If I understand correctly, we're now four bloggers who are paid, four professional journalists. […] It was complicated for *LaPlace* not to pay bloggers who do exactly the same job as professional journalists, bloggers who are in fact professional journalists.

The case of Celia shows how editorial and click-based criteria of evaluation overlap when deciding of compensation at *LaPlace*. Sarah starts by emphasizing the journalistic value of Celia's work and states clearly that Celia will be paid if and only if her pieces are worth it in terms of journalistic content. This first statement is consistent with the editorial mode of evaluation and Philippe's assertion that bloggers are only paid when their posts have journalistic content.

Yet Sarah then moves to a quite different justification in order to explain Celia's change of status, which concerns the advertising revenue that she brings to *LaPlace*, since her articles are highly successful online: "they realized that she brought them so much that they had to pay her." This sentence is ambiguous: what does Celia bring to the website exactly? Does she contribute good content, extra clicks and advertising revenue, or both? In any case, the editors decided to pay Celia, not with a percentage of the advertising revenue but as a freelancer.

But Celia "does not know the mechanism" and the real cause of this change from unpaid blogger to paid freelancer: she thinks that it is due to the journalistic value of her work and to the fact that she is a "professional journalist," since her day job is at a women's magazine. When I asked Celia about the online success of her articles, she said that she never looked at the numbers of page views.[22]

In other cases, however, the deal was much clearer from the beginning, as confirmed by the blogger in charge of the "sex and gender" blog:

> Lou: I already had a blog that was extremely successful. So when we started talking about my blog, I asked for three things. First I didn't want any salary or work contract, because I already have a day job. Second, I told them that I didn't want to cost more than what I would bring. I wanted to support them and bring extra revenue to the website. Third, I told them that I wanted a percentage of what my pieces would bring in terms of advertising revenue. […] We calculated together how much the advertising revenue was for every hit. I was paid two or three times a year, with a maximum of 600 euros per month… I wasn't the only one to be paid this way, but my blog was making 10% of the overall traffic of *LaPlace* at that time.

Lou clearly states that she is not a journalist (she was trained and works as an engineer).[23] She first met one of the assistant-editors at a party; she said that she liked their website and proposed to participate. In her case, a transparent negotiation about compensation took place at the

[22] Celia does not have access to Chartbeat. But the number of page views can be seen on the website.
[23] Lou explicitly required that her or his gender was not specified in any research document using her/his case. I use the feminine pronoun for the sake of readability but comply here with this request.

beginning of her relation with *LaPlace*. She asked to be paid with a percentage of the advertising revenue produced by her articles and the editors agreed.

Hence, compensation at *LaPlace* is a complicated matter that mirrors the constant overlap between different modes of evaluation of journalistic quality. The "official position" that distinguishes between (paid) journalists and (unpaid) bloggers draws on the editorial mode of evaluation in order to justify the fact that bloggers are not remunerated. Yet many bloggers in fact receive some kind of compensation, monetary or otherwise. A few bloggers are even compensated in proportion to the online success of their articles: in this case, *LaPlace*'s editors and staffers rely on the click-based criterion to justify their decision to compensate the bloggers.[24]

IV. Discussion: avoiding incoherence at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*

This chapter delved into the daily routines of *TheNotebook* in New York and *LaPlace* in Paris. I analyzed the editorial formats of the two websites, the interactions that take place at the two newsrooms, and the compensation practices that define the relationship between the websites and their non-staff writers. In so doing, several stark differences emerged between the two websites.

At *TheNotebook*, there is a clear distinction between "slow" and "fast" parts of the website. This is reflected in the spatial organization of the newsroom and the autonomy of editors in deciding on compensation. These contribute to establish a strong separation between editorial and click-based modes of evaluation, thus reinforcing the separate arrangement that characterizes the U.S. organization. In contrast, at *LaPlace*, I documented a significant overlap

[24] Toward the end of my fieldwork at *LaPlace*, journalists mentioned the fact that several bloggers might be compensated in the future (in particular the illustrators). Yet, as of April 2014, the website's FAQ page still states that "external contributions by non-journalists are not compensated."

between editorial and click-based definitions of journalistic value. The multiple editorial formats, the organization of the newsroom, and the interactions between editors and staff reveal that *LaPlace*'s staffers constantly switch back and forth between the two evaluations when assessing the value of their work. Even the official rule distinguishing between "paid journalists" and "unpaid bloggers" eventually reinforces the connected arrangement between the two modes of evaluation, since several bloggers are in fact compensated based on their traffic numbers.

Taking a step back, it might seem like a miracle that *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* still exist today given the centrifugal forces present in each organization.

Take, for example, the heterogeneity and sometimes incompatible projects of the people who staff these two organizations. The print journalists who founded the websites wanted to rebuild journalism online, whereas the investors and managers who ran the organizations were trying to figure out new methods to make a profit using online content. In addition, editors and managers had to take into account the expectations of the young freelancers and bloggers participating in the project, who typically wanted to increase their media profile by publishing on prestigious online platforms (Gillespie 2010) and had strong ideas about the editorial lines of the publications. These different projects might have initially seemed to be in harmony, but given the realities of shrinking revenues and limited resources, conflicts became inevitable. Perhaps more profoundly, the two websites were organized around conflicting missions: they sought to produce high-level journalistic pieces in order to maintain their reputation and credibility, but during a period of financial stress found that publishing more frequent content on tabloid subjects was an easy way to increase their traffic.

How do top editors and managers at the two websites manage these irreconcilable expectations? Drawing on the material presented so far, I argue that, in spite of the differences between *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, top editors at the U.S. and French news sites came up with similar strategies in order to assure the survival of their organizations.

First, editors at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* rely on a careful management of information flows. At the two websites, most staffers, freelancers, and bloggers are in the dark as far as compensation is concerned: they do not know who is paid, who is not, how much others are paid, whose status has changed recently, and why. Depending on their position in the constellation of writers who provide content for the website, employees and contributors have different information on the compensation system and draw on different arguments to justify it. Perhaps more troublingly, people have incorrect information about other contributors. For example, at *TheNotebook*, Aaron asserts that he has been "grandfathered in" and that he is paid significantly more than other people, which is not correct. Similarly, at *LaPlace*, Lou is sure that other bloggers are paid by the click, which is in fact wrong. At the two organizations, only top editors have a panoptic view of the compensation system. They carefully decide which bits of information to give to people in the lower parts of the hierarchy. This control is more pronounced at *TheNotebook*, which is centralized and hierarchical. At *LaPlace*, which is more horizontally organized, many different employees have contradictory bits of information about who is compensated and why, but most of them remain largely in the dark about the bigger picture.

The second strategy developed by top editors involves code-switching between logics. At *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, editors switch between modes of evaluation depending on whom they are talking to, in an analogous manner to bilingual people who code-switch between

different languages depending on the context of the interaction (Gumperz 1982). At *TheNotebook*, code-switching is carefully regulated: there are strong spatial, occupational, and temporal boundaries distinguishing interactions in which the click-based mode of evaluation predominates from those in which the editorial mode of evaluation prevails. At *LaPlace*, in contrast, editors constantly switch back and forth between the two logics, without any clear rule. Yet editors use this ambiguity for their own purposes: they draw on the ambiguity of the two registers in order to satisfy everybody. This is particularly clear in the case of Celia's compensation (the blogger who brought a great deal of traffic to *LaPlace*). Editors and managers know that Celia is now paid because she brought a lot of traffic to the website. Yet Celia and other staff writers believe that she is compensated because of the high journalistic quality of her articles. It seems likely that the editors did not deliberately deceive Celia. Rather, they emphasized the high quality of her work rather than her high traffic numbers when they explained why they would pay her. In Sarah's ambiguous words, "she brought them so much that they had to pay her."[25]

In conclusion, at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, editors tried to build unity and stability in a setting where heterogeneity and centrifugal forces dominated (Padgett and Ansell 1993). Like the "Sphinx" figure of Cosimo de Medici in Renaissance Florence, they did so by developing a style of "robust action" in which acts are ambiguous enough that they can be interpreted in many different ways depending on the observer's location in the network and the public under consideration (Mische and White 1998). This robust style of action was probably the only way to

[25] These alternative ways to organize code-switching have some affinities with Bernstein's distinction between "restricted" and "elaborated" codes (Bernstein 1975). In this view, *TheNotebook* would be relying on an elaborated code – more democratic and spelling everything out – whereas *LaPlace* would be relying on a restricted code, which occurs when tight-knit groups of participants possess high amounts of background information.

secure the continued participation and enthusiasm of their contributors. The next chapter will turn to the motivations of these external contributors.

CHAPTER VI

Living in the Market:

How Freelance Journalists Manage their Careers

in the United States and France

On March 4, 2013, the veteran journalist Nate Thayer, well known for his coverage of military zones in Cambodia and North Korea, published on his blog a post entitled "A Day in the Life of a Freelance Journalist, 2013" (Thayer 2013). In the post, Thayer simply copied and pasted an email exchange he had with a web editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. The editor was interested in publishing a version of an article that Thayer had just posted on the same day on NKNews.com. When Thayer expressed his interest and asked for more information about the format and fees, the *Atlantic* editor wrote:

> "Thanks for responding. Maybe by the end of the week? 1,200 words? We unfortunately can't pay you for it, but we do reach 13 million readers a month. I understand if that's not a workable arrangement for you, I just wanted to see if you were interested. Thanks so much again for your time. A great piece!"

To which Thayer responded:

> "I am a professional journalist who has made my living by writing for 25 years and am not in the habit of giving my services for free to for profit media outlets so they can make money by using my work and efforts by removing my ability to pay my bills and feed my children. […] I appreciate your interest, but, while I respect the Atlantic, and have several friends who write for it, I have bills to pay and cannot expect to do so by giving my work away for free […]. Frankly, I will refrain from being insulted and am perplexed how one can expect to try to retain quality professional services without compensating for them."

Thayer then concluded his blog post with the following sentence: "For those of you who remained unclear on the state of journalism in 2013, you no longer are…"

Thayer's blog post launched a fierce debate that resounded in the Twittersphere and the journalistic world for weeks. While the blog post was being picked up by every digital publication in the United States and Europe, Alexis Madrigal, senior editor at *The Atlantic*, spent the week on Twitter defending his subordinate and the general policy of the website regarding freelance work. He finally wrote a response to Thayer, entitled "A Day in the Life of a Digital Editor, 2013" (Madrigal 2013). After describing the current financial constraints and traffic imperatives of news websites,[1] Madrigal turned to the question of unpaid work: what about people who write for free? He explained:

> "I don't like to ask people for work that we can't pay for. But I'm not willing to take a hard line and prevent someone who I think is great from publishing with us without pay. My main point in these negotiations is this: What do you, the writer, get out of this? But the fact is, a lot of people *do* get stuff out of it. They're changing careers into journalism, say. Or they're a scholar who wants to reach a broader audience. Or they've got a book coming out. Or they're a kid who begs you (begs you!) to take a flier on them, and you have to spend way too much time with her, but it's worth it because you believe she's talented, even if you know the story isn't going to garner a big audience."

[1] See Chapter 3 in this manuscript.

Madrigal argues in favor of a case-by-case approach to unpaid work. If the writer is getting something out of it, then it might be a fair deal: the website gets free content (and more traffic) and the writer gets exposure. Closely following Madrigal's intervention, Ta-Nehisi Coates, another high-profile writer at the Atlantic, added his contribution to the debate:

> "I've been watching all of this with some curiosity, mostly because I got my start at the online *Atlantic* working for free […] I wanted exposure. I was not a "young journalist." This was not my chance to break into the profession. […] [But] I could not convince editors that what I was curious about was worth writing about. Every day I would watch ideas die in my head. […] What the internet offered was the chance to let all of those ideas compete in the arena, and live and die on the merits. And Matt was offering a bigger arena. I was ecstatic […]. I was ecstatic any time anyone took my ideas seriously enough to offer them a platform. Most people never get that" (Coates 2013).

Coates reminds us that passion – the inextinguishable desire to write and share one's ideas – plays a major role in the decision to pursue a journalistic career. The prospect of having an audience and working with writers he admired was enough to make Coates "ecstatic," regardless of monetary compensation.

Nonetheless, the last word on the matter might go to Nate Thayer. After giving hundreds of interviews about the incident and participating in more conferences than he could remember, Thayer sarcastically summarized his take on the whole affair: "This particular post has gotten more attention than anything I've spent my entire adult life researching. I've gotten more than 20,000 hits in the past hour. The irony is that I haven't made a penny off of any of this" (Coscarelli 2013).

This controversy introduces the main question that motivates this chapter on freelance work in the United States and France: how do freelance writers negotiate their careers in the uncertain world of web journalism? The preceding chapters analyzed the organizational dilemmas and

different arrangements developed by news websites in order to manage the tension between editorial and traffic-oriented goals. This chapter steps outside of organizations to focus instead on individuals who sell their writings on the competitive market of online news. Drawing on 101 interviews with journalists in New York and Paris (including 38 interviews with journalists who were freelancers at the time of the interview),[2] this chapter examines the ways that American and French freelance journalists make sense of their journalistic careers and manage their reputations, online and offline.

Labor regulations and freelance work in the United States and France

A comparison of American and French freelance journalists is of particular interest given the different regulations and public subsidies that help and protect freelance journalism in France compared to the United States.

For nearly eighty years, the French state has engaged in extensive regulatory efforts to provide a legal definition of journalistic work. The 1935 Brachard Law provided an official definition of "professional journalists." The 1974 Cressard Law completed this legal framework by providing specific benefits to freelance journalists ("*pigistes*"). Freelancers who meet the criteria for "professional journalists" – those who receive more than half of their income from one or several media companies – can claim severance packages, unemployment subsidies, paid leaves, and social security benefits including retirement subsidies and public health insurance (Charon 2003, Aubert 2011).[3]

[2] Among the interviewees, 17 freelancers lived in New York and 21 in Paris. See Appendix A for a full description of the sample and a comparison of the interviewees' socio-demographic characteristics with the journalistic workforces in the two countries.

[3] A complete description of the French system would also include a comparative discussion of the status and benefits of performing artists ("*intermittents du spectacle*"), who, if they have worked more than 507 hours over the last year

It should be noted that from a legal standpoint, French "*pigistes*" are in fact tenured salaried employees ("*salariés en contrat à durée indéterminée*") rather than independent contractors.[4] This legal status explains why "*pigistes*" benefit from the exact same advantages as tenured salaried employees in the press sector. In addition, in cases of legal disputes between news organization and "*pigistes*," the burden of proof regarding the employment relationship is on the side of the employer.[5] Yet almost all the "*pigistes*" whom I met were not aware of this legal distinction (e.g., that they are salaried employees and not freelancers). Hence, I translate "*pigiste*" into English as "freelance journalist" for the sake of simplicity.

This legal definition of "professional journalism" and related benefits should also be understood within the broader system of social security in France. The United States is characterized by an "at-will" doctrine of employment and minimal labor laws that include, nonetheless, the obligation for employers to pay at least a minimum wage per hour, to pay a higher rate for overtime work, to pay for on-the-job injuries, and to allow workers to organize unions (Bernhardt, Milkman, Theodore, and Heckathorn 2009). These protections are, however, far less forceful than the centralized system protecting workers' rights created in France beginning in the late nineteenth century and to a greater extent in the 1930s and following the Second World War (Castel 1995, Rosanvallon 1993, Palier 2005). In addition to a minimum wage and the right to unionize, the welfare state in France provides significant unemployment benefits (*Unédic*), health insurance benefits (*Sécurité Sociale*), and retirement subsidies (*Assurance Retraite*).

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or so, qualify to receive unemployment subsidies in between short-term contracts. See Menger (2011) and Grégoire (2013).

[4] *"Présomption de salariat,"* Code du Travail, article L7112-1, n° 74-630, July 4, 1974.

[5] Less central to the argument developed here, but still important as measures of the legal protections afforded to independent contractors are the laws in the United States and France regarding the maximum number of hours that a company can bill to an independent contractor. In France these stipulations are included in the Loi Cressard. In the United States they come from the landmark decision on "permatemps" *Vizcaino v. Microsoft Corporation* (1996) (Barley and Kunda 2004).

Thus, the benefits associated with being a "professional" journalist (either a salaried employee or a freelancer) in France are paid for by payroll taxes and managed directly by the state through the public health insurance system and the unemployment agency. In contrast, in 2012-2013 in the United States (when I conducted the interviews), freelancers frequently mentioned that health insurance was one of their major financial concerns. This situation may change in the coming years due to the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act" ("Obamacare"), which was passed in 2010 but only became available in 2014, after the end of my fieldwork.

Given these structural differences between the two countries, do French freelancers manage their careers differently than their American counterparts? This chapter presents counter-intuitive findings. Freelance journalists describe their careers in very similar ways in New York and Paris. In both cities, freelance writers try to balance four simultaneous concerns when making choices about whether to publish an article with a given publication. These four concerns are: their passion and the desire to engage in intrinsically interesting activities; economic survival, or the need to "pay the bills" (in Thayer's words); "exposure" and the strategic construction of professional reputations; and networking, or getting to know and maintaining good relations with potential employers, online and offline. Freelancers in both countries engage in constant trade-offs between these different goals. In addition, I find that the legal benefits associated with being a "*pigiste*" do not influence the strategies of French freelance journalists as might be expected. Many French freelancers are not aware of their benefits or do not claim them.

After introducing these four different goals and the freelance journalists' constant arbitrage between them, I turn to the main difference between U.S. and French freelance

journalists that emerged in the interviews. This hinges on the differences in the discursive repertoires used by U.S. and French freelance journalists to describe their lives in the market. French freelancers are more reluctant than their American counterparts to describe themselves as rational maximizers in a competitive marketplace. I conclude this chapter by discussing the relevance of these findings for three threads of research: the literature on independent work, the role of networks (offline and online) in job searches, and the relative predominance of market-based justifications in the United States and France.

I. 'Passion,' 'fun,' and the intrinsic qualities of journalistic work

Many journalists elaborate a narrative based on the idea of 'passion' when explaining how they entered journalism and why they continued in that career. They argue that writing is a meaningful activity for them, regardless of their professional success or economic well-being. This discursive emphasis on passion takes several forms.

First, some journalists describe journalism as a kind of vocational calling: they wanted to write from an early age onward and were never interested in any other occupation. For example, Sean, the 38-year-old freelance journalist who lives in New York and works for *TheNotebook*, explains:

> Sean: I always wanted to be a writer, since I was ten. I always knew that it was the only thing I was good at, writing. Coming out of college I realized that journalism was the easiest way to do that. So I started writing for the college newspaper…

Sean wanted to write and decided that journalism was the "easiest" way to do it. In his case, there was no hesitation about which career to choose. For others, though, the decision to become a journalist was more complicated. For example, many of the journalists I interviewed had

considered an academic career before turning to journalism. Joseph, a 27-year-old freelancer in New York, describes his trajectory:

> Joseph: When I was a teenager I just wanted to be a writer… then I became a scholar and went to graduate school. Most of the comments I got were: "you write like a journalist"… It took me some time to figure out that it was not a compliment! I didn't have an academic style, I used anecdotes, leads, examples from real life, I didn't like to be theoretical. But I reminded myself that I got into that to write and I wasn't doing the kind of writing that I wanted to do… So I left. It was good but I wanted to engage in more experimental kinds of writing and more contemporary issues and more dynamic discussions.

A recurrent theme among journalists, both in the United States and France, involves contrasting journalistic writing and academic writing. They describe academic writing as theoretical, abstract, time-consuming, slow-paced, and possibly boring. In contrast, journalistic writing is lively, light, filled with anecdotes, fast-paced, and 'experimental.'

Most journalists in the sample who considered an academic career explain their decision by emphasizing that journalism is just 'more fun:' one can write light pieces, move from one topic to the next, and take advantage of one's eclectic interests and curiosity about the world. In this view, journalism is not necessarily a vocation; it is simply the best available job for doing interesting things. For example, Marie, a 29-year-old freelance journalist in Paris, explains how she gradually became convinced that journalism was the right job for her:

> Marie: Journalism… It wasn't a vocation. When I was an undergrad, I majored in history, I didn't really know what to do next… My parents talked a lot about the media, my grandfather had been a journalist… And I always wrote very easily, I was always first in my class in French, in history… So I thought, why not? I did a summer internship at a local newspaper in Alsace. Then I realized that I would like this job ["*ce métier allait me plaire*"]. In fact it's not one but several jobs at the same time… It's a job where you can do everything. I had found what I wanted to do.

According to Marie, it was the variety associated with journalism – the fact that "you can do everything" – that convinced her that she should become a journalist.

This emphasis on 'fun' and 'passion' also comes up when journalists describe why they became freelancers. Sean explains his decision to quit his former job at a large mainstream magazine in 2000:

> Sean: I was working for [*the magazine*] at the time… The reason why I eventually left was that… I couldn't write with the voice I wanted to write with. It was intended for people all over the U.S. Anything that was fun had been taken out of it. I quit in 2000 to drive around the country with my then-girlfriend and figure out what I wanted to do. I started freelancing that fall. I've been freelancing ever since. At the time I thought that I would try it and probably eventually go back on staff… but I ended up staying freelance all this time because I really like the flexibility, I like the freedom of it…

According to Sean, his decision to become a freelancer was driven by a desire to do "fun" things again, to make jokes in his articles, and to be able to drive around the country with his girlfriend to find inspiration. He also highlights the "flexibility" and "freedom" associated with freelancing – a common trope among freelancers (Barley and Kunda 2004). Anne, a 29-year-old freelance journalist who lives in Dakar and works for *LaPlace*, adds:

> Anne: I'm really glad to be a freelancer. This status right now is the best for me… and I wouldn't exchange it for anything on earth… Okay, let's be honest, maybe to become an investigative reporter in a good newsroom… There you're really free. But except for that… I don't really care about money, I'm not very materialistic. Being a freelancer is great, I do radio, I work for online media, I can propose a lot of topics… I can use different formats. And I'm so free… It would be hard to go back to a newsroom, with strict hours and a boss… Now I start and finish when I want; when I don't want to work, I don't have to work.

Anne points out that she enjoys the flexibility of her status: she has no strict schedule, she does not have to work when she does not want to, she does not have a boss, and she has the opportunity to use different journalistic formats (radio, web writing, print writing, etc.). She also

alludes to the monetary aspect of freelance work and emphasizes that she does "not really care about money" and that she is "not very materialistic."

Thus, freelance journalists emphasize how they have "fun" when they write and argue that they like the "freedom" of their independent work situation. But how do journalists react when they realize that it is not necessarily easy to make a living writing "fun" pieces?

II. Paying the bills: the economic imperatives of freelance work

A second essential aspect of the careers of web journalists is their financial situation. The range of situations varies widely among individual journalists, from relative security to frequent precariousness.

A wide range of situations

In rare cases, freelancers seem perfectly content with their financial and professional situations. In the previous chapter we encountered Sean, a freelancer for *TheNotebook*, who explains:

> Sean (New York): I think that a lot of people who write on the web will write a thousand word essay and get paid $150, $250. I don't see how you can make a living doing that. If it's something you're doing for fun on the side and you have a real job, fine. Or if you're really, really young, okay. But I'm 38 years old so I need to make a living and pay a mortgage. (…) I won't work for less than a dollar a word. But I think I'm lucky… I've been around for a while and I have a lot of editors to contact and they know that I'm reliable (…). I'm on a contract with *TheNotebook*. They give me a check each month for the same amount, predictable, and then I produce a quota of material for them. (…) My high point was in maybe 2006-2007, I was making $72,000 from *TheNotebook*. It's $65,000 now. I would say that it's two-thirds of my income and time, I supplement that writing for other places.

Sean has worked out a comfortable financial system. He has an annual contract with *TheNotebook*, which limits the financial uncertainty usually associated with freelancing. He

complements this stable compensation with freelance pieces. Regarding freelance rates, Sean says that he is "lucky": he can ask for a high rate for his pieces, contrary to young writers who write feature articles for $150. According to Sean, this higher rate can be explained by his "reliability": he has been a journalist for a long time and editors know that they can count on him.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Joseph, a 27-year-old freelancer who, like Sean, is a graduate from Brown University.

> Joseph (New York): My income varies all the time… Last year probably 50% of my income was coming from my day job. I was making very little money last year… You know, I'm on food stamps and I have a rent-controlled apartment, otherwise I wouldn't have survived… and I was borrowing money against the second half of my book's advance. I borrowed the second half and paid it back. Since December 2008, I got my insurance through the Freelancers' Union. And so that's really bad, that's a big problem for us. But then I got a grant to do a reporting project related to my book and I'm working on a feature story for *Harper's*…

Joseph's multiple sources of income show how complex it is to make a living as a freelancer. He works part-time as the main webmaster of an educational website. He works two or three days per week for this job and spends the rest of his time writing articles and working on his book project. Joseph does a lot of work for free for several websites that he admires particularly. He explains: "Almost always it was unpaid. A couple of times [the websites] got some money and I got some out of it. But it's never been about that." As a consequence, Joseph lives in New York on a very tight budget: he relies on food stamps, has a small room in a rent-controlled apartment with two roommates, buys inexpensive health insurance through the Freelancers Union,[6] and borrows money from his friends. But things were looking up at the moment of the interview: he

[6] The Freelancers Union was founded in 1995 in New York by Sara Horowitz. In 2014, the union had 237,844 members. The union offers relatively inexpensive health insurance (through the Freelancers Insurance Company) to its members. See https://www.freelancersunion.org/about/

had received a substantial advance for his second book, had paid off his debts, and received a grant to subsidize his work.

Many freelance writers mentioned that they had faced similar situations at different periods of their lives: they had a day job and accepted to write for very little or no money. For example, John, a 29-year-old freelance writer, works for *TheNotebook* but has a day job in Pittsburgh for an advertising company. He explains that it is all a matter of time and persistence:

> John: I have different degrees of happiness. I've reached one of them, which is that someone is paying me to write about something that I love. So I've already gone that far and that's great. But I also have an advertising day job and honestly it takes a lot of my time. Ten years from now I really hope to just be writing non-fiction… and not subsisting on advertising or another side job. Basically the way people do that is to become a household name. You write a book every couple of years and you write articles in between and probably that includes having a popular and frequent blog. When you see people getting these sorts of positions, then your goal becomes a little bit more realistic.

For John, making a living as a writer is a long-term plan. He focuses on the small steps that one has to take in order to reach this goal: having a blog, then writing paid articles, building a stable audience, and writing books, before eventually becoming a famous writer. Another freelancer echoes this idea that constant efforts and discipline are needed in order to persevere as a freelancer. Nikos, who is a freelance illustrator for *LaPlace* in Paris, describes his work schedule:

> Nikos (Paris): As a freelancer, you realize that time is money: when you don't work you lose money ["*chaque fois que tu bosses pas tu perds de l'argent"*]. I only take two weeks of vacation per year… and that's when [*with an ironic tone*] my 'best friend' at the communication agency takes his vacations. I have to be alert at all times. And of course I work on weekends.

Nikos highlights the paradoxical fact that, as a freelancer, he is not the master of his own time: his work depends on the desires and schedules of his clients. Thus, the reality of freelance work

is often at odds with the freelancers' emphasis on "freedom" and "flexibility" (Barley and Kunda 2004).

Passion versus economic reality

What are the arbitrages that freelancers reach between compensation and passion? All freelancers agree that the best-case scenario resembles Sean's situation: writing 'fun' articles for a prestigious publication that also pays well. Yet this is an exceptional case.

Most freelancers in the United States and France explain that they sometimes agree to write for free or for very little money simply because they like the website, the people who work there, or because they want to publish an article they really care about. Celia, 36 years old, has a day job in Paris as an editor of a women's magazine and does some freelancing and blogging for *LaPlace* on the side. She explains:

> Celia (Paris): My main job is really well paid… so I don't care much that my blog isn't paid. My blog… It's more like a hobby, a passion, than like actual work. And I want to have fun ["*je veux m'amuser*"] with my blog, I want to write articles and have fun… It's egoistic…

Celia draws on the metaphor of the "hobby," an activity that she does in order to "have fun," when she describes her blogging activity for *LaPlace*. She explains that she does not "care" about not being paid by *LaPlace* because her main job is "really well paid."[7] Similarly, Margaret, a 36-year-old former staff writer at national daily newspaper who now writes for *TheNotebook*, describes her situation:

> Margaret (New York): My husband got a job in New York, so I left, and I didn't have a job for a while and then I had a daughter and then I didn't work for about nine months

[7] Yet, as we saw in Chapter 5, Celia started being paid by *LaPlace* for her blog. Her status changed about a month before the interview.

> and then I started freelancing again. So that's my story. […] *TheNotebook* doesn't pay well. They don't. But I really like writing for them. Other places pay much better. But I really like writing for them, and I think they're high profile. I think the editor is good… and I really enjoy it! So I write for less than what I would ask for at another newspaper… Also, the pieces that I'm writing for them are less reporting-intensive than the other pieces I write for other places… They take me less time.

Margaret describes the circumstances that led her to leave her job at the daily newspaper: her husband found a job in New York, she had a daughter and needed more flexibility, and she knew someone at *TheNotebook*. She thinks that *TheNotebook* "doesn't pay well," but explains that she enjoys working for them, because the editor is good, because the style is fun, and because it does not take a lot of time or effort. She mentions the "high profile" of the website, a subject that we will return to shortly. Yet Margaret's decision to work for *TheNotebook* even though it "doesn't pay well" is also made possible by the high income of her husband, who is a computer programmer in the news business.

Many freelancers – like Joseph at the educational website and John at the advertising company – accept 'gigs' or short-term jobs that they do not find interesting but leave enough spare time to work on their writing projects. Marie explains her system:

> Marie (Paris): I'm doing this job because I want to dream ["*ce métier je le fais pour rêver"*]… I don't want a boring white-collar job where I don't do anything new, I'm not interested in that! […] So I found this way…Now with the web there is a system of 'shifts' in large web newsrooms: they need three teams of freelancers to cover the news all day long. And they hire freelancers to do that. It's a way to pay the bills ["*un taf alimentaire"*]: you work for seven hours in a row and then you go home and you're done. People tell you what to do, they boss you around, and you work like a dog… But then on the side I can do fun things ["*des trucs qui m'éclatent"*]… I create slideshows with sound recordings, it's really my thing, it's my passion. I created a collective and we all do it together. It's my hobby. Sometimes I make money out of it but usually I don't and when I do it's almost nothing.

Marie contrasts two types of journalistic work. To pay the bills, she does freelance 'shifts' in large web newsrooms: she works "like a dog" eight hours per day, doing day or night shifts

several weeks in a row. She describes this line of work as uninteresting, not creative, and hierarchical. But as soon as she has earned enough money for the month by working shifts, Marie turns to her "hobby": making slideshows with sound clips. News websites rarely pay for these slideshows, but this is of little importance to Marie, who describes it as her "passion."

Interestingly, many French freelancers do not know about or do not claim any of the benefits associated with their status as "professional journalists." First, people who write occasionally for online publications are often not aware of the benefits associated with the "*pigiste*" status. The ones who know about the benefits often explain that they do not qualify because less than half of their income comes from their writing. Finally, even the journalists who do qualify rarely claim the benefits. For example, Marie, who meets the criteria for being considered a "professional journalist" and thus qualifies for the benefits, explains that she stopped claiming her subsidies because "it was not worth it":

> Marie: When you're a *pigiste* and you have a bad month, Pole Emploi [*the national unemployment agency*] helps you out… But I've decided to stop, it's a ton of paperwork, it's almost a full-time job to apply for the benefits… It's a crazy maze ["*c'est la maison qui rend fou*"], they never tell you anything, sometimes they give you money and sometimes they take some, it's really perverse… For me it was a luxury, a couple of hundred euros here and there… but only for one or two months per year… So I stopped because it was not worth it.

According to Mary, the small amounts of money that she was eligible to receive, coupled with the hassle of paperwork, discouraged her from claiming her subsidies.[8]

Many French and American freelancers rely on a similar dual system in which they balance a paid day job and a poorly paid writing activity. They all underscore the constant efforts and hard work needed to make a living as a freelance journalist. Much of the freelancers' efforts

[8] Journalists are in this respect very different from performing artists ("*intermittents du spectacle*"), who are highly aware of the subsidies that they should receive and keep track of the numbers of hours that they need to work in order to be eligible (Matthieu Grégoire, personal communication, see also Grégoire (2013)).

are also devoted to constructing his or her reputation in the journalistic world. So how do freelancers manage to become 'household names' in journalism, to use the aspirational phrase from John's interview?

III. 'Exposure' and the strategic construction of reputation

Establishing a public profile is a third essential goal for freelance journalists. Freelancers often mention how important the opinions of others are for their careers: their future jobs and ability to make a living as writers depend on it. Reputation among the journalistic community is thus intertwined with work opportunities, since high-status journalists receive more propositions to write as well as higher pay for their articles.

But what exactly is reputation? When describing their careers, American and French journalists rely on the concept of "exposure" (in English) and "*visibilité*" (in French). In both cases, the metaphor draws on the idea of 'viewing from a distance,' not unlike photography or meteorology.[9] This section explores the freelancers' descriptions of the role of reputation and exposure in online news.

Compensation versus exposure

In many cases, journalists agree to write for little or no money when the website provides good exposure. Freelancers attempt to achieve different kinds of balance between compensation and exposure. Anne, the freelancer who lives in Senegal and blogs for *LaPlace*, clearly explains that the "visibility" of *LaPlace* offsets their low freelance rate.

[9] These questions have been explored in greater detail in the literature on reputation, fame, and celebrity in artistic fields. See for example Heinich (2012), Karpik (2010), Lilti (2008), Podolny (1993), Faulkner and Anderson (1987), Dubois (2008), and Menger (2003).

> Anne: *LaPlace*, they pay very poorly. 120 euros the piece… It's bad. […] But it's offset by their visibility. Now that I regularly write for them, a lot of people, journalists but also other people, have contacted me because they've seen my papers on the website. That's why I transferred my blog from [another website] to *LaPlace*, it's more visible… and it's more prestigious too.

Anne keeps writing for *LaPlace* even though they only pay her 120 euros per piece because *LaPlace* has many readers and a prestigious status in the journalistic field. In New York, Eric, a 37-year-old graduate student who used to work in public radio and now freelances for *TheNotebook*, explains:

> Eric (New York): I wasn't interested in money… although I was freelancing, I wasn't employed at the time, but basically I saw it as a way to improve my career, my profile as a writer. And *TheNotebook* has a good reputation. When you write for *TheNotebook*… you get a little bit of that brand, a little bit of that brand washes off on you. When you've written a couple of times for the publication… well, at least I don't suck, right? I'm a little bit okay, right?

Eric develops an argument that is similar to Anne's trade-off between pay and prestige: he understands his work as *TheNotebook* as a way to improve his reputation rather than a day job to make money. Eric also relies on a contagion-based understanding of prestige: according to him, the prestige of *TheNotebook* "washes off" on him and improves his own reputation. Margaret, who was mentioned above, also describes her arbitrage between pay and exposure:

> Margaret (New York). Other places pay much better… But I got many work opportunities because of what I do for *TheNotebook*. Oh yeah. For example, the *NYRB [New York Review of Books]*, which pays really well… I got an email from an editor, whom I didn't know at all, who said, "I saw that you wrote this piece for *TheNotebook*, would you like to write a piece for us on a similar topic?" Or… at some point I talked to a *New York Times* editor about an idea and the editor said, "I'm familiar with your work from *TheNotebook*". It's interesting to me because when I was writing for the [national newspaper], well it's older and more prestigious than *TheNotebook*… But the way the site is designed, people often didn't see my stuff! I would work on these pieces, they were awesome, and they would just disappear! It was like it didn't exist. But *TheNotebook* really knows how to exploit the stories and show them to the readers.

Margaret complicates the picture by establishing a distinction between prestige and exposure. The national newspaper she was working for previously is more prestigious than *TheNotebook*: it is older, more respectable, and has a more central position in the journalistic world. But articles rotated very quickly on the newspaper's website, so many articles hardly appeared on the homepage. Hence, though it was theoretically prestigious to write for the newspaper's website, articles could "disappear." In contrast, she explains that *TheNotebook* really "exploits the stories," in the sense that the editors usually post articles on the homepage for a longer period of time. According to Margaret, this exposure led to several opportunities with other newspapers or magazines that pay better than *TheNotebook*.

Different publics: quality versus quantity

Both Margaret and Anne draw a distinction between 'lay' and 'professional' readers. For a website to be considered as providing "good exposure," the site not only has to be read by a large number of people, but it should also be followed by the people who really matter: other journalists and editors – people who might later offer the writer a job.

Yet different freelancers attach different weight to these 'lay' and 'professional' subgroups. For example, Etienne, a 38-year-old wine blogger who contributes to *LaPlace,* explains that he is mostly interested in having a large number of readers, regardless of whether they are journalists or not:

> Etienne (Paris): *LaPlace*… I mostly blog for them because of their visibility, it is much better than my own blog on wine… When I write an article for *LaPlace*, I don't write on technical things, I keep these pieces for my own blog which is more for experts… For *LaPlace* I try to write easy and fun pieces so that the editors will promote my articles.

> The main point for me is to be read by a large number of people. I want people to talk about my work on wine… The only thing I care about is the number of readers.

Etienne blogs for *LaPlace* for free. He justifies it by explicitly drawing on the idea of 'visibility' as a quantitative criterion: what matters is the sheer number of readers who 'click' on his articles and might later visit his own blog on wine. Etienne currently has a day job, but he hopes to eventually make a living with his blog, through advertising revenues and by receiving a percentage on wine sales.

In contrast, Nikos, the illustrator who works for free for *LaPlace*, is more critical of the concept of "visibility" and its alleged benefits in terms of reputation and work opportunities.

> Nikos (Paris): It's true that I gained visibility with *LaPlace*… Between the blog, Facebook, Twitter, I post my drawings everywhere. I don't even remember how many followers I have […]. Six months ago, I received a proposition from an advertising agency, they had seen my drawings on *LaPlace* and they liked it. But it's the first time that I got something out of this blog. So I tell myself that my investment in the blog had positive consequences… But when Philippe tells me: "Congratulations! 3,000 clicks on your drawing!," I want to tell him: "Wait… I've been working for you for five years and nothing came out of it!" The people who read my articles, they're internet users, not companies… I don't need this kind of visibility, I mean I do, but what I really need is to make a living…

Nikos has mixed feelings about "visibility." He now works for an advertising agency that learned about his work on *LaPlace*, so he believes that his "investment" has been profitable. Yet he also remembers that for five years, "nothing came out" of his free work for the website. Like Anne and Margaret, Nikos contrasts lay readers and professional readers (in his case, advertising companies).

All freelancers emphasize that having a large number of readers is essential in the web economy. Journalists and bloggers engage in a constant quest for readers, 'followers' on Twitter,

or 'friends' on Facebook. Exposure, in this sense, is not necessarily something that happens to you: it is also an object upon which one can act.

Take the example of Patricia, who used to be a staff journalist for website of a mainstream national magazine. After she was laid off in 2011, she had a baby and moved to Washington, D.C. to live with her husband, who is also a journalist. She now freelances and blogs for a political magazine website:

> Patricia: My blog is not doing poorly but it's not doing great either. After the debate, I was so annoyed by Romney I wrote this piece and got 3,000 likes on Facebook… It's not bad. But it's depressing when I look at [the national magazine's website], where it's more like 100,000 likes… It's frustrating because it's the same ideas, but just fewer people read it… On Twitter I have 2,000 followers… Yeah, I still don't know how to pass the threshold and be followed massively on Twitter. But now I'm followed by several editors, it's really important. It's a way to build my brand. That's what online journalism is about today… You have a brand and the people who read you follow you. XXX [*journalist's name redacted*], for example, he moved four times, and people follow him everywhere. I want to get to that point.

Patricia compares her reputation to a "brand" that she "builds." She mixes quantitative and qualitative criteria when describing how her articles are received. On the quantitative side, she mentions the number of "likes" that her articles attract on Facebook and compares it to the number of "likes" that she used to have when she was working for the mainstream magazine's website. She complains about the fact that she 'only' has 2,000 followers on Twitter and does not know how to reach a larger audience. On the qualitative side, she emphasizes that she is now followed by several important editors on Twitter, which she describes as "really important" in order to "build her brand."

Many journalists closely associate the question of exposure and reputation with their use of Twitter. Twitter is a complex arena in which journalists seek to do many things at once: it is a way to promote one's work; a measurement of one's sphere of influence; and also a networking

site where job listings are posted. For example, Marie describes Twitter as one of her most important work tools:

> Marie (Paris): Twitter is sooo important… All the journalists are on Twitter. It's really a networking thing. I mean, I got all of my jobs through Twitter. Two days ago, a guy I didn't know sent me an email because they're starting a website and they want to hire me […]. That's where you get all the gossip. All the job listings are posted on Twitter. So in this case I guess that the guy checked my profile, he noticed that I had many followers and everything… It's not the only thing that matters of course but… with Twitter now I have some influence, I have a network of people who follow me, it matters. I know that people also hired me for this reason! They think: "she's on Twitter, she has a large number of followers, so whenever she tweets an article her followers will retweet it…"

According to both Marie and Patricia, Twitter has become a useful tool to build one's brand and keep a loyal fan base. Marie and Patricia say that one's number of followers on Twitter is a professional asset: editors check these numbers because they want to make sure that the authors have a large number of faithful readers who are likely to "retweet" and "click" on the journalists' articles and bring traffic and advertising revenue to their website. Journalists thus make constant efforts to increase their number of followers and readers. John, the freelancer who lives in Pittsburgh and blogs for *TheNotebook*, describes his daily routine for promoting his articles online:

> John: It can certainly be disheartening when you spent a couple of hours pitching your ideas and writing the article, and then… you get nothing on social media. It's frustrating! But you realize that a lot of social media things happen because authors are promoting their own work and putting it out there, and that takes some more energy. Not only do you have to write the article, you also have to spend some time promoting it too. […] I usually try to tweet in the morning, in the evening, and sometimes during the weekend for a particular article. I also have a Facebook page for my blog so I promote things there. Then, if I have the energy, I'll put it on StumbleUpon, Reddit, Pinterest… It's hit or miss. Another thing that has worked for me in the past, especially when I was scraping to get attention, I would write something on a topic and then I would search on Twitter for people who were talking about it and then tweeted at them, "hey, you might think this is interesting"… I'm very conscious about promoting my work.

John's routine is thorough: not only does he write and publish his articles on *TheNotebook*, he also tweets them, posts them on two different pages on Facebook, as well as on Reddit, StumbleUpon, and Pinterest, before sending private messages to journalists and influential people on Twitter… Yet he concludes: "it's hit or miss." Despite these efforts, U.S. and French freelancers – like *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*'s editors before them – realize that it is unclear when or why an article 'goes viral.'

The concept of reputation in web journalism appears to embrace both quantitative and qualitative criteria. On the quantitative side, all journalists highlight the importance of quantitative measures of "exposure:" the number of readers that their articles attract, the number of followers on Twitter, and the number of friends on Facebook. On the qualitative side, they also underline that some readers count more than others: it is important to build a positive reputation among 'professional' readers (i.e., journalists, editors, and advertising companies) who might provide job opportunities in the future. In addition, journalists are conscious that they have some agency in building up their "brand" by thoroughly promoting their articles online and increasing their visibility on social networking sites.

This distinction between different kinds of publics and types of "exposure" matches Heinich's comparative analysis of "reputation" versus "renown" (Heinich 2012). According to Heinich, "reputation" consists of the esteem of one's peers, whereas "renown" or "celebrity" draws on the opinion of a wider audience. As this section shows, "renown" in web journalism is assessed through simple quantitative indicators, whereas "reputation" is more complex to define.

IV. Networks, 'friends,' and 'followers'

Finally, freelancers all agree that contacts are an essential resource in the journalistic world. Most journalists hear about new work opportunities through friends and acquaintances. According to them, professional ties and friendship ties are often intertwined. For example, Anne, the freelancer who lives in Senegal, describes how she searches for job opportunities:

> Anne: I'm proactive, I'm always contacting other newsrooms when I have a topic in mind, I have their email addresses and I contact them. When you're a freelancer you have to be proactive or you're dead! But I also have a friend in each newsroom in France, it helps.

Anne starts by explaining that she is "proactive": she emails editors when she has a topic that she thinks might interest them. She adds that she also has friends in many newsrooms, which "helps" in terms of receiving commissions for articles. And indeed it complements her proactive efforts: her friends can talk to the editors and vouch for her; or they can remind the editors that they know a good freelancer in Senegal. Anne went to a large journalism school in Paris, the *Institut Pratique du Journalisme* (IPJ). Most of the members of her cohort found salaried positions in newsrooms, which explains why she has friends everywhere despite her relatively young age.

Yet creating these multiplex ties – which are both friendship ties and professional ties – is not easy. It often results from a long career in journalism. Both Sean and Gabriella, two freelancers who are older and more experienced, emphasize how central their previous work experiences have been in developing their professional network:

> Sean (New York): When I hear young journalists say "I want to freelance," I say: "Bad idea! Go work on staff somewhere first, go learn and get contacts, and then when you're ready and when you know people you can go freelance." It's very hard, I think, to start as a freelancer, when you don't have any contacts and you don't have a lot of experience.

> Gabriella (Paris): But being a freelancer is hard, it's a hard thing to do when you're just starting... I know a lot of people from when I was in New York who are bosses now… So I have a good network, a network that I didn't have before because I didn't go to journalism school.

Sean and Gabriella explain that building a network of good relations is hard work and takes time. According to them, it is not a good idea to start a career in journalism as a freelancer. Sean thinks that young journalists would be better advised to start on staff somewhere, in order to "get contacts" and "know people," and only later become freelancers. Similarly, Gabriella praises her network, which is mostly composed of people she met when she was a correspondent in New York in the 1990s, who are now senior editors at major publications.

Building one's network: online and offline

Do young journalists agree with the statement that building one's network takes time and efforts? Many young journalists also emphasize that contacts are essential. They often add that going to journalism school is one of the best ways to get meet helpful people. Nathan, a 30-year-old journalist who freelanced for a couple of years before finding an editorial position at a New York-based news website, explains:

> Nathan (New York): I went to journalism school at Columbia. I was working in Chicago. I didn't like my job and I wanted to move to New York and become a journalist. But I didn't have any clue about how to become a reporter… I thought that it would be hard to be a freelancer… I'm not a self-starter; I'm not good at pitching myself. I knew that in J school you made connections, it's more of a networking thing.

Nathan assesses his social skills in a realistic way: he emphasizes that he is "not a self-starter" and "not good at pitching [himself]." He decided to go to the Columbia Journalism School because he wanted to make connections, rather than because of the curriculum in journalism.

Journalists who did not go to journalism school also think that it is harder for them because they are not as 'plugged in' as journalism graduates. Joseph, a freelance journalist in New York has a M.A. but did not go to journalism school. He highlights how hard it was to enter the editorial world that interested him:

> Joseph (New York): As soon as I found this [*online magazine*] I realized that it was exactly what I wanted to do… I wrote to [*the editor*] a couple of times, I didn't hear back. One day I saw that they were doing an event five minutes away from my house. So I went there and it was great; I introduced myself to everybody and I volunteered to do the website […]. I needed nurturing relationships, because I had never been to journalism school, so I needed someone to teach me how to do this, so that's what [*this website*] was for me. By doing that work for free, I knew that I was doing it for connections, for mentorship, for friendships, relationships, support, and community. That was worth it for me.

Joseph's account is revealing in several ways. First, he describes how discouraging it can be to try to get in touch with editors: he emailed several times but did not hear back from them for a year. It was eventually a pure coincidence that triggered the encounter: he went to an event that took place near his house, where he met the editors and the staffers; he got along with everybody and started working for the website. Second, Joseph underlines the arbitrage that he made between compensated work and social capital. He worked for free for two years, but it was "worth it" because he got connections, mentorship, friendship, and support from the people at the website. According to Joseph, this support was essential because he did not go to journalism school.

In Joseph's case, the encounter with editors took place with a face-to-face interaction at a social event. Yet other freelancers explain that Twitter now plays an essential role in the construction of professional networks. Marie develops this idea by comparing Twitter to a coffee machine:

> Marie: Twitter is like the coffee machine that freelancers don't have. You see, in a company, the coffee machine is where people gossip: which position is available, that kind of things. But when you're a freelancer you're alone, at home, you don't have a coffee machine. But we get the gossip on Twitter, because we're in a network of journalists […]. Twitter is an amazing tool for me, it's a way to promote my work…It's called *personal branding* [*in English*], it's criticized but it's actually important, it's a way to put your work out there. You couldn't do that before… You had to send your CV… or you really depended on your friends… or you had to go to the right conference and shake hands with the right people and show how proactive and motivated you were. With Twitter, you enter the network of important people without having to send a CV…

According to Marie, Twitter is an essential tool in order to build a good network of relations: she still pitches her ideas directly to editors and relies on her network of friends, but a large part of this relational work now takes place on Twitter. On Twitter she learns about professional "gossip" (new positions, conflicts, promotions, etc.) and also uses it as an opportunity to interact with "important people."[10]

However, many journalists still think that face-to-face interactions are overall more productive than online interactions. Mara, a 26 year-old journalist who works as a 'temp' at a national magazine and freelances on the side for *TheNotebook*, makes the following point:

> Mara: Working over email really takes longer than working face to face; it can also be a little bit frustrating to wait for people to get back to you […].I look forward to the day when I won't have to do that. When I worked at home, I was lonely. And you don't really feel like you can always go back to those people, like after a year, because you're not, you know, your relationship is not really… You don't know each other.

Mara never met anyone from *TheNotebook*, even though she wrote several articles for them and lives in New York. Most of the exchanges take place over email, a few by telephone. Mara does not like working over email: she thinks that it takes more time, it feels lonely, but most importantly it is not a face-to-face interaction. Even though she works regularly with an editor of

[10] Based on the interviews, it appears that, contrary to other highly educated professions (Kuhn and Skuterud 2004, Pfieffelmann, Wagner, and Libkuman 2010), freelance journalists do not use employment websites such as Monster.com to find out about job opportunities. Most of the information about open editorial positions is listed instead on Twitter.

TheNotebook, she does not feel that she "knows" him or that she could "go back to him" and ask for work a year from now.

Many web journalists underline the continuing importance of face-to-face interactions. Even though they do not technically have to go to the newsroom, web freelancers often explain that they still do it regularly as a way to maintain good relationships with the editors and staffers. For example, Sean says that he usually goes to *TheNotebook*'s office at least two days per week:

> Sean (New York): I usually come to the office two or three days a week and work at home the rest of the week. I find it good to get out of the house and see people, it prevents me from going cabin-crazy. When you don't see anyone and you work at home all day, I think that you lose some social skills. There is a tendency to become a little bit paranoid. You send in the first draft of your story, you don't hear anything for two days, and you think "I'm never going to work again. They hated it. They emailed all their editor friends and told them how bad it was" [*laughs*]. And then when you actually go into the office, everyone's super busy. And the reason they didn't answer is because they haven't looked at the draft yet, they were too busy with other stuff. That's why it's good to go into the office.

Sean humorously describes a paranoid tendency common among freelancers who work from home: when they do not hear back from the editors about a piece, they tend to imagine the worst. Tellingly, the worst case scenario entails blacklisting: Sean imagines that the editors of *TheNotebook* "emailed all of their editor friends and told them how bad it was," indicating that his reputation and network might be the things that he cares the most about.[11] In Paris, Marie also mentions the benefits of face-to-face interactions:

> Marie (Paris): The good thing with my day job is that I have to spend time in newsrooms. First, it's nice from time to time to be in an office with people, actual people… I couldn't be alone at my place 24 7. Sometimes it's nice to be in a lively place where people talk about the latest news, where they interact… Also it's a way to do some networking… people get to know you… that's how people come to think of you when a friend of theirs is looking for a freelancer…

[11] I have never directly encountered any case of "blacklisting" during my fieldwork but this fear is highly common among freelancers (see Barley and Kunda (2004) for similar findings about computer programmers).

Marie is conscious of the truth of the dictum "Out of sight, out of mind." She believes that face-to-face interactions are important for future work opportunities: people are more likely to remember you when they see you regularly in the newsroom. Marie thus has several reasons to do 'shifts' in web newsrooms. First, it is a way to pay the bills while keeping enough free time for her writing. Second, it helps to maintain good relationships with the staffers and editors and leave open the possibility of future work contracts.

Yet maintaining good relationships with the staffers and editors one works with is not always easily achieved. Anne, in Senegal, hopes to keep working with *LaPlace*, but she highlights one contentious issue with the website:

> Anne: It's been a while since *LaPlace* last paid me. They regularly forget… You have to check, make sure they pay you, and ask them over and over again. It's really annoying… especially because you get the feeling that you're harassing people. You look like a beggar ["*ça fait très quémandeur*"] when, I mean, you're only asking for your wage!

Anne describes her dilemma. On the one hand, she wants to be paid for her articles and *LaPlace* regularly forgets to pay her if she does not repeatedly remind them. On the other hand, she runs the risk of damaging her relationship with the editors when she "harasses" them about money, which makes her "look like a beggar."

The previous sections of this chapter documented similarities in the constant trade-offs that French and American freelancers reach between passion, compensation, reputation, and networking. For example, freelance journalists accept to work for free as long as the work is interesting or provides good exposure. They alternate between day jobs, which they find uninteresting, and their writing activity, which they consider as a "passion." They refrain from

repeatedly asking to be paid for their articles because they do not want to damage their relationship with the editor of a prestigious website, even though they often desperately need the money. Finally, they engage in careful management of their personal "brands" on Twitter. So far, freelancers seem to organize their careers in highly similar ways in the United States and France.

V. National differences: evaluating one's life in the market

In this last section, I focus on the main difference that emerges between the discourses of French and American freelance journalists. What is it like to be a 'free agent' in a competitive marketplace? French and American freelancers provide differing answers to this question at two levels: first, regarding the stereotypes and discriminations associated with independent work; second, regarding the concept of 'personal branding' and self-promotion.

First, what do freelancers think of their status as independent workers? American journalists never mention the subject. Rather, they all seem to believe that freelancing is the most common way to start in journalism. None of the journalists I interviewed in the United States ever mentioned negative stereotypes or extra-professional difficulties relating to their freelance status.[12]

In contrast, French freelance journalists repeatedly pointed out the hardships and discriminations they faced as independent workers. Gabriella, 42, was *LaPlace*'s manager editor between 2007 and 2009, after which she worked at a prestigious culture magazine for a year. She started freelancing again in 2010 and describes the unexpected difficulties that she encountered.

[12] Except regarding the provision of health insurance, though the majority of salaried entry-level positions at news websites do not provide benefits, so this issue is not specific to freelancers.

> Gabriella (Paris): I decided to start freelancing again... but it's hard. What I hadn't anticipated before is the look of pity on journalists' faces. Journalists are obsessed with salaried employment, it's really an obsession! A friend of mine told me, "You got fired?" No, actually, I resigned! This look of pity, like "poor you, you don't have a real job!"… It's hard. Also, in order to get interviews… If I go to a political meeting and I have a question, people ask for my name and my publication… and I don't have any. So often they refuse to answer. […] I think that it's not healthy to be that obsessed about salaried employment… For a long time I thought that it was different in the United States… It's true that they have star journalists who are independent… We have none.

According to Gabriella, being a freelancer in France is not easy. First, independent contracting has a bad reputation among journalists, who are "obsessed with salaried employment." Many people – including her friends – see freelancing as a professional failure and consider her with pity. Second, Gabriella argues that it is more difficult to do her work as a freelancer than as a staff member: she finds it harder to obtain the authorization to interview political figures. Finally, Gabriella contrasts the French situation with the situation in the United States, where she was a freelancer at the beginning of her career. She points out that many prestigious writers in the United States are freelancers, which is not the case in France.

Marie, who is twenty years younger than Gabriella and works with different Parisian newsrooms, emphasizes similar issues:

> Marie (Paris): People always assume that you're looking for salaried employment… When you have a tenured position, it's like "Congratulations! You found the Holy Grail!" Well, no, I'm glad to be a freelancer… But each time I start a new shift in a newsroom, the bosses treat me like I'm an intern, like I'm incompetent. In France we're still in this system where freelancing is a fallback option… Most people want to become salaried employees. But I think that younger people are starting to understand that we have nothing to expect from big companies… Several of my friends who work in big firms, they have the Holy Grail, a tenured position, and they're super bored… […] But right now I'm looking for an apartment and it's hell. No one even wants to consider us because we don't have a tenured position… even though we make enough money and we could pay the rent!

According to Marie, there are many negative stereotypes against freelancers: editors usually assume that she is incompetent and treat her as an intern before realizing that she knows her job. She also underlines a generational change, arguing that a growing number of young people are rebelling against the ideology of tenured positions as the "Holy Grail." Yet she acknowledges that there are material difficulties associated with independent contracting. For example, she has trouble finding an apartment because landlords prefer tenants who have regular wages.

A second important difference that emerge between American and French freelancers regards their understanding of 'personal branding,' or the idea that they are have to market their own reputation as a brand. American freelancers often rely on market-based metaphors when describing their efforts in promoting their work. For example, John, the writer who works for *TheNotebook*, explains:

> John: I try to promote myself… I know the importance of branding so I hired a friend to do these business cards for me… I left them everywhere. They're colorful and engaging. It's just a way of keeping people interested … And my website is like an online portfolio that allows me to show editors, "hey, look what I'm doing", but also to show my work to the rest of the world, with social media… So that's a way to get my name out there and my writing out there… for free, of course, but it's exposure… Also I'm going to conferences, being persistent, meeting contacts, trying to get my ideas out there…

John is very conscious of the fact that journalism operates as a marketplace, where "promoting" your "brand" matters, as does having a "portfolio" that you can use to get your name "out there." John does not hesitate to rely on a corporate repertoire in order to describe his efforts to become a full-time writer. In contrast, many French freelancers are reluctant to the idea that they are entrepreneurs and that journalism is a marketplace.

> Marie: Networking… I'm not very good at it. Once I know people, yeah, I'll follow them on Twitter and I'll try to stay in touch, but it's not systematic. I don't do *personal branding* [*in English*] I'm trying to be myself ["*j'essaie de rester moi-même*"]. But then it's true that when I post one of my slideshows and tweet: "look at my latest slideshow,"

> well I'm selling myself ["*je me vends*"], it's true that I try to get attention, but I think that it's natural, I just finished a slideshow, it's natural, it's not strategic or mathematical…

Marie establishes a clear distinction between "natural" and "strategic" self-promotion. On the "natural" side, Marie explains that it is normal to promote one's work on Twitter, since she is proud of her slideshows and wants to "get attention" and circulate them widely. Even though she promotes her work, she wants to "be [her]self." To the contrary, Marie is critical of "strategic" approaches such as "personal branding," which she associates with "mathematical" behaviors such as following every single person one interacts with on Twitter. Thus, "personal branding" appears unnatural and artificial to Marie. She even compares it to human trafficking ("selling oneself"), not unlike the French web editors who drew on the metaphor of prostitution to describe the chase for traffic.[13]

Hence, French and American freelancers seem to differ on one point: the discursive repertoires that they use when describing their employment status as freelancers. Whereas journalists in the United States do not mention negative experiences relating to their freelance status and eagerly rely on the metaphor of personal branding to describe their promotion efforts, French freelancers have mixed feelings about it. They emphasize the discriminations and stereotypes that they face as independent contractors; they also distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' ways of promoting one's work. These divergent vocabularies do not necessarily mean that U.S. and French journalists in fact organize their careers in strikingly different ways. Rather, it indicates that they have different understandings of what it means to be an independent worker in a competitive marketplace.

[13] See Chapter 4 in this manuscript.

VI. Discussion

This last section discusses the findings presented in this chapter with respect to three broader questions: the ways in which independent workers manage uncertainty, the role of networks (online and offline) in job searches, and the differing attitudes of the Americans and the French regarding market forces.

1) Managing uncertainty in independent careers

The interviews presented here describe the complex strategies developed by freelance journalists to manage their careers in the uncertain world of online news. These findings matter since freelancing is becoming an increasingly common occupational status in the current media landscape. For example, in France, the number of "*pigistes*" has risen since 2001, especially among young journalists.[14] In the United States, there is no national data about the proportion of freelance journalists (Weaver 2007: 3). However, many observers rely on small-scale evidence to assert that the number of journalists who freelance or have temporary or part-time positions is increasing (Salmon 2013), which is consistent with existing data on the journalistic labor force.[15]

These developments are part of a larger transformation in the economies of the United States and France. Journalism is not the only sector where the proportion of workers with

[14] Thus, 63% of the journalists of less than 26 years old were freelancers or temp workers in 2011 compared to 50% in 2009. Among the journalists who are between 26 to 34 years old, 33% are freelancers or temporary workers. This proportion is also increasing (Observatoire des Métiers de la Presse 2013).

[15] Indeed, the number of full-time editorial positions created in online news only represents a small fraction of the number of full-time jobs lost in the print sector: the top 468 digital news organizations have produced about 5,000 full-time editorial jobs over the last decade, compared to 16,200 full-time newspaper newsroom jobs lost between 2003 and 2012 (ASNE) and 38,000 magazine jobs lost over the same period (Pew Research Center 2014).[15] Thus, it is reasonable to believe that at least some of these full-time positions have been turned into temporary, part-time, or contract employment, offline and online.

independent, temporary, and part-time jobs (e.g., nonstandard employment) is rising (Kalleberg 2011, Kalleberg 2000, Barley and Kunda 2004: 16, Tilly 1996). According to the most recent national estimates of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 10.3 million independent contractors (7.4 percent of total employment) in the United States in 2005.[16] In addition, millions of workers now have part-time and temporary positions in the United States (Kalleberg 2000) as well as in France (Abdelnour 2012).

One of the main effects of nonstandard employment on the workers' lives is the lack of security and predictability about future economic and professional prospects. How do workers react to these new forms of uncertainty? Several approaches in sociology of work have analyzed this question: the "institutionalist" approach, the "post-Fordist" perspective, and recent research exploring the practical strategies developed by workers to manage uncertainty.

Institutional analyses

In the "institutional" literature on nonstandard work, economists and sociologists have insisted on the negative effects of "bad jobs" on workers' economic and professional prospects.

According to this view, the labor market is now organized as a "dual market" segmented between a "primary" and a "secondary" sector. The primary sector provides stable employment, a career ladder, and benefit plans. The secondary sector is less stable, with nonstandard employment arrangements such as part-time, short-term, or independent work (Berger and Piore 1980, Osterman 1996). Due to causes as diverse as globalization, economic integration, the rise of the service sector, and the growing importance of neo-liberal ideology (Kalleberg 2011, Smith 1997), the secondary market has grown constantly over the past forty years in most Western countries.

[16] http://www.bls.gov/cps/lfcharacteristics.htm

Many scholars explain that the flexibility of the second market has disruptive effects on workers' well-being. Contingent workers are more likely to experience job insecurity, unpredictability, lack of control over their work, and perceive themselves as disadvantaged relative to non-contingent workers (Kalleberg 2011). This is the case both for skilled workers (Bidwell and Briscoe 2009, Kunda, Barley, and Evans 2002) and unskilled workers (Chauvin 2010, Chauvin and Jounin 2011). Even workers with stable jobs feel threatened when their company relies on temporary workers (Pedulla 2013).

Post-Fordist views

"Post-Fordist" analyses adopt a different understanding of the effects of flexibility on people's lives and creativity. In this view, scholars highlight the positive externalities accompanying the rise of nonstandard employment in highly skilled occupations (Damarin 2006).

Thus, organizational sociologists have noted the emergence of "boundaryless careers" in the new economy (Arthur and Rousseau 2001). Several features of the "twenty-first century firm" are central in this process: the permeability of organizational borders is greater; inter-firm networks play a more important role in the production process (Saxenian 1994); there has been an apparent flattening of hierarchy and a shift toward more cooperative forms of organization; creativity, learning, and knowledge have become valued goals in the new "network form of organization" (Owen-Smith and Powell 2004, Powell 2001); and "project-based management" calls for more flexibility and autonomy from the workers (Menger 2009).

These arguments have been pushed to the extreme by the proponents of the new media economy during the boom years of the dot-com bubble. Among the most vocal advocates of the 'free agent' ideology was Daniel Pink, a former speechwriter for Vice President Al Gore, who

argued that direct rebellion against paternalistic companies is the only way to ensure a fulfilling and creative career in a postindustrial economy (Pink 2002, Florida 2002).

Where do freelance journalists stand in this stark dichotomy between institutional and post-Fordist analyses? Based on the findings presented in this chapter, it appears that freelance journalists match both types of predictions. Like the post-Fordist advocates, freelance journalists repeatedly praise the "freedom," "autonomy," and "fun" associated with their independent status.

Yet some of them report stories that match the descriptions of the "institutional" perspective: several freelancers live on food stamps, with no job security, no stable income to pay their rent, and no health insurance. They also tell stories of domination and powerlessness, for example when Anne explains that she hesistates to press for the money she is owed because she does not want to jeopardize future work opportunities. Likewise, Nikos explains that he only takes vacation when his main employer goes on vacation.

Hence, as far as freelance journalism is concerned, the post-Fordist and institutionalist perspectives appear to describe two sides of the same coin: freelance journalists experience both the coercive and fulfilling aspects of their independent status (see Barley and Kunda 2004 for similar findings).

Managing uncertainty

To better understand the case of freelance journalists, we can compare their situation with research on the strategies developed by independent contractors in other fields to manage the radical uncertainty associated with their employment situation.

In their ethnographic study of independent computer programmers, Barley and Kunda analyze the contradictions between the discourse of computer programmers who work as

independent contractors and the reality of their professional lives. When explaining their decision to become contractors, programmers praise the freedom and autonomy associated with independent employment (Barley and Kunda 2004: 56). Yet when examining how programmers organize their careers, the authors find that the reality of independent work is less romantic. Not knowing their sources of income for the foreseeable future, contractors are very conscious of the different forms of capital – temporal, human, and social – at their disposal in order to make a profit (Barley and Kunda 2004: 221). Contractors realize that they need to behave like rational entrepreneurs and maximally exploit these different kinds of capitals. To do so, they work non-stop, train constantly in order to acquire new skills, and use their social networks instrumentally in order to gather information about future work opportunities. Barley and Kunda conclude that, as far as contractors are concerned, "free agency" turns out to be as much an iron cage as a liberating ideology (Barley & Kunda 2004: 291).

In her research on the new media industry in New York's Silicon Alley, Neff completes this picture by proposing three ideal-type strategies used by highly mobile new media workers to manage economic uncertainty (Neff 2012: 69). According to Neff, some people rely on a "financial" strategy, choosing jobs exclusively based on their remunerative potential. Other new media workers develop a "creative" strategy. According to them, creative work is always risky, so they have "nothing to lose" in trying to get more visibility by working on high-profile projects, even if they are less remunerative. The third strategy is "actuarial": people maximize employment and career longevity rather than financial success or artistic reputation. According to Neff, these cultural frames constitute different strategies for managing and making sense of the uncertainties associated with professional life in the fast-paced and risky dot-com economy.

To what extent do these findings apply to the case of freelance journalists? Like Barley and Kunda (2004), I find that freelance journalists behave as maximizing entrepreneurs using the types of resource at their disposal. Freelancers care deeply about reputations, networks, pay, and interesting jobs. They engage in constant arbitrages when trying to maximize these different goals. Journalists accept low pay for a "fun" project. They minimally engage in day jobs that allow them to write on the side. They carefully construct their reputations by collaborating with prestigious websites that provide "exposure," even when the pay is bad or the project is uninteresting. Furthermore, they discuss how essential their contacts are for future employment opportunities and make efforts to protect such relations, sometimes at the expense of their pay. Freelance journalists thus behave as "entrepreneurs of themselves" in the sense that they constantly try to maximize several types of capital at once in order to increase their output (Foucault 2004: 226).[17]

In addition, I find that freelance journalists develop different kinds of strategies to manage their careers. Two main profiles emerge that match Neff's study of dot-com workers (2012). First, several freelancers whom I interviewed adopted a version of the "creative" strategy delineated by Neff. These include journalists like Joseph in New York and Anne in Paris, who assert that they are "not materialistic" and prefer to write "fun" articles for very little or no money. These journalists also participate in artistic or politically engaged projects that pay little but are fulfilling. In contrast, other freelancers adopt a more pragmatic approach, similar to Neff's "actuarial" strategy: they want to continue making a living based on their writing. These

[17] In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault provides a compelling definition of the "homo œconomicus" which adequately describes the nature of such arbitrages: "*Homo œconomicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the stake in all neo-liberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo œconomicus* as a partner of exchange with a *homo œconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his earnings." (Foucault 2004: 226).

freelancers – for example Sean and Patricia in New York or Marie in Paris – make different choices about where they publish their articles. They alternate between work that they find "boring" but pays well and more prestigious publications that enhance their reputations.[18]

The analysis presented here supports the findings of research on independent contracting and the strategic management of economic and professional uncertainty. In the high-tech industry and online journalism, freelancers need to balance the different resources at their disposal. Do these findings hold for occupations other than computer programmers and new media workers, for less-skilled occupations and more marginal populations, for example? Previous work suggests otherwise (Chauvin 2010, Jounin 2008, Wacquant 2008, Goffman 2009), but comparative research on other occupations with many independent workers, as well as the situation in other countries, is needed in order to compile a more comprehensive understanding of the shape of independent careers in the twenty-first century economy.[19]

2) Getting a job, online

A second intriguing set of findings relates to the ways that online networks change journalistic careers. Online tools are universally cited in the stories of freelancers in the United States and France: they all mention the importance of Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and other social media sites. Most of freelance journalists' professional interactions take place online (either over emails, tweets, group chat, or instant messaging), and most of their articles are posted online.

[18] Similar strategies seem to take place among fashion models (Mears 2011, Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005). However, in journalism as well as in fashion modeling, there is no trace of a "financial" strategy, which can be explained by the lack of opportunities to make large profits by obtaining stock-options in these fields.

[19] Another important research program would be to explore more systematically the socio-demographic characteristics of independent workers. For example, several freelancers mentioned that they had other sources of income which allowed them to make more idealistic career choices. A more complete analysis should take this information into account in explaining the career decisions of independent workers.

The growing importance of digital tools leads to a stronger emphasis among freelancers on quantitative rather than qualitative measurements of prestige, social capital, and reputation. Numbers of readers, numbers of followers on Twitter, and numbers of friends on Facebook have become central concerns for freelance journalists. High numbers are a measure of their reputation and extensive networks. These numbers are also a valuable resource when negotiating future employment opportunities: journalists cite rumors that editors check the size of the writers' online networks as a way to assess the potential popularity of their articles. These quantitative measurements differ from the more traditional qualitative criteria of journalistic reputation, such as the prestige of one's newspaper, the value attached to one's articles, or the power and status of one's sources.[20]

Yet these transformations should not be overstated. In fact, freelancers' career strategies seem rather resistant to change. Web journalists brag about the high numbers of readers and followers that they have, but they also point out that the prestige of a publication is as important as its daily traffic numbers. They highlight the advantages of being connected and 'in flux' all the time, but still feel lonely when they work from home. They emphasize the importance of Twitter in building their professional network, but still think that face-to-face interactions are essential in order to find work.

Contrary to the idea that the web has dramatically transformed the nature of social interactions and the sharing of resources in an increasingly connected world, I find that classical sociological findings about the role of networks in job searches seems to hold true in online journalism. Freelancers still rely on a mix of weak ties and strong ties in order to find work opportunities, in a good case of "network complementarity" (Granovetter 1995, Uzzi 1997). Twitter acquaintances might be useful once in a while in order to learn about an occasional

[20] See Chapter 5.

freelance gig, but it is vital to have strong ties with a handful of editors who are able to give work on a regular basis (Barley and Kunda 2004, Pilmis 2007). Freelance journalists explain that it takes time and efforts to maintain relationships that are both professional and meaningful for the people involved.

In other words, the internet should not be understood as a unidirectional force that dramatically transforms the shape and meaning of networks and careers (Boczkowski 2005); online tools simply add another layer of complexity. In the case of reputations, networks, and job searches, quantitative criteria are not taking over qualitative criteria. Rather, freelancers play on a complementary mix of quantitative and qualitative resources when searching for new work opportunities – a wise strategy in a context of high uncertainty about their professional value.

3) American and French freelancers: the question of inconsistency

The third important finding of this chapter is the difference between the discourses of American and French freelancers in describing their situations in a competitive market. As we saw in Chapter 1, the "national cultural repertoires" perspective proposed by Lamont and Thévenot argues that the French are less likely than Americans to draw on market-based arguments; instead, they rely on "civic-solidarity" arguments that emphasize non-materialist and egalitarian values (Lamont and Thévenot 2000: 8).

The findings of this chapter broadly support these conclusions: French freelancers are indeed much less likely than their American counterparts to describe themselves as rational maximizers on a competitive market. Instead, they prefer to emphasize the friendship ties, non-materialistic values, and collaborative projects that they developed with their colleagues. It

would be mistaken to stop here, however, since I also find that American and French freelancers give very similar descriptions of their daily decisions in building their careers. French and American freelancers alike emphasize the constant trade-offs between passion, payments, reputation, and networking. Whereas French freelancers have a more critical discourse about instrumental behavior than their American counterparts, the two groups appear to manage their careers similarly, or at least to describe their career choices in a similar way.

How should we make sense of these paradoxical findings? In drawing on the concept of arrangement to describe *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, I argued that *TheNotebook*'s editors and journalists were highly consistent in their discourses and practices. For example, *TheNotebook*'s editors discursively emphasized the importance of web metrics and also relied on traffic numbers to make routine editorial decisions. Similarly, the U.S. journalists who discursively professed their indifference towards numbers disregarded metrics in their daily work. In contrast, *LaPlace*'s editors and journalists presented a deep disconnect between discourses and practices, since they vocally asserted how critical they were of internet metrics but also constantly looked at Chartbeat.

I document a similar situation for freelance journalists. American freelancers describe themselves as rational maximizers on a competitive market, which is consistent with their descriptions of the constant arbitrage that they have to perform in order to maximize their chances to have successful careers in journalism. In contrast, French freelancers assert that they want to "be themselves" and are highly critical of instrumental approaches such as "personal branding." Yet they seem to engage in the same rational arbitrage as their American counterparts.

Hence, the French freelancers examined in this chapter draw on a somewhat inconsistent repertoire to describe their independent careers. This finding supports the idea developed in

previous chapters that the history and structure of the journalistic field make French journalists more reluctant to rely on an openly market-based repertoire to justify their actions.[21] American journalists do not have the same doubts: they switch in and out of market repertoires in a much more fluid way.

Conclusion

This chapter compares the lived experiences of freelance web journalists in the United States and France. Despite the different journalistic traditions and legal frameworks in these two countries, French and American freelancers describe similar trade-offs between four different objectives: passion, compensation, reputation, and networking. In both countries, freelancers make constant arbitrages using the different types of resources at their disposal to further their careers in journalism. The main difference between the two countries emerges at the discursive level, in the description that freelancers provide of their employment status.

By stepping outside of the news organizations, this chapter provides a complementary view of the freelance workers who constitute an increasingly important part of the workforce producing online news in the United States and France. It shows that new websites are highly porous organizations, in the sense that they outsource a large part of their editorial production to external contributors, who themselves are associated with several websites simultaneously. In so doing, this chapter argues that the content published on news websites should not be understood as a unitary block written by a bounded editorial team. Rather, it is a collection of highly diverse editorial formats coming from many different sources: staffers' articles, freelance pieces, blog

[21] It is important to mention that this does not necessarily mean that the careers of U.S. and French freelancers unfold in ways that are exactly similar. The analysis presented here draws on retrospective interviews with freelancers, who might have biased memories and partial understandings of the events that shaped their careers.

posts, partnerships, and op-eds. The next and final chapter of this dissertation will provide a quantitative analysis of the articles produced by these porous organizations.

CHAPTER VII

"Sex, Scandals, and Celebrities"?

Exploring the Determinants of Success in Online News

What kinds of articles are read most often on news websites? The previous chapters of this dissertation analyzed the ways that web journalists interpret internet metrics and integrate these numbers into competing definitions of journalistic excellence. Throughout the materials compiled from interviews and ethnographic observations, journalists commented on the types of articles that were "hits" or "flops." Web journalists thus engage in reflexive analysis about the preferences of their online audience and the characteristics of their own editorial production. In this last chapter, I compare these intuitive claims with an original data set allowing a quantitative analysis of the determinants of online success.

How do web journalists make sense of their readers' preferences? Reactions are mixed. Most journalists assert that it is virtually impossible to predict which articles are going to "go

viral" and bring millions of visitors to the website. In online news, like in many other cases of cultural production, "all hits are flukes" (Bielby and Bielby 1994). However, journalists also draw on their observations of traffic numbers to make statements about the kinds of articles that tend to be popular online.

Specifically, web editors and journalists make three central claims about the determinants of articles' success online. First, they say that readers usually 'click' on stories involving sex, scandal, and celebrities. In contrast, prestigious sections covering international news, politics, and the arts are said to perform poorly in terms of page views. Second, web editors and journalists draw strong distinctions between different categories of readers. According to them, the readers who access the website from Twitter and Facebook are young and superficial, whereas the readers who regularly comment on articles are described as "trolls" being disproportionately attracted by controversial topics. Finally, web editors argue that posting a high quantity of content is essential in order to attract more traffic, since online readers are looking for constant updates. Journalists thus believe that they have to 'feed the machine' by posting articles and blog posts at very short intervals in order to grow a loyal audience over time.

Yet it is an open question whether web journalists and editors are correct in their representations of their readers' preferences. In this article, I examine the determinants of online success by drawing on a data set of articles published on the French website *LaPlace*. With the assistance of a computer scientist,[1] I collected all of the articles published between May 2007 and September 2012 (13,152 articles) on *LaPlace.* The data set includes several variables of interest for each article: the number of visits, "tweets" on Twitter, "likes" on Facebook, and comments written by readers. It also includes the headline and key-words assigned to each article, the time of publication, length, number of quotes, gender of the author, and author's employment

[1] I thank Yannis Varni for his help with this project.

status. These different variables allow me to examine the determinants of online popularity over time and compare these findings with the journalists' statements.

This research design is innovative in several ways. First, the statistical analysis presented here takes advantage of the rise of "big data" available online (Boyd and Crawford 2012, Hobeika and Ollion 2012). This allows me to analyze the entire population of articles published by a generalist news organization on its home page since its creation. This design is more exhaustive than existing content analyses that draw on a sample of articles selected over time (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein 2013, Benson 2013, Boczkowski 2010). Second, the comparison of ethnographic material (the journalists' predictions of online success) and statistical analysis (the actual determinants of online success) affords a more nuanced reading of the ethnographic data (Gramain and Weber 2001). If web journalists have a biased understanding of the audience's preferences, what does it indicate about the internal culture of news websites and the worldview of web journalists?

This chapter proceeds as follows: I start by briefly summarizing how web journalists and editors at *LaPlace* understand internet traffic and the preferences of their readers. Three key notions emerge from the ethnographic material. Second, I introduce the original data set and the variables used in the statistical analysis. Third, I present my quantitative findings. In the final section, I discuss the implication of these results.

I. How web journalists understand traffic numbers

How do journalists and editors at *LaPlace* interpret their readers' preferences? I describe three central ideas that are prevalent among web journalists: the "sex, scandals, and celebrities" idea, the claim that "commenters are trolls," and the assertion that "more gets us more."

1) Sex, scandals, and celebrities

What kinds of articles are likely to attract large numbers of readers? *LaPlace*'s journalists and editors have strong views on this question: they all agree that articles about sex and celebrities are particularly popular, whereas pieces on world news, politics, and culture do not attract as many readers. The following quotes excerpted from my interviews support this distinction:

> Philippe (editor-in-chief): If we only cared about the number of clicks, we would only write about celebrities. Celebrities… it always works. […] But if we only do Syria, Africa, and… say, the socialist party's plan on housing policy, we won't get any readers.
>
> Marina (managing editor): Our readers couldn't care less about Syria. A headline on Syria will only get 4,000, 5,000 clicks, which is not a lot. […] At 8am, if we see on Chartbeat that traffic is all flat, we post an article, a scandal, something about sex, or something about corruption… because we know that we need to hook the readers in…
>
> Gael (Social Media Editor): If we want more traffic, we have to do more articles about celebrities and scandals… See [*he opens Google Analytics on his monitor and shows me traffic trends since 2007*], this peak is Cecilia Sarkozy's blank vote; the second peak is when Dominique Strauss-Kahn was arrested in New York.
>
> Louise (staffer): We know the recipes to get more traffic… Kittens and sex, obviously!
>
> Agnès (staffer): In the culture section, you have to become humble. When you write about graphic novels, you know that you won't get a lot of page views. It's pretty clear that the articles that work well are about sex, politics, censorship…

> Marianne (staffer): Well, we know that articles about sex and testimonies ["*témoignages*"] will get a lot of clicks. Sometimes it's more complicated… Some articles, though, it's easy to predict… For example the story about the cops who posted comments on Facebook, in the headline you have 'cops', 'Facebook', and 'arrests,' obviously it's clickable. If you have an article about senators, embezzlement, and dual mandates… It's less likely to work.

Journalists and editors at *LaPlace* all seem to agree on the fact that articles about sex, scandals, and celebrities are likely to attract a large number of page views. Journalists and editors also claim that articles on world news and culture are not very popular. Philippe seems to lament this situation. As he explains with frustration, in Syria, "People are being butchered on every single day… and no one cares." Yet most of the editors and journalists at *LaPlace* who adopt a cynical tone when they talk about traffic do not express strong condemnations of readers' preferences: they just state the facts.

Articles about "scandals" form another category of articles that allegedly attract many readers on *LaPlace.* According to journalists, "scandals" are actions by public figures that can be regarded as legally or morally questionable. Some examples of notable incidents of this kind during the period under consideration included Cecilia Sarkozy (the former wife of President Sarkozy) casting a blank vote in the 2007 elections, Dominique Strauss-Kahn's arrest in New York, and a case in which policemen made derogatory comments on Facebook about several people whom they had arrested. This category of "scandals" also broadly includes the corruption cases mentioned by Marina, as well as the articles on censorship listed by Agnès. All these stories are likely to be successful online, according to *LaPlace*'s editors and journalists.

In addition, Marianne asserts that reader-submitted first-person narratives, or "testimonies" ("*témoignages*"), also tend to be popular. "Testimonies" is a format which is specific to *LaPlace*: readers can send stories to the website about their life or a specific experience that they would

like to share with a larger audience. "Testimonies" are similar to blogs posts in the sense that in both cases the authors are not professional journalists. Yet there is an important difference between the two forms of writing: bloggers repeatedly post on their blogs and tend to specialize on a given topic, whereas "testimonies" are usually a one-time collaboration.[2]

Are these claims consistent with the existing literature on the consumption of online news? A recent publication tends to confirm these ideas but adds important nuances. In their book *The News Gap* (2013), Boczkowski and Mitchelstein explore the difference between journalists and readers' news preferences. Drawing on a content analysis of about 40,000 articles in eight online publications in four different countries, the authors code and analyze the articles that appear in the "Most popular stories" section and compare these articles to the headlines of the homepage (which they consider to be representative of the journalists' preferences). Boczkowski and Mitchelstein find that readers prefer stories about sex, celebrities, crime, and practical matters – what they call "non-public interest stories" (see also Tewksbury 2003). In contrast, "public interest stories" about world news and politics usually attract relatively few page views. The authors also find that user-generated content – they take the example of blog posts – is unpopular on the websites that they study. Hence, Boczkowski and Mitchelstein's study tends to support several ideas presented above, but not the claim on the popularity of "testimonies" on *LaPlace*'s website.

2) Commenters as trolls

LaPlace's journalists and editors emphasize a second important idea regarding online success. According to them, the kinds of articles that attract a high number of comments are different than

[2] See Chapter 5 for more details about the different editorial formats.

the articles that receive a high number of "likes" on Facebook and "tweets" on Twitter. Journalists argue that commenters are a very specific group of readers.

A discussion with Gael gives us his understanding of the distinction between different categories of readers. Gael explains:

> Gael (Social Media Editor): The profiles of the readers are becoming more and more diverse. First, we have the internet users who read our articles on Facebook… It's a particular profile. They read our paper through their friends' links, or they "like" our page on Facebook, but they never go to the website directly… They're younger, 25 or 30 years old, whereas our average reader is more like 30-35 years old. But our returning readers, who are usually the ones who post comments all the time, every day or almost every day, well they hate Facebook because of its use of private data, because of its ideology… […] And then there are some readers, many of them actually, who go on the main page and maybe check out a couple of articles, but don't read the comments, not even the recommended comments, and they don't post anything.[3]

According to Gael, these different categories of readers have distinct profiles and preferences. It is possible to distinguish between two broad categories of readers.

A first group is the large mass of online readers who access the website's content through Facebook and Twitter. These readers usually browse through a couple of articles, do not post comments, and sometimes share the articles with their friends and followers. Readers on Facebook are said to be younger, less interested in political news, and more attracted by "fun," "weird," or unusual stories with pictures that they can "like" and "share" with their friends. Readers on Twitter (nicknamed "twittos" in French) are said to be more educated on average than on Facebook; they are more interested in stories about the media, politics, and the internet.

Journalists also often criticize the behavior of a small group of regular commenters on the website. Most staffers point out that most comments are negative and offensive:

[3] Gael's quote was already cited in Chapter 3 for a different purpose.

> Louise (staffer): The commenters… It's a gold mine, all the information they're giving us, but we don't really use it. Also, some lunatics are posting insults every day! They're insulting the people we interview and they're threatening us… It's not super interesting…
>
> Alexandre (staffer): The comments are usually annoying... There is a lot of trolling involved, people who come to mess around, who are very negative… It's depressing. For example, yesterday we published a fun article, it wasn't really news, but it was a piece about the Nigerian spam, you know, the emails... Well, we were all laughing about it so we thought we could share it with our readers… But of course we got trashed in the comments, "boo it's not news, *LaPlace* is the trashcan of the news, this article is awful". Anyway, I usually don't read the comments. And in the comments, it's mostly trolls, I don't like it, so I try not to pay attention.
>
> Marianne (staffer): There is a lot of garbage in the comments, that's certain. It doesn't add anything to the debate when people say, 'yes I agree' or 'no I disagree' without adding anything else…
>
> Gael (Social Media Editor): The commenters… They're very critical, very politicized, often offensive… It's true that they often drag the discussion down…

Web journalists at *LaPlace* are very critical of the behavior of the website's regular commenters, which they describe as "insulting," "annoying," "depressing," and "offensive."[4] They often rely on the metaphor of "trolling" to characterize regular commenters. In the internet slang, a "troll" is someone who creates discord by posting inflammatory messages and upsetting online communities. For example, a recurring commenter on the website took the pseudonym "LaPlaceGutter." Most of his/her comments harshly criticize the political and editorial line of the website, in addition to insulting each journalist on a daily basis. According to the staffers, commenters are particularly likely to post comments about controversial topics. They explain that topics such as racism, sexism, religion, the Middle East, and immigration particularly appeal to French "trolls."

[4] It should be noted that this is not specific to *LaPlace*: journalists at *TheNotebook* also acknowledged that they never read the comments because they were too offensive and insulting. See Domingo (2008) for an elaboration on the "uncomfortable myth" of interactivity in online news.

Hence, journalists believe that commenters follow a different, negative logic. In comparison, readers who access the website through Facebook and Twitter follow a more positive logic based either on intrinsic interest or a desire to share a "fun" story with friends and acquaintances.

3) "More gets us more"

Finally, web editors and staffers have a specific understanding of traffic growth which can be labelled "more gets us more"[5]: they believe that publishing more content online mechanically brings more traffic to the website.

Thus, each journalist is encouraged to gather, write, and post more content on the website. Chapter 3 and 4 describe in detail the pressure to publish more content, its increase over time at *LaPlace*, and the main reasons why editors generally believe it to be a viable strategy. This process culminated in December 2012 with the emails about "the battle for the audience" ("*la bataille de l'audience*"). As we saw, *LaPlace*'s journalists disagree with the editors' strategy to increase traffic. According to the staffers, doing more aggregation (e.g., cutting and pasting of news produced elsewhere) is not only a waste of their time but also a threat to the editorial line of the website. Louise provides a good summary of the staff's position:

> Louise (staffer): When the bosses sent the email in December… We were all very tired, we had been working so hard… and we received this email saying "hey friends, we feel that you're resisting, you have to work harder! (*laughs*) […] And so they told us everything that we had to do on top of our actual work: more aggregation, checking the news wires, hiring more bloggers… But we're too qualified to do this! I'm better at doing a long investigation on a union than at cutting and pasting a funny video… So we started joking among ourselves, "it's a race, soon we'll have a number on our back with our individual performance…"

[5] This formulation comes from Sam, the editor-in-chief of *TheNotebook*.

According to Louise, who is commenting on the collective email sent by the editors, *LaPlace*'s journalists are over-qualified merely to rewrite news wires and articles published elsewhere. Other staffers complain that writing short posts hinders them from focusing on their long-term investigations. They all agree that the massive increase in the amount of content published daily has blurred the editorial identity of *LaPlace*, making it more similar to its competitors.

Thus, two conflicting understandings of internet traffic emerge from this ethnographic material. On the one hand, the editors believe that publishing more content online increases traffic more than proportionally ("more gets us more"). On the other hand, staffers reply that publishing more is counter-productive; they argue that traffic in fact increases in a less than proportional manner compared to the number of articles.

This section proposed several hypotheses on internet traffic based on interviews and ethnographic observations conducted with journalists and editors at *LaPlace*. The next section turns to the quantitative data used to test these ideas.

II. Data and method: a statistical analysis of *LaPlace*'s content

In collaboration with a computer scientist, I devised a web crawl (an automated computer program) in order to gather all the articles published on *LaPlace*'s central column between May 2007 (when the website was created) and September 2012. This process gathered a total of 13,159 articles.[6]

[6] I hired Yannis Varni as a research assistant in October 2012 to develop the crawl. We discussed and improved the specifications in the following four months. I manually coded several variables about the authors (gender, status, and Twitter account). Varni later integrated these variables in the data set.

The crawling process collected all the articles published in the central column of the website (nicknamed "the river" ("*le fleuve*") by the journalists). Focusing on this section of the website automatically excluded two types of articles from the analysis. First, the articles that were never published on the homepage are not included in our sample. According to the editors, very few articles go unpublished on the homepage; such pieces are usually blog posts written by non-journalists that are deemed to be of poor quality and unfit to be posted on the homepage. During my days of observation, I observed very few instances where the editors vetoed publishing an article on the homepage. These cases invariably involved blog posts written by non-journalists, rather than articles written by staff members or freelance journalists. Second, the sample does not include the short rewrites of news wires and external web content that are published in the section called the "lookout" ("*vigie*"), a column located on the left side of the homepage. In the brief posts published in this section, staffers 'signal' articles published on other websites and provide a short paragraph summarizing the information. Articles that elaborate more lengthy analyses of external content are published in the "river" section of the website and thus are included in the sample.

For each of the 13,159 articles published in the central column of the website, we collected several variables of interest. First, we gathered information on the characteristics of the articles themselves: the time of publication (minute, hour, day, month, and year); the number of words, quotes, images, and hyperlinks. We also gathered the 'tags' of the article, meaning the key-words chosen by journalists and editors to describe the topic of the article. In addition, drawing on the information provided on the website, we gathered variables about the articles' online success: the number of visitors (number of people who clicked on the article), number of times the article was "tweeted" on Twitter, the number of times the article was "liked" on

Facebook, and the number of comments left by readers. Last, we included information about the author(s) of the article: the author's name; the number of authors; the author's professional relationship vis-à-vis *LaPlace* (staffer, freelancer, or blogger); the gender of the author; and his/her use of Twitter (i.e., whether he/she has a Twitter account or not).

These last three variables were documented using a two-step process. First, the computer scientist extracted the information about the gender of the author, his or her status, and his or her Twitter presence[7] based on the biographical note provided for each author on the website. These biographical notes are created by the editors and include the name of the author, her gender, and her occupational status, e.g., whether she is a "journalist" or not. Thus, the original categorization of the author as a journalist or not is decided by *LaPlace*'s staff members. Yet this first coding process left us with many missing variables and unclear cases. To remedy this, I manually checked and recoded the "employment status," "gender," and "Twitter" variables by searching for the names of each of the 2,169 authors online. I use a conservative set of criteria in order to code an author as a "journalist" when the information is missing. In order to be categorized as a journalist, an author either has to define himself as a journalist on Twitter or on his personal website, or (when I could not find a Twitter account or personal website) has to have worked for at least one news organization. I created an additional distinction among the category of "journalists" between the "staffers" affiliated with *LaPlace* (people working in the newsroom, including tenured employees, untenured employees, and interns) and the "freelancers" who write for *LaPlace* on a contractual basis.

Table 5 provides descriptive statistics about the articles and their authors. As shown in Table 5, most of the articles are published during weekdays (76% between Monday and Friday)

[7] We also gathered information on the Twitter activity of each author (number of tweets, number of followers, number of people he/she follows), but I do not use that information here.

rather than weekends. *LaPlace* publishes almost half of its articles during the afternoon (46% of the articles are published between 12pm and 6pm) and to a lesser extent in the evening and the morning (29% and 22% respectively). Very few articles are published at night.

2,169 authors had published at least one article on *LaPlace* as of September 2011. Among these 2,169 authors, 57% are non-journalists, 40% are freelance journalists, and only 3% are staffers affiliated with *LaPlace,* which confirms the idea that the content published on the website comes from multiple sources. More than half of the authors are non-journalists. However, this percentage drops when one looks at the proportion of articles written by each of these categories of authors: staffers provide 44% of the content published on the website, against 33% for freelancers and only 23% for non-journalists. The gender balance is decidedly in favor of men: 55% of the articles published were written by men, against 36% by women. The other 9% of the articles come from partner websites, such as think tanks and NGOs, rather than individuals. Finally, articles published on *LaPlace* are on average 1,008 words long (the longest article has 14,930 words – longer than some academic articles). Articles feature an average of 3 quotes (the maximum number is 65 quotes for an article) and 5 hyperlinks (with a maximum of 105 hyperlinks).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics about the characteristics of the articles

Descriptive statistics		N	%
Articles published	**Total**	**13,159**	**100**
Day:	Weekday	9970	76
	Weekend	3189	34
Time of day:	Morning	2910	22
	Afternoon	6062	46
	Evening	3835	29
	Night	352	3
Number of authors:	Total	2169	100
	Non-journalists	1243	57
	Freelance journalists	857	40
	Staffers	49	3
Number of articles written by:	Non-journalists	3088	23
	Freelance journalists	4435	33
	Staff journalists	5397	44
Number of articles written by:	Males	7,299	55
	Females	4,715	36
	N/A (news organizations)	1,145	9
Number of words	Mean	1,008	--
	Minimum	1	--
	Maximum	14,930	--
Number of quotes	Mean	3	--
	Minimum	0	--
	Maximum	65	--
Number of hyperlinks	Mean	5	--
	Minimum	0	--
	Maximum	105	--

Table 6 provides additional descriptive statistics on the main variables measuring online 'success.' As can be seen in the table, the median number of visits for *LaPlace*'s articles is 24,311 and the average number of visits is 35,738. The difference between the median and the mean is due to the presence of outliers: articles that are "hits" and attract very high numbers of visitors. For example, the most popular article ever published on *LaPlace* was viewed by more than 4 million people. The median number of comments for *LaPlace*'s articles is 104 (the mean

is 147). The median numbers of "likes" and "tweets" are much lower than the number of visits and comments: 71 "likes" (the mean is 331) and 13 "tweets" (the mean is 37) per article. These lower numbers can be explained in two ways. First, Facebook and Twitter only became popular in recent years in France, around 2008-2009 for Facebook and 2011-2012 for Twitter.[8] Second, sharing an article with one's friends on Twitter or Facebook reveals a deeper engagement with the content of the article compared to simply reading an article or even posting an anonymous comment on the website (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein 2013).

Table 6. Descriptive statistics about the measurements of online success

	Median	**Mean**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Number of visits	24,311	35,738	39	4,351,786
Number of "likes" on Facebook	71	330	0	128,445
Number of "tweets" on Twitter	13	37	0	2,679
Number of comments	104	147	0	2,310

Table 7 describes the evolution of the main variables between 2007 and 2012. Before comparing numbers across years, one should remember that *LaPlace* was created in May 2007 (thus 2007 only has 8 months of data) and the fact that the data collection ends in September 2012 (thus 2012 only includes 9 months of data).

As can be seen in Table 7, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of content posted online over the last five years. Between 2007 and 2012, the number of articles published each year on the website has been multiplied by 3.2 (even though 2012 is not a full year). Most

[8] See Chapter 3.

of this increase is due to staffers: the number of articles published by staffers has been multiplied by 5.8, whereas the number of articles published by non-journalists has (only) been multiplied by two over the period. These trends should be understood in the light of *LaPlace*'s expansion: the staff grew from 10 to 21 journalists between 2007 and 2012 (see Appendix A). Interestingly, articles became longer over time, from a median of 694 words in 2007 to 960 words in 2012 (+38%). The median number of quotes and hyperlinks per article also increased over the period, from 0 to 2 for the quotes and 3 to 4 for the hyperlinks.

The evolution of the different measurements of success reveals a mixed picture. The median number of visits grew quickly between 2007 and 2008 (it was multiplied by more than 2). It remained stable between 2008 and 2010. Over the past two years, however, there has been a decline in the number of visits per article, which decreased by 32% between 2010 and 2012. Similarly, the median number of comments has been stable between 2008 and 2011, before decreasing between 2011 and 2012 from 124 to 74. In contrast, the average number of "likes" and "tweets" per article constantly increased over the period, which is logical given the expansion of the two social networking sites between 2007 and 2012.

Table 7. Main variables, 2007-2012

Variables	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Number of articles published online	1035	922	1827	2826	3263	3268
Articles written by staffers	280	254	676	1066	1496	1625
Articles written by non-journalists:	332	251	461	693	697	654
Median number of words per article	694	991	876	880	994	960
Median number of quotes per article	0	2	2	2	2	2
Median number of links per article	3	3	5	4	5	4
Median number of visits	12032	28091	28754	28147	25175	19150
Median number of "likes"	0	2	19	101	220	106
Median number of "tweets"	0	0	0	1	29	51
Median number of comments	57	126	112	124	124	74

In the final part of the data section, I introduce several additional variables for identifying each article's topic. As mentioned above, the web crawl collected all the tags attached to the articles. Copy editors – not journalists – usually decide which tags to attach to any given article. There is an average of 5 tags per article for the entire sample. Tags convey essential information about the article using a limited number of key-words that are drawn from a pre-existing list. When a new topic emerges that cannot be described using existing tags, the copy editors may create a new tag. The number of tags varies between 0 and 29 per article in the sample. As of October 2012, a total of 3,217 different tags had been used. For example, in a recent article about the Olympic Games at Sotchi entitled "The cost of the Olympic Games at Sochi? A farce!," the copy editor in charge of the article used the following tags: "Olympic Games Sochi 2014," "Russia," "Corruption," "Putin," "ski," "Winter Sports," and "Caucasus."

In order to test the idea that sex, celebrities, and scandals are more successful in terms of visits than world news, culture, and politics, I defined five categories of articles based on the aggregation of relevant tags about "politics," "world news," "culture," "sex," and "celebrities and scandals." Instead of aiming for exhaustive categories – which seems hardly possible given that there are more than 3,000 tags – I gathered a critical mass of articles for each category by focusing first on the tags that received many occurrences in the data set.

The "world news" category includes all the articles that have one of the following tags: "world" (972 occurrences),"United States" (582 occurrences), "Europe" (335 occurrences), "Arab Spring" (314 occurrences), "China" (227 occurrences), "Israel" (199 occurrences), "Tunisia" (199 occurrences), "Palestine" (140 occurrences), "Maghreb" (136 occurrences),

"Russia" (129 occurrences), "Syria" (111 occurrences), and "Iran" (89 occurrences). Put together, these different tags gathered a total of 2,443 articles.

The "politics" category includes all the articles with the following tags: "*LaPlace* politics" (1,280 occurrences), "Nicolas Sarkozy" (former president, 1,241 occurrences), "UMP" (conservative party, 555 occurrences), "Presidential election 2012" (522 occurrences), "PS" (socialist party, 417 occurrences), "François Hollande" (current president, 353 occurrences), "FN" (far-right party, 253 occurrences), "Front de gauche" (far-left party, 69 occurrences), "Modem" (center-right party, 65 occurrences), "Presidential election 2007" (56 occurrences), and "PC" (communist party, 46 occurrences). A total of 2,896 articles are included in the "politics" category.

The "culture" category includes the tags "films" (395 occurrences), "culture" (344 occurrences), "music" (306 occurrences), "books" (301 occurrences), "photos" (131 occurrences), "arts" (113 occurrences), "movies" (81 occurrences), "festivals" (57 occurrences), and "paintings" (37 occurrences). A total of 1,389 articles are counted in the "Culture" category.

I created a "sex" category by aggregating the following tags: "sex" (352 occurrences), "rapes" (75 occurrences), "prostitution" (70 occurrences), "gender questions" (59 occurrences), "LaPlace_69" (53 occurrences) (a section of the website devoted to sex-related articles), and "intimate life" (12 occurrences). A total of 489 articles belong to the "sex" category.

Last, the "scandals and celebrities" category was harder to define. I included tags on affairs, corruption, and fraud, but also specific names of politicians and celebrities associated with contentious affairs: "censorship" (134 occurrences); "affairs" (e.g., "scandal" in French) (97 occurrences); "corruption" (84 occurrences); "Liliane Bettencourt" (80 occurrences) (heiress of L'Oréal involved in the transfer of secret funds to the conservative party and betrayed by her

butler); "Dominique Strauss-Kahn and the Sofitel Affair" (44 occurrences); "tax haven" (35 occurrences); "celebrities" (35 occurrences); "fraud" (34 occurrences); "Carla Bruni-Sarkozy" (33 occurrences) (model, singer, and wife of the former president Nicolas Sarkozy); "Cecilia Attias" (19 occurrences) (former wife of Nicolas Sarkozy); "conspiracies" (18 occurrences); and "Valérie Trierweiler" (11 occurrences) (journalist and partner of François Hollande at the time). The "scandal" category includes 566 articles.

Table 8 examines the evolution of the number of articles associated with each tag between 2007 and 2012.

Table 8. Number of articles by tag, 2007-2012

Number of articles	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	*Ratio 2012 / 2007*
World news	126	119	276	482	837	603	*4.8*
Politics	212	187	414	537	705	841	*3.9*
Culture	76	48	186	291	369	419	*5.5*
Sex	14	22	64	91	187	111	*7.9*
Scandals	16	16	68	169	191	106	*11.9*

Table 8 shows that the number of articles associated with each of the tags increased between 2007 and 2012 at a faster rate than the total number of articles published on the website.[9] The tags which increased the most over the period are "scandals" (the number of articles was multiplied by 11.9) and "sex" (the number of articles was multiplied by 7.9 between 2007 and 2012). In contrast, the number of articles about "politics" and "world news" increased more moderately.

[9] Table 7 showed that the total number of articles published on *LaPlace* was multiplied by 3.2 between 2007 and 2010. All the ratios in Table 8 are higher.

It should also be noted that the different tags used above are not mutually exclusive. For example, an article about Dominique Strauss-Kahn's arrest in New York will be categorized as belonging to the "scandal," "world," "politics," and "sex" categories simultaneously. Table 9 provides Pearson's correlation coefficients for the different tags under consideration. [10]

As can be seen in Table 9, the tags that are the most highly correlated are "scandals" and "politics" (r = 0.0537). A total of 184 articles in the sample are associated with both the "scandal" and "politics" tags. The other correlation coefficients are lower.

Table 9. Correlation coefficients between tags

Correlation coefficients between tags	Sex	Scandals	World	Politics	Culture
Sex	1.0000				
Scandals	0.0237	1.0000			
World	-0.0122	0.0298	1.0000		
Politics	-0.0685	0.0537	-0.1234	1.0000	
Culture	0.0175	0.0040	-0.0158	-0.1097	1.0000

Finally, I draw on several additional variables in order to test the relative popularity of user-generated content. First, I use the variable on the employment status of the author as a first approximation of participatory content by looking at the online success of articles written by "non-journalists." Indeed, content published by "non-journalists" can be of three types on *LaPlace*: blog posts by one of the regular bloggers; "testimonies;" or op-eds. All three formats count as user-generated content. Second, I draw on two detailed variables to distinguish between "testimonies" and "blogs." I created a category called "testimonies" including all the articles published with the tag "testimonies." This variable includes 276 articles. I also defined a

[10] I found the exact same results with Cramér's V coefficients.

category for "blogs." Since there is no specific tag for blogs, I proceeded differently. I gathered the names of all the bloggers on the dedicated page of the website that introduces the 73 blogs. 39 bloggers were active between 2007 and 2012. I then collected all the articles that they published during the period – a total of 526 articles between 2007 and 2012.

III. Findings

This section tests the three main ideas put forward by web journalists about internet traffic: the idea that articles about "sex, scandal, and celebrity," as well as "testimonies," fare better online than articles about world news, politics, and culture; the proposition that the types of articles that are successful on Facebook and Twitter are not the same as articles attracting a high numbers of comments; and the claim that publishing more content online is correlated with more than a proportional increase in traffic.

1) The determinants of online success

Are *LaPlace*'s journalists correct when they claim that sex, scandals, and celebrity-related articles are particularly popular online whereas world news, politics, and culture articles attract lower numbers of visits? Table 10 introduces a negative binomial regression that explores this question. In this model, the unit of analysis is the article; the dependent variable is the number of visits. Poisson regressions are usually the most appropriate for this type of count data. However, the dependent variable here is characterized by a strong over-dispersion and Poisson regressions

are not adequate in these cases. Hence, I use another regression model from the Poisson family instead: a negative binomial regression (Land, McCall and Nagin 1996).[11]

Model 1 explores the association between the topic of the articles and the number of visits that they attract; it confirms the predictions of *LaPlace*'s journalists, with one important exception. As emphasized by the French journalists and editors, articles about sex, scandals, and celebrities are more likely to receive a high number of visits compared to other articles: the coefficients for the "sex" and "scandals" tags are positive and highly significant. More precisely, the differences in logs of expected counts for online visits are expected to be 0.91 units higher for articles about sex than for other articles. This coefficient is highly significant. Articles about sex are much more popular than articles about scandals: the coefficient for the "sex" tag is more than four times higher than the coefficient for the "scandal" tag (0.91 versus 0.19). In contrast, the coefficients for the "world news" and "culture" tags are negative and significant. Articles about culture appear to be particularly unpopular on the website.

Yet, surprisingly, articles about politics – which were predicted to be unpopular – turn out to be significantly more successful than other types of articles on *LaPlace'*s website: the coefficient for the "politics" tag is positive (0.12) and significant at the 0.001 level. Since tags overlap (see Table 9), this positive coefficient may be due to the fact that many articles categorized in "politics" are also about "scandals." Thus, I added an interaction term to control for this phenomenon. Yet the coefficient for politics remains positive even when the interaction term is integrated into the model.

[11] As a robustness check, I ran the exact same analysis on the sample without the outliers (excluding the top percentile of articles that had received the highest number of visits) and found similar results (available upon request).

Table 10. Regression model: Number of visits and the determinants of success

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
"Sex" tag	0.91***	0.75***	0.70***
	(0.038)	(0.040)	(0.040)
"Scandal" tag	0.19***	0.08*	0.08*
	(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.041)
"World news" tag	-0.11***	-0.17***	-0.17***
	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.019)
"Politics" tag	0.12***	0.11***	0.08***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.019)
"Culture" tag	-0.20***	-0.16***	-0.13***
	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Politics*Scandal	0.12	0.21**	0.18*
	(0.076)	(0.074)	(0.072)
Female author		0.08***	0.08***
		(0.015)	(0.019)
Twitter account		0.03	0.03
		(0.020)	(0.022)
Morning		-0.11***	-0.09***
		(0.018)	(0.018)
Evening		0.05**	0.03
		(0.017)	(0.017)
Night		0.08	0.09
		(0.046)	(0.045)
Weekend		0.06***	0.07***
		(0.017)	(0.016)
Number of words (1st quartile)		0.00	-0.03
		(0.021)	(0.022)
Number of words (4th quartile)		0.25***	0.23***
		(0.020)	(0.020)
Number of quotes (1st quartile)		-0.02	-0.04
		(0.021)	(0.021)
Number of quotes (4th quartile)		0.09***	0.09***
		(0.022)	(0.022)
Staffer			0.11***
			(0.023)
Non-journalist			0.06**
			(0.023)
Testimony			0.61***
			(0.050)
Blog post			-0.27***
			(0.035)
Constant	10.43***	10.61***	10.51***
	(0.010)	(0.041)	(0.044)
Observations	13,152	12,008	11,957
Ll	-150175	-136085	-135231
Pseudo R-Squared	0.01	0.01	0.01

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Several control variables (year, month, day, dummies for staffers, number of hyperlinks) are not reported in this table (available upon request).

Model 2 elaborates on Model 1 by adding important control variables: the gender of the author (female=1); whether the author has a Twitter account (Twitter=1); the date of publication (year and month, not reported in the table); the time of day (afternoon is omitted); and the time of the week (weekday is omitted).[12] I also included measurements of the characteristics of the article, such as number of words and number of quotes, for which I created quartiles. The third quartile is omitted from the regression; Table 10 only reports the lowest and highest quartiles (e.g., the 25% articles featuring respectively the lowest and highest numbers of words and quotes).

In Model 2, the sign and statistical significance of the coefficients for the different tags remain highly stable compared to Model 1 (with the only exception of the interaction term between "politics" and "scandals," which becomes significant). Model 2 also indicates that articles written by women are more likely to receive a higher number of visits than articles written by male authors. A possible explanation for this finding is that women are more likely than men to write on "soft" news such as social issues and lifestyle (Neveu 2000, Damian-Gaillard, Frisque, and Saitta 2012), which might not be captured by the existing tags. Having an account on Twitter is positively but non-significantly correlated with the number of visits. Articles that are published in the morning are less popular than articles published in the afternoon. Last, articles that feature a high number of words and quotes are correlated with high numbers of visits: the coefficients are positive and highly significant for the two top quartiles (respectively 0.25 for the 25% longest articles and 0.09 for the 25% articles with the highest number of quotes).

[12] Since the articles are clustered by staffer, Model 3 also includes dummy variables for each of *LaPlace*'s staffers. The sign and significance of coefficients did not vary when the dummy variables were introduced. A possible alternative (not explored so far) would be to use a fixed-effect model.

Model 3 keeps the control variables and adds several additional variables about the authors. First, I rely on a broad categorization of the occupational status of the article's author: is he or she a staffer, a freelance journalist, or a non-journalist? "Freelance journalist" is the omitted category in the model. Model 3 documents that articles written both by staffers and non-journalists are overall significantly more successful than articles written by freelance journalists. The last two variables of Model 3 unpack the category of "user-generated content" by distinguishing between "blog posts" and "testimonies." Interestingly, the coefficients are significant but of opposite signs. The coefficient for testimonies is positive, high (0.61), and significant at the 0.001 level, thus indicating that testimonies are very popular on the website. In contrast, the coefficient for blog posts is negative (-0.27) and also significant at the 0.001 level: blog posts are less successful online than other types of articles.[13] The other coefficients of the model remain stable.

To summarize, I confirm the idea that articles about sex, scandals, and celebrities are popular online. Articles about world news, politics, and culture were predicted to fare poorly online, which seems true with the notable exception of politics. Articles about politics in fact attract high numbers of visitors on *LaPlace*'s website, even when controlling for the interaction between "politics" and "scandals." I also find that articles written by non-journalists are overall more popular than articles written by freelance journalists. Within this category of user-generated content, testimonies are highly successful in terms of visits whereas blogs are largely unpopular. Finally, I find that longer articles with more quotes tend to be more popular than shorter articles with fewer quotes.

[13] I tried running the model without the "testimonies" variable and only with the "blog" variable: the coefficients remained the same; blogs still attracted fewer numbers of visits compared to other articles.

How should we make sense of these findings? First, one should note that, overall, *LaPlace*'s journalists have accurate representations of their readers' behaviors, at least in terms of the topics that they like to read. The exception to this is the popularity of articles about politics, which both journalists and scholars deem as unpopular as other public-interest stories (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein 2013). Instead, politics pieces are popular on *LaPlace*, which might indicate two interrelated things. First, it appears that *LaPlace*'s journalists and editors have found a way to keep their readership interested in politics with a smart mix of light pieces, "explainers," interviews, and critical articles about right-wing politics during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency. Second, this finding suggests that *LaPlace*'s returning readers come to the website because of its engaged liberal political line and are more likely to read political articles than, for example, articles about culture. However, the success of politics pieces also depends on the political climate of the country. Hence, many staffers and media critics have attributed the decline in the number of visits during the summer of 2012 to the election of the Socialist president François Hollande. *LaPlace*'s left-wing editorial line may have become less appealing once the conservative party lost the elections. I will come back to this idea later.

Second, the findings about user-generated content on *LaPlace*'s website are counter-intuitive. I find that blog posts and freelancers' articles are less successful than staffers' articles and testimonies – which might be said to represent two extremes on the spectrum going from journalistic to non-journalistic format and style. One possible interpretation is to take into account the overall awareness of "newsworthiness" that the different types of authors possess when they write for *LaPlace*. Staffers are very aware of what is "trending" at a specific moment of the day, week, month, and year. Based on this understanding of online traffic, staffers pick topics and write headlines that are designed to be attractive for online readers. However,

freelancers and bloggers are less "in the know." They do not work in the newsroom and do not routinely interact with staffers. They usually specialize on a given topic and are thus usually less familiar with the editorial line and writing style of the publication, and less aware of popular topics that fall outside of their specific area of expertise.

Paradoxically, however, internet users who write testimonies might have a better timing and choice of topics than blogger and freelancers. Internet users tend to propose "testimonies" that are accepted by *LaPlace* when a specific topic attracts a lot of media attention. For example, several testimonies were published during the legal debate and political fight about gay marriage in 2013: people shared their experiences of what it would change for gay people to be able to get married or how it felt to be in a gay relationship in this context. Thus, people usually propose testimonies when they feel that the topic is popular, controversial, and "newsworthy." Readers are interested in these first-hand accounts of highly mediatized topics.

These findings add nuance to the results proposed by Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013), who argued that public interest stories tend to be unpopular online and that user-generated content is less successful than journalistic articles. Rather, I find that politics pieces and testimonies are popular genres on *LaPlace*'s website. Further research should explore whether these findings are specific to *LaPlace* or not.

2) Different shades of success: visits, "likes," "tweets," and comments

This section compares the determinants of 'success' when different measurements are taken into account: number of page views, "likes" on Facebook, "tweets" on Twitter, and comments on the

website. Table 11 provides several negative binomial regression models.[14] The number of visits, likes, tweets, and comments are the dependent variables for Model 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

Table 11 shows that the determinants of success are not strikingly different when success is measured by the number of comments compared to other measurements such as visits, likes, and tweets. Overall, coefficients are highly similar in Models 1, 2, 3, and 4. Articles about sex or politics perform better in terms of visits, likes, tweets, and number of comments than articles about world news and culture. Articles written by non-journalists are more successful than articles written by freelancers. Blogs posts are not very successful, whereas testimonies attract many visits, likes, and tweets.

The main difference emerging between Models 1, 2, 3 and Model 4 is that articles about "scandals" are relatively unpopular in terms of comments: the coefficient is negative (-0.13) and significant at the 0.01 level. In addition, the coefficient for "politics" is higher in Model 4 than in Model 1, 2, and 3, thus indicating that articles about politics attract more comments than visits, "likes," and "tweets."

[14] I ran the same models on the sample without the outliers and found similar results (available upon request).

Table 11. Regression model: visits, likes, tweets, and comments

Variables	**Model 1 Visits**	**Model 2 Likes**	**Model 3 Tweets**	**Model 4 Comments**
"Sex" tag	0.70***	0.66***	0.44***	0.30***
	(0.040)	(0.088)	(0.079)	(0.045)
"Scandal" tag	0.08*	0.26**	0.25**	-0.13**
	(0.041)	(0.089)	(0.081)	(0.046)
"World news" tag	-0.17***	0.00	-0.07	-0.14***
	(0.019)	(0.040)	(0.037)	(0.021)
"Politics" tag	0.08***	0.10*	0.18***	0.30***
	(0.019)	(0.041)	(0.038)	(0.021)
"Culture" tag	-0.13***	-0.04	-0.23***	-0.39***
	(0.023)	(0.049)	(0.046)	(0.026)
"Politics"* "Scandal"	0.18*	-0.05	0.58***	0.09
	(0.072)	(0.157)	(0.147)	(0.081)
Female author	0.08***	0.39***	-0.04	0.04
	(0.019)	(0.041)	(0.038)	(0.021)
Twitter account	0.03	0.20***	-0.22***	0.01
	(0.022)	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.025)
Number of words (1st quartile)	-0.03	-0.01	-0.17***	-0.16***
	(0.022)	(0.047)	(0.045)	(0.024)
Number of words (4th quartile)	0.23***	0.36***	0.20***	0.09***
	(0.020)	(0.043)	(0.040)	(0.022)
Number of quotes (1st quartile)	-0.04	0.02	0.14**	-0.11***
	(0.021)	(0.046)	(0.043)	(0.023)
Number of quotes (4th quartile)	0.09***	-0.05	0.09*	0.08**
	(0.022)	(0.047)	(0.043)	(0.025)
Staffer	0.11***	-0.25***	0.07	0.11***
	(0.023)	(0.050)	(0.046)	(0.026)
Non-journalist	0.06**	0.24***	0.20***	0.15***
	(0.023)	(0.050)	(0.048)	(0.026)
Testimony	0.61***	0.68***	0.28**	0.59***
	(0.050)	(0.106)	(0.097)	(0.056)
Blog post	-0.27***	-0.54***	-0.39***	-0.27***
	(0.035)	(0.075)	(0.068)	(0.039)
Constant	10.51***	3.07***	-0.44***	4.77***
	(0.044)	(0.094)	(0.094)	(0.049)
Observations	11,957	11,963	11,963	11,959
Ll	-135231	-70721	-43376	-70360
Pseudo R-squared	0.01	0.03	0.08	0.02

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Several control variables (year, month, day, time of day, dummies for staffers, and number of hyperlinks) are not reported in this table.

In order to complement this statistical analysis, it is revealing to focus on specific articles that attracted the highest number of visits, likes, tweets, and comments since the creation of *LaPlace*. Table 12 relies on the following color code: dark grey cells are for "hard news" articles; medium

grey cells are for user-generated articles; light grey cells are for “sex and gender” articles; and black borders delineate articles that appear several times in the table.

Table 12. Ten most successful articles in terms of visits, likes, tweets, and comments

	Visits	Likes	Tweets	Comments
1	"Video: a French-Tunisian professor murdered during a protest in Tunisia"	"Dear neighbors: Best and Worst neighbor Stories"	"600 good reasons not to vote for Sarkozy"	"Heated Debates at the Knesset"
2	"Protests in Tunisia after the suicide of an unemployed man"	"600 good reasons not to vote for Sarkozy"	"'Get lost, asshole!'" The story of the man insulted by Sarkozy"	"DSK's hearing postponed because of DNA tests"
3	"UMP: Christian Jacob tells how he seduced his friend Copé"	"High school teacher, I faked a Wikipedia account to trick my students"	“The 46 first steps of the Twitter addict: where are you?”	"True and false conspiracy theories after 9/11"
4	"Online auctions: I tested the mower scam for you"	"She makes fun of Morano and is fired for gross misconduct"	"Twitter: Sarkozy's team acknowledges interference"	"Blacks, Arabs, and Criminality: Zemmour sentenced"
5	"Egypt: the army deploys its troops in Cairo"	"When I was a child, I wanted to be a baker but I was good at maths"	"'What is 3G? An insider's story to the launching of Free Mobile"	"I am going back to my home country because of racism in France"
6	"Inga Sempé: Design in France is too conservative"	"In the U.S., ridicule is the best way to kill the 'war on women'"	"Dear neighbors: Best and Worst neighbor stories"	"Filthy Arab": the ophthalmologists' association investigates
7	"Lou Charmelle, porn actress: ‘there are rules’"	"Eric Fassin: public policies on national identity have built a white France"	"Recent bride, I'm learning about racism for the first time"	"She makes fun of Morano and is fired for gross misconduct"
8	"Revolt in Algeria: three deaths and angry youths"	"Fist-fucking in the valley"	"She makes fun of Morano and is fired for gross misconduct"	"Integrist Catholics destroy blasphemous "Piss Christ""
9	"Dear neighbors: Best and Worst neighbor stories"	"How to write to one's neighbor when he has loud sex"	"Help senators to refrain from accumulating mandates"	Video of the high school student hurt in flash-ball
10	"Strauss-Kahn and his relation to women"	"Scared to get married for life? In favor of impermanent love"	"Ms. Figaro names her blog and threatens"	Toulouse: Mohammed Salah cornered

Let us first look at first column and the number of visits in Table 12. The most successful article ever published on *LaPlace* (4,351,786 visits) is entitled "Video: a French-Tunisian professor murdered during a protest in Tunisia." An internet user sent to *LaPlace* a video of the murder that marked the unravelling of the Arab Spring in January 2011. Marina, the managing editor of the website, wrote an article summarizing the information and embedded the video in the page. This piece of breaking news was followed by many media outlets around the world. The second most visited article (3,282,176 visits) also relates to the beginning of the Arab Spring. Written by a freelance journalist from Tunisia and published in December 2010, it describes how the suicide of an unemployed man led to arbitrary repression and censorship by the Tunisian authorities. The third most successful article (1,587,103 visits) was written by a staffer and published in October 2010; it is a political article with a witty and sarcastic tone describing the internal wars of the conservative party (it compares politicians to the three Musketeers and the "Dalton brothers" in the Lucky Luke comic books series).

On Facebook, the most popular article (128,445 likes) is entitled "Dear Neighbors: Best and Worst Neighbor Stories. Pictures" In this webpage, which is frequently updated by two staffers, internet users are invited to send pictures of the funniest notes that their neighbors have left in the communal parts of the buildings. *LaPlace*'s journalists then publish the pictures and sometimes add a comment. The second most popular article on Facebook (49,822 likes) is a politics piece entitled "600 good reasons not to vote for Sarkozy." First written by a freelance journalist, this article has been frequently updated and completed. It lists some of the most controversial quotes and political measures taken by Nicolas Sarkozy during his presidency. The third most successful article on Facebook (41,501 likes) is a testimony entitled "A high school

teacher: I faked a Wikipedia account to trick my students." Out of the ten most popular articles on Facebook, four are about sex and gender.

On Twitter, the most popular article is once again "600 good reasons not to vote for Sarkozy" (2,679 tweets). The second most successful article is entitled "'Get lost, asshole'! The story of the man insulted by Sarkozy" (2,087 tweets). This is a fiction piece imagining the life of the (unidentified) man who was insulted by Sarkozy during a public meeting. The third most popular story (1,843 tweets) is "The 46 first steps of a Twitter addict: Where are you?" It was originally written in English and published by a U.S. blogger on his website.

Finally, the most popular article in terms of comments is entitled "Heated debates at the Knesset: "Traitors, go to Gaza!"" It is a short "lookout" piece which summarizes current political debates in Israel (2,310 comments). The second most popular article is entitled "The hearing of Dominique Strauss-Kahn postponed because of DNA testing." It was written by Phillipe, the editor-in-chief (1,800 comments). The third most popular article (1,733 comments) was written by a staffer and is entitled "True and false conspiracy theories after 9/11."

Table 12 thus qualifies the findings provided by the regression models. First, the articles that are popular in terms of "likes" and "tweet" appear to be fairly similar. In particular, "testimonies" score well on Facebook as well as on Twitter. Three articles appear both in the Twitter and Facebook columns: "Dear Neighbors," "600 reasons not to vote for Sarkozy," and "She makes fun of Morano." Articles about sex and gender are particularly popular on Facebook.

Surprisingly, however, the most popular articles in terms of visits are first and foremost "hard news" articles. 4 out of 10 most visited articles are world news pieces about the Arab Spring. This finding is counter-intuitive given the negative coefficient for "world news" in the regression models presented in Tables 10 and 11. One explanation for this surprising result is

that, despite the lower overall interest of *LaPlace*'s readers for world news, these specific articles provided breaking news that were followed by many other media outlets, thus reaching a much broader audience than usual.

In addition, the kinds of articles that attract high numbers of comments appear to differ from the more "liked" and "tweeted" stories. Similarly to the most visited articles, the most commented articles include breaking news (4 out of 10 articles). In addition, the most commented articles are mostly about topics that are controversial in France. These include Israeli politics, Dominique Strauss-Kahn's arrest, 9/11 conspiracy theories, racism, and Catholicism. Only one article ("She makes fun of Morano") in the most commented articles also appears in the other columns. There is not a single article about sex or gender in the "most commented" list.

Hence, even though the regression models did not document striking differences between the determinants of visits, likes, tweets, and the determinants of the number of comments, a more qualitative approach indicates that the articles that are the most commented upon differ starkly from the other types of articles that are popular online.

3) "More gets us more": numbers of articles and numbers of visits

This section focuses on the relationship between amount of content and traffic growth. Specifically, I explore whether *LaPlace*'s editors are correct when they assert that more content necessarily attracts more traffic. Figures 9, 10, and 11 provide descriptive statistics about the articles published on *LaPlace*'s website between 2007 and 2012.

Figure 9. Number of articles published per month, 2007-2012

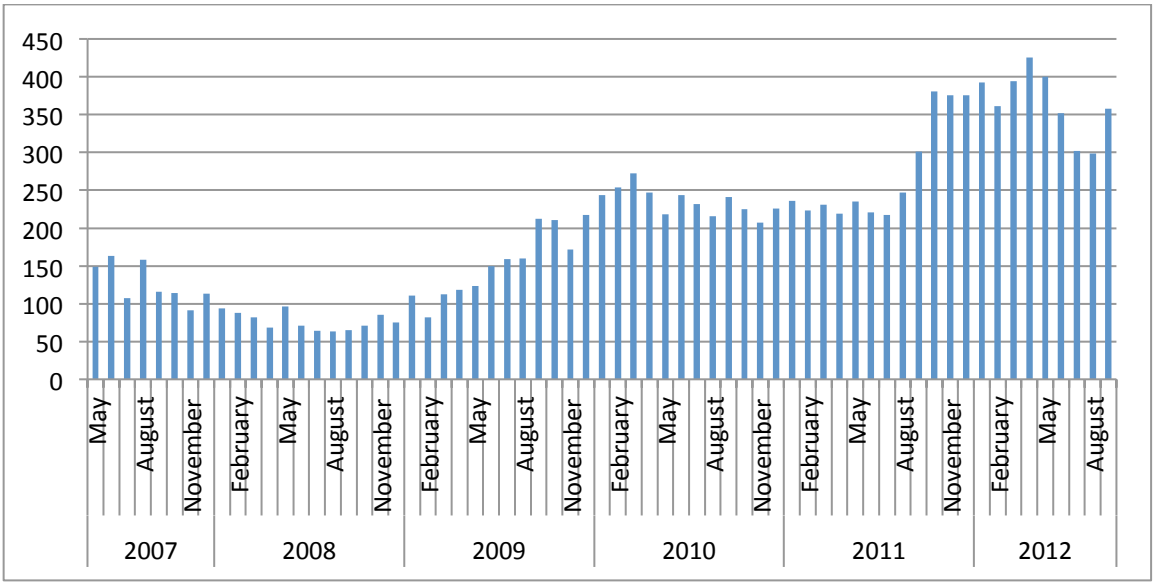
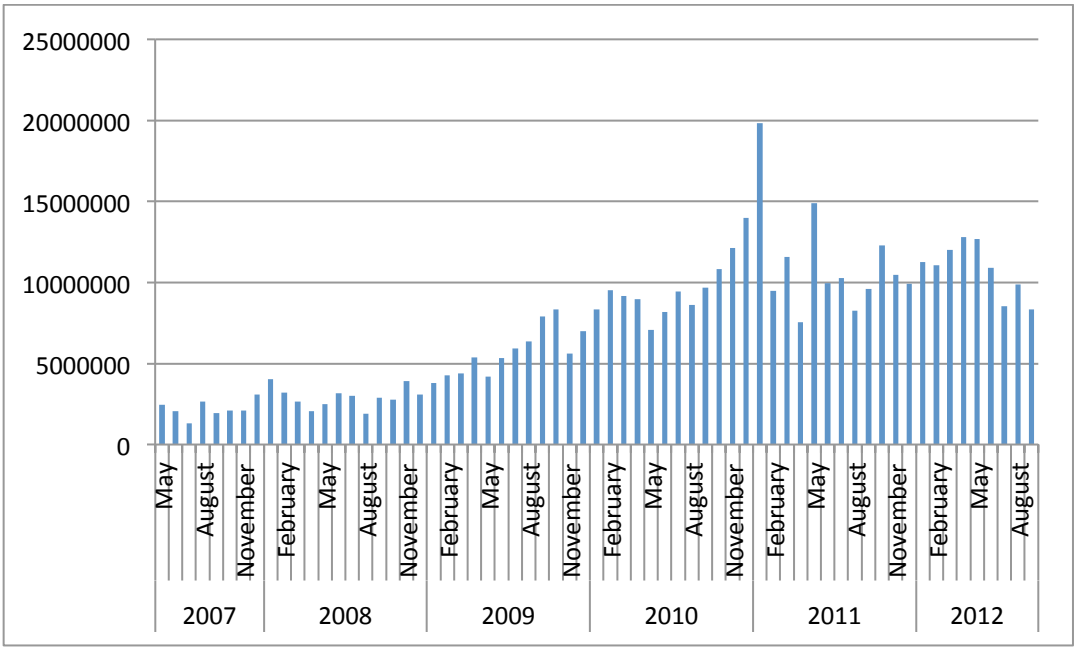


Figure 9 confirms that the idea that there was a massive increase in the number of articles per month published on the website between 2007 and 2012. In 2007, the number of articles published monthly varies between 91 (November) and 163 (June). In 2008, the numbers are even lower and alternate between 64 and 96. In contrast, in 2012, the monthly number of articles varies between a minimum of 299 (August) and a maximum of 426 (April).

Figure 10 focuses on the evolution of the total number of visits per month between 2007 and 2012. The monthly number of visits remains relatively stable in 2007-2008. The graph documents a steady increase in 2009-2010. The number of visits reaches a peak in the winter 2010-2011, with 19,838,396 visits in January 2011.[15] There is a slight decrease in the number of visits for the last four months of 2012.

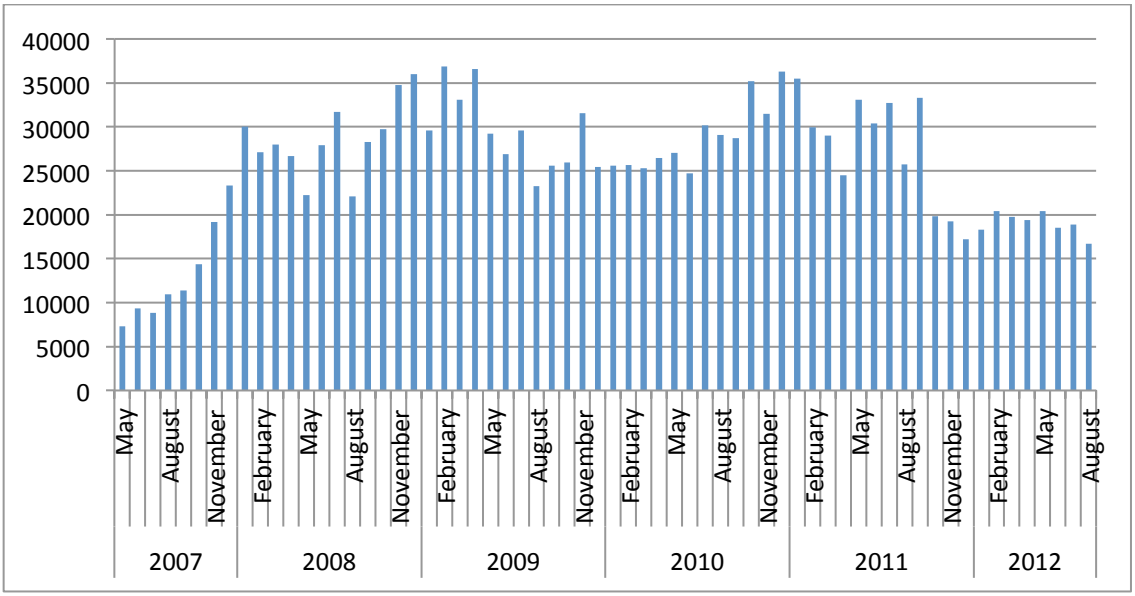
[15] It should be noted that the data analyzed here does not count the number of unique visitors but the number of visits. Thus, internet users who read an article ten times in a row will be counted ten times, which explains the discrepancy between these high numbers (19 million visits) and the website's number of unique visitors at about the same time (about 2 million unique visitors).

Figure 10. Total number of visits per month, 2007-2012



Finally, Figure 11 describes the evolution of the median number of visits per article over the period. Four main periods can be delineated. There is a first expansionary phase between 2007 and early 2009 during which the average number of visits per article increases from 7,289 in May 2007 to 36,908 in February 2009. Second, in 2009-2010, the median number of clicks remains relatively stable. Third, between the summer of 2010 and the summer of 2011, the median number of visits reaches a new peak. Last, between September 2011 and September 2012, the number of visits stabilizes at a much lower level than during the previous years, with a median number of 20,157 visits per article over the period.

Figure 11. Median number of visits per article per month, 2007-2012



Based on these descriptive statistics, it seems that publishing more content online does not necessarily lead to a constant increase in traffic. Rather, the correlation between the number of articles and the number of visits varies widely over time and is probably affected by additional variables (newsworthy events, quality of the articles, turnover of the journalists, and online competition) that are not included in this analysis.

More broadly, these graphs call for a more nuanced understanding of the idea that "more gets us more": more content might lead to more traffic, but only when additional conditions are fulfilled. Hence, despite publishing an ever increasing number of articles on the website, *LaPlace* did not secure more traffic in 2012. In fact, the average number of visits per article returned to an inferior level compared to 2008, 2009, and 2010.

Additional material indicates that *LaPlace*'s journalists may have a point when they emphasize that quality might increase traffic more than quantity. Tables 10 and 11, presented above, reveal that the length of the articles (measured in number of words) and the inclusion of

original material in the articles (measured by the number of quotes) are positively correlated with the number of visits that the article attracts, even when variables such as time of publication, topic of the article, or author's status are controlled for. The longest articles are also positively and significantly correlated with the number of "likes," "tweets," and comments. Hence, readers seem more likely to read and share articles that are longer and more deeply researched. Of course, readers do not know about the length and the number of quotes included in an article before they click on it. Yet regular readers are usually able to decipher whether the article is a long-form, original piece or a short post simply by reading the headline. In addition, the positive coefficients for Twitter and Facebook indicate that people are more likely to share and recommend longer articles on social networking sites after having read them.[16]

Taken together, these findings add nuance to the idea that "more gets us more" and indicate that *LaPlace*'s journalists may be correct when they ask for more time to write pieces that are more deeply researched rather than multiplying short blog posts: even in terms of traffic numbers, the "editorial" strategy might be more productive than the "click-based" strategy.

IV. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis developed in this chapter stems from a double theoretical ambition. First, it contributes to a better understanding of the determinants of success in online news. With the exception of Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013), there are no quantitative studies taking advantage of the existence of online data on the relative popularity of different types of articles

[16] Yet see the ingenious NPR's fake article for April Fool's Day, 2014, which shows that many people do not in fact read the articles that they like or share on Facebook (Hathaway 2014).

and publications. Do Boczkowski and Mitchelstein's findings hold true in the case of the French website *LaPlace*?

The answer is a qualified "yes": articles about sex, scandals, and celebrities are highly popular online, whereas articles on world news and culture do not fare well in terms of 'clicks,' even though these articles are the ones journalists consider to be the most valuable and prestigious. Yet I find noticeable differences as well. Specifically, articles about politics, as well as "testimonies," are highly popular on *LaPlace*'s website, contrary to Boczkowski and Mitchelstein's findings. Of course, I only study one website in France, so there is no way to generalize the findings proposed here. However, these results indicate that there are ways to render topics of traditional public interest such as politics appealing for a sizeable online audience.

Boczkowski and Mitchelstein worry about the decline of interest for politics and world news stories in the online media world and its consequence for democratic life (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein 2013: 147). Yet their findings might simply indicate that the large-scale, traditional publications that they study (*USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *CNN*, etc.) might have something to learn from small, stand-alone news websites such as *LaPlace*. At *LaPlace*, politics-related articles reach a large audience because they have a witty tone and alternate between interviews, in-depth reporting, and unusual angles.

This is not to suggest that *LaPlace* has discovered a panacea for the woes of online news, however, since *LaPlace*'s traffic numbers leveled out significantly since the fall of 2011, as we saw in the last section of this chapter. How should we interpret this relative decline in the popularity of the French website? I propose several tentative explanations.

First, *LaPlace* has faced increasing competition over time. In addition to the online versions of print newspapers such as *LeMonde.fr* and *Liberation.fr*, stand-alone websites with a liberal editorial line also emerged, such as *Mediapart* in 2008, *Website A* (anonymized) in 2009, and *The Huffington Post* in 2012. Staffers at *LaPlace* believe that many of their left-leaning readers started following *Mediapart* more assiduously after that website's scoops about the Bettencourt affair in June 2010.

Second, staffers and media observers alike emphasized the negative effect of the sale to LeGroupeMag on *LaPlace*'s audience.[17] In the same way that the staffers felt betrayed by the sale, critics argue that many of the website's dedicated readers who cared about the independence of the publication resented its acquisition by a traditional media company and consequently stopped reading it.

Finally, critics usually note that the changing political climate certainly played a role in the declining traffic numbers of the site. When *LaPlace* was created in 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy had just been elected president; the website soon became a rallying point for left-leaning voters, intellectuals, and politicians. Over time, however, people found other venues providing information on the misdeeds of the conservative presidency. Finally, the election of François Hollande in May 2012 was a mixed blessing for *LaPlace*, since it deprived the journalists of their favorite target: the right, and more specifically former president Nicolas Sarkozy. The French website tried to adapt to this new political situation by developing its coverage of François Hollande and the Parti Socialiste, but *LaPlace* lost the prominent critical position that was its trademark during the early years of Sarkozy's presidency.

[17] See Chapter 3.

In addition to comparing the popularity of different topics and formats in online news, this statistical analysis also confronts the journalists' interpretations of traffic numbers with the actual determinants of online success. By comparing ethnographic evidence and statistical data, I explore whether journalists' perception of their "quantified audience" (Anderson 2011) diverges from the actual behavior of the readers.

I find that *LaPlace*'s journalists overall have adequate understandings of traffic numbers, with a couple of notable exceptions. First, journalists and editors undervalue of the popularity of politics articles. Second, editors have an unjustified trust in policies geared to increasing the quantity of their workers' production: the dictum "more gets us more" (publishing more articles automatically brings more traffic to the website) is not strictly supported by the statistical analysis. In fact, longer and more deeply researched articles attract more visitors, all else being equal.

Of course, editors would probably argue that *LaPlace*'s traffic decline in 2012 would have been worse had they not published a large number of articles. Yet an alternative interpretation – put forward by the staffers – suggests that, in addition to the changing political climate and increased competition faced by the website, *LaPlace*'s editorial line and identity has been blurred in the past couple of years due to the need to publish articles and blog posts at an ever increasing pace.

This discrepancy between web journalists' understanding of traffic numbers and actual determinants of online popularity is worrisome for the future of online news. If editors and journalists believe that they need to publish shorter articles about sex, scandals, and celebrities in order to grow an audience and stay afloat financially, they will orient news websites in this direction, making it harder for readers to find quality information online. Thus, further research

is needed in order to show that the determinants of online success are more complex than web editors and journalists tend to believe.

Conclusion

How do American and French web journalists make sense of their work during the current period of economic turmoil and technological change? This dissertation emphasizes how definitions of "good journalism" have evolved along with the internet. Drawing on in-depth ethnographic analysis of *TheNotebook* in New York and *LaPlace* in Paris, I find that American and French web journalists face similar tensions between conflicting definitions of journalistic value. Web journalists continue to draw on a traditional "editorial" definition of journalistic quality based on original reporting, interesting angles, and peer evaluation. Yet the proliferation of new ways to measure readership provided by the internet has led web journalists to pay close attention to the quantitative manifestations of online success. In this view, a good article is one that 'goes viral' and attracts a high number of page views. This "click-based" mode of evaluation is often at odds with the "editorial" definition of journalistic quality.

I find, however, that the U.S. and French websites under consideration manage the tension between these two definitions of journalistic value in different ways. Whereas journalists

at *TheNotebook* rely on a "separate arrangement" that distinguishes sharply between the two modes of evaluation, *LaPlace* does not draw clear boundaries between click-based and editorial criteria. In this latter "connected arrangement," the two modes of evaluation are invoked by journalists and editors alike, without clear differentiation in the organization of the publication. Even though they are highly critical of traffic numbers, French editors and journalists also understand online success as a proxy for editorial excellence. These different arrangements manifest themselves in several important features of the two websites, such as their editorial formats, the daily routines of the newsrooms, the management of the staff, and their compensation practices.

How do such arrangements emerge? This study argues that separate and connected arrangements reflect the history and structure of the U.S. and French journalistic fields respectively: *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*'s journalists drew on existing practices, cognitive categories, and organizational forms when making decisions about the editorial lines and organizational structures of their websites. In the United States, where journalism has been characterized by strong market forces and professionalization for more than a century, *TheNotebook*'s journalists relied on a strong division of labor between editors and staffers, a clear hierarchical structure, and a symbolic "wall of separation" between editorial and marketing concerns. In France, where journalism was traditionally a less professionalized occupation facing relatively low market pressures, *LaPlace*'s journalists did not establish a clear distinction between editorial and managerial goals. Instead, the French editors took advantage of the ambiguity of their double role as journalists and managers by constantly switching back and forth between editorial and click-based modes of evaluation. This left *LaPlace*'s journalists –

editors, staffers, and freelancers – ill-prepared to handle the sudden intrusion of market forces in the newsroom under the form of "clicks."

To conclude this study of the world of web journalists in the United States and France, I would like to take a step back and discuss two broader questions of theoretical and political importance. The first one is a critical assessment of how the internet is transforming journalism, for better and for worse. A second line of questioning regards the different effects that quantification has on people's lives depending on the context in which it takes place.

1) The future of news

Moving from the previous chapters' analysis of the changes that have transformed web newsrooms in the United States and France, this section examines the normative implications of the growth of the internet for journalism at large. The financial crisis of the press has increased the polarization of this already heated debate.

On the negative side, many media critics argue that online news contribute overall to a decline in the quality of information. According to this view, web editors and journalists are running on a "hamster's wheel," engaging in "motion for motion's sake" (Starkman 2010). News websites multiply the number of low-cost, fast-paced opinion pieces instead of providing reportage and in-depth investigations, creating an echo chamber that is increasingly mimetic and dependent on wire services rather than original reporting (Boczkowski 2005). In this view, web editors also tend to publish an increasing amount of tabloid and sensationalistic pieces, using editorial formats that have low information value such as slideshows, quizzes, and "listicles" (e.g., "top ten" lists of various phenomena) in order to attract page views (Poole 2013,

Poniewozik 2014, LaFrance 2012). Some go as far as to predict an existential crisis for the news, with many critics worrying about the "collapse of journalism" (McChesney and Pickard 2011). They hold the internet in part responsible for the negative transformations of news-making in the twenty-first century.

On the positive side, researchers emphasize that readers have access to more information today than ever before (Schudson 2011). The information available online is also more diverse. Web journalists and bloggers have developed many innovative formats and styles, such as blog posts, user-generated content, new writing styles, and multimedia productions (Anderson 2013, Dagiral and Parasie 2010a). Furthermore, positive evaluations of online journalism note that it made possible new forms of journalistic inquiry by giving a broader platform to writers who are more critical of the political and economic establishment. For example, without the work of *WikiLeaks* and the blogger and journalist Glenn Greenwald, the public would know much less about the United States' diplomatic action and global surveillance undertaken by the National Security Agency.

The marriage of technological capabilities and economic pressures

How do the findings of this dissertation contribute to the debate? Based on the material presented in the previous chapters, I argue that news websites differ from print publications in two critical ways that have important consequences for the future of journalism.

First, pressure to post content at a faster rate has dramatically increased in online news over the last decade. This is not due simply to the fact that webpages can be constantly updated, but also to the widespread belief among web editors that "more is more:" more content brings more traffic, which in turn brings more advertising revenue at a time when most web

publications face strong economic pressures. Yet publishing more content without increasing the inputs of production (e.g., the number of writers) comes at a cost. As we saw at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, news websites choose instead to multiply editorial formats that require less time and effort, such as short blog posts, opinion pieces, and partnerships with other organizations. Consequently, a majority of the pieces published on the two websites comment on news that has been produced elsewhere.

Second, audience measurements have entered the digital newsroom. Whereas traditional print journalists knew little about their readers and their publication's circulation numbers, web journalists receive constant feedback about the real-time popularity of their articles. As this dissertation showed, the availability of detailed internet metrics facilitates cost-benefit analyses in web newsrooms. Is it worth it for a journalist to spend three days researching a topic when a blog post written in two hours attracts the same number of page views? Should the editor leave a technical article on economic policy on top of the home page when an op-ed piece ranting about the exorbitant prices of New York real estate is the most popular one on the website? Like radio and television producers before them (Rossman 2012, Gitlin 1994), web editors are now forced to take commercial considerations into account when making daily editorial decisions. In addition, online measurements are more precise, more frequent, and more individualized than their equivalents in radio and television. Thus, web editors are now able to monitor each journalist's performance, article by article, paragraph by paragraph, and second by second.

Taken together, these transformations are worrisome. They confirm some of the pessimistic views about the negative effects of the internet on journalism. Specifically, they indicate that the technological capabilities of the internet (e.g., constant updating of webpages and the existence of server-based web metrics), in conjunction with the intensification of

competitive market pressures, led to a noticeable intrusion of commercial concerns in editorial departments. The increasing prominence of commercial considerations in editorial decision-making threatens the production of quality information on the web. It also has effects on society at large. Indeed, the journalistic field acts as a magnifying glass: it has a multiplier effect on the power dynamics of many other fields, including the political, the artistic, and the scientific fields (Bourdieu 1994, Benson and Neveu 2005). By this means, the accelerated pace of publication and tabloidization of journalism on the internet could contribute over time to a loss of autonomy and increased commercialization of many essential areas of social life.

A transitional period?

Yet it would be a mistake to draw overly dramatic conclusions from these findings. After all, U.S. newspapers witnessed a similar upheaval in the middle of the nineteenth century. That time, the shock was tied to emergence of the penny press and the development of steam-powered printing. These made the market for news more competitive, leading to rivalries between newspapers, an increased rhythm of production, and the emergence of sensationalistic editorial formats as newspapers sought to capture an increasingly diverse and growing audience. Nonetheless, at this exact moment of radical uncertainty, the foundations were laid for the strong professional culture of journalistic independence that shaped the development of the U.S. news media for more than a century. Over time, nineteenth-century newspapers engaged in a process of specialization not only between "fast" and "slow" publications (e.g., newspapers versus magazines) but also between publications specializing in fact-based "information" and sensationalistic "entertainment" (e.g., *The New York Times* versus *The New York World*) (Schudson 1978).

The current period bears many similarities with the media mayhem of the mid-nineteenth century: the development of a new technology is accompanied by growing competition and the emergence of new types of organizations. Yet it is interesting to note that, so far, many news websites refuse to specialize: they want to do everything at once. News sites want to publish prestigious long-form investigative articles while also trying to cover breaking news in real-time. They want to provide opinion pieces with a critical perspective on current political and economic affairs, but they also end up covering celebrities and lifestyles in an effort to attract more traffic. This ambivalence is particularly striking at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, but many news sites are characterized by a similar ambiguity. For example, the *Huffington Post*, whose early success was mostly due to "celebrity gossip and adorable kitten videos" (quoting Bill Keller from the *New York Times*) (2011) rather than long-form journalism, hired high profile journalists from prestigious print publications in order to manage its "investigative journalism" unit. This tactic seemed to work: the *Huffington Post* won a Pulitzer Prize in 2012.

Is this the future of the media? Perhaps placing these developments in a longer time frame can give us some perspective. Based on the example of the penny press in the nineteenth century, I argue that this may be a transitional period in the development of a full-fledged field of online news. New areas of specialization already begin to emerge. For example, on the "autonomous" side of the field, websites such as *ProPublica* in the United States or *Mediapart* in France focus on investigative journalism, devoting resources to long-term investigations and expecting little or no profit. On the commercial side of the field, platforms such as *BuzzFeed* overwhelmingly rely on slideshows and quizzes, with the explicit goal of maximizing traffic and advertising revenue.

Eventually, one might expect different types of websites to coexist in a more differentiated field of online news. The first category of websites would consist of legacy media sites such as *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*. These websites would all have pay walls restricting access to paid subscribers, in addition to online advertising. The combination of these two types of revenue would allow them to maintain their costly but essential structures for gathering information every day across the world. The second category would be magazine websites, which would primarily engage in critical and in-depth analysis of major political and social trends. These sites would rely on a mixture of advertising revenues and premium plans for loyal readers who support the website. A third category of websites would take on the task of investigative reporting. They would adopt a non-profit structure and rely primarily on donations and/or paywalls. The last category of websites would specialize in sensationalistic content and "click-bait" articles. Advertising revenue would be their main source of income.

Of course, this optimistic description of the future field of online news mostly depends on the willingness of consumers to continue reading long-form journalism and agree to pay for quality reporting. As we saw in this in-depth study of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*, editors often express their doubts and make cynical comments about the sensationalistic preferences of their readers. Thus, the first lesson that we should remember as daily readers of online news is that we are all responsible for the future of journalism: every click counts in deciding of the shape of tomorrow's news.

2) Quantification in context

In addition to the important question of where online journalism is headed, this research provides a case study within the larger subject of quantification, its techniques, and its effects of people's lives. The past thirty years have witnessed a proliferation of metrics in many sectors that used to be insulated from performance measurements. In this final section, I argue that there is much to gain from comparing the ways that quantification unfolds in different organizations, fields, and countries.

Judges and journalists

Let me start by describing a surprising realization that struck me in the middle of my ethnographic fieldwork. I was reading some of the notes that I had taken during my first six months of fieldwork at *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* and suddenly realized that the ideas that emerged from the notes and interviews sounded familiar. Strangely enough, the web journalists whom I was interviewing in Paris and New York resembled the French magistrates whom I had studied for my Master's thesis in 2005-2006.

Before starting my Ph.D., I conducted a year-long ethnography of a courthouse in the outskirts of Paris, which was published as *Comparutions Immédiates: Enquête sur une Pratique Judiciaire* (Christin 2008). In this project, I focused on an emergency criminal procedure called "*comparution immédiate*" (*emergency hearings*). This procedure allows magistrates to proceed to immediate arraignment and trial in the twenty-four hours after a defendant's arrest in cases of petty misdemeanors typically related to the drug trade or assaults in urban areas. For one year, I

studied the interactions between prosecutors, judges, and lawyers during hectic days when each judge presided over more than twenty cases.

These magistrates were deeply troubled by the emergence of new quantitative measurements of their judicial performance. In the same way that web journalists expressed their ambivalent feelings about traffic numbers, the judges and prosecutors whom I interviewed in 2006 were concerned by the systematization of a new penal policy called "*Traitement en Temps Réel*" ("*Real Time Proceedings*") which promoted stricter measurements of the efficiency of individual courthouses within the French justice system (Vauchez 2008, Vanneuville 2013). A computer filing system tracked the number of criminal cases processed by each prosecutor per day, the number of cases sent to the emergency procedure (described as more "efficient" than regular trials), as well as the proportion of jail sentences over the total number of cases sent to *comparutions immédiates* (Christin 2008, 2006, Bastard and Mouhanna 2006).

The magistrates worried about the implicit assumption of these measurements, in which to be considered "efficient" they had to tailor their judicial decisions to "fill up" vacant spots in the emergency procedure. Judges and prosecutors argued that they could not send a set proportion of all criminal cases first to *comparutions immédiates* and then to jail just to fill the vacant spots every day. In their view, most cases did not call for such a drastic response. They relied on a professional definition of "good justice" in order to resist this new penal policy. Eventually they developed several strategies to "game" the tracking system and appear efficient while in fact continuing to judge cases as they had done previously. Thus, judges and web journalists responded in similar way to the emergence of new performance measurements: they criticized the metrics and resisted quantification, while also finding ways to avoid open disobedience and evade sanctions.

Several waves of quantification

This unexpected resemblance between judges and web journalists should be understood within the broader development and institutionalization of metrics and performance measurements that took place during the past thirty years.

The use of numbers and measurements in order to manage and increase the productivity of the workers is far from new. From Marx onward, scholars have analyzed how the standardization, mechanization, and quantification of work on the shop floor contributed to increasing workers' alienation over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century (Marx 1992 [1867], Thompson 1966, Biernacki 1995). Many researchers inspired by the Marxist framework paid particular attention to Taylor's "scientific management of work" and its diffusion with the Fordist model of the firm (Braverman 1998 [1974], Burawoy 1979, Gramsci 1971, Edwards 1979, Noble 1977, Nelson 1980, Taylor 1911, Dujarier 2012).

However, over the past three decades, many sectors that used to be protected from quantitative measurements witnessed the emergence and institutionalization of metrics measuring their efficiency in new, quantitative terms. The sectors affected by this rise of quantitative performance measurements include academia (Espeland and Sauder 2007, Bruno and Didier 2013), healthcare (Scott, Ruef, Caronna, and Mendel 2000, Reich 2012, Belorgey 2010), the justice system (Garland 2001, Espeland and Vannebo 2007, Vauchez 2008), policing (Fassin 2013, Bonnet 2006, Willis, Mastrosfky, and Weisburd 2007), international and non-governmental organizations (Davis, Fisher, Kingsbury, and Merry 2012, Merry 2011, Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997), non-profit organizations (Anheier and Sebeil 1990, MacIndoe and Barman 2013, DiMaggio 2001), and more generally the state and its various sectors of

administration (Foucault 2010 [1979], Porter 1996, Espeland and Vannebo 2007, Desrosières 2005, Bruno and Didier 2013).

The emergence and institutionalization of quantification in these different sectors is often analyzed as the manifestation of a neo-liberal paradigm that took center stage starting in the 1980s, leading to a gradual reconfiguration of the state and its relationship to society at large (Foucault 2010 [1979], Miller and Rose 2008). All of the organizations influenced by this recent rise of quantitative measurements have an essential characteristic in common: they aim to promote or provide public goods for which efficiency and performance are not simple to measure.

Yet another wave of quantification is currently under way. This wave concerns the behavior of individuals and stems from the increasing prevalence of "big data" gathered online. One of the most striking technological changes of the last decade is the increasing amount of time that we spend on the internet, where we engage in a dizzying and ever increasing array of activities (Fox and Lee 2014). With the development of internet-based tracking devices (e.g., cookies), marketing firms, companies, banks, and security agencies track, analyze, and store massive amounts of data about people's daily habits, preferences, and life events. This massive increase in the amount and use of data gathered without the explicit consent of the people being monitored poses important questions of privacy and confidentiality (Boyd and Crawford 2012, Nissenbaum 2009, Scheppele 2007, Vertesi 2014, Lupton 2014, Levy 2013, Tufekci 2013, Tene and Polonetsky 2012, Ziewitz 2012, PCAST 2014). Existing research on "big data" highlights the potential abuse of power related to this flourishing amount of information, whether at the level of countries, firms, or individuals. Scholars also often delineate possible paths for resistance, from bottom-up refusals to divulge individual data (Vertesi 2014) to national regulations on data use to protect privacy (Nissenbaum 2009).

Yet, with a few important exceptions, there is little research that systematically compares the ways that quantification – online and offline – unfolds in different organizations, fields, and countries. For example, do metrics operate similarly or differently in places like newsrooms, hospitals, schools, universities, and courthouses? What can we learn by comparing how people react to quantification online and offline? Are metrics always the "weapons of the weak" (Porter 1996, Scott 1985) that disrupt the *status quo* of the field by promoting new measurements of value? Do workers react differently to the rise of measurements in the public and private sector? Are there national differences in the reception of numbers? In the upcoming years, I plan to continue exploring these questions by comparing the reception of online and offline metrics in several newsrooms and courthouses in the United States and France. Such a research program will attempt to shed light on the rise of individualized performance measurements and the disciplining effects of metrics on professional identities. As with the present work, I hope that it will contribute to the analysis of the daily manifestations of market forces in the twenty-first century workplace.

Appendix A

Methods

This appendix introduces the methods used in this project. To analyze changing definitions of journalistic value in U.S. and French online news, I relied primarily on ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews. I complemented this qualitative approach with statistical analysis of an original data set gathered from the French website *LaPlace*, which is described in detail in Chapter 7. The qualitative side of this project was conducted in three stages. First, I focused on a pair of news websites, *TheNotebook* in New York and *LaPlace* in Paris, which constitutes the core of the analysis presented here. Second, I studied four additional websites with differing characteristics in the United States and France. Finally, I conducted additional interviews with journalists, editors, freelancers, and bloggers in New York and Paris.

Before turning to the presentation of this ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews, it is important to discuss the anonymization measures employed throughout the

project. At the beginning of this research, the Princeton Institutional Review Board asked that all names should be anonymized, both the names of individuals and organizations (see O'Connor, Netting, Thomas 2008, Bonnet and Robert 2009 for a discussion of the IRB).[1] There are important ethical reasons for anonymizing the names of organizations as well as individuals. In addition to providing a layer of confidentiality protecting the individuals who accepted to participate in the project, anonymizing organizations also grants more autonomy to the researcher in framing her research questions and presenting her findings, whether critical or not (Weber and Beaud 2003, Weber 2008, Fassin and Bensa 2008, Weber 2011).

Yet there are cases when anonymization becomes a complex task. Scholars have already noted the difficulty of anonymizing prominent political figures, intellectuals, as well as one-of-a-kind institutions (Chamboredon, Pavis, Surdez, and Willemez 1994, Weber 2008, Desrosières 2008, Scheppele 2004). In other cases, strict anonymization is not enough to provide confidentiality for populations at risk (Béliard and Eideliman 2008). Anonymization has become even more complex in the age of the internet (Shklovski and Vertesi 2013), especially when studying people such as journalists whose main ambition it is to be visible online. In this project, I rely on pseudonyms for the organizations and individuals under consideration. I also remove or reformulate as much information about the unique features of the individuals and organizations as I can without undermining the sociological analysis. When describing the U.S. and French fields of online news, I usually provide the actual names of other news websites, except in cases where it directly threatens the anonymity of *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace*.

[1] Princeton Institutional Review Board, Protocol #5556, December 29, 2011. The protocol also requests written consent from all the interviewees, which I gathered systematically.

1) A comparative ethnography of TheNotebook *and* LaPlace

I first conducted an in-depth ethnographic study of a "pair" of connected websites between the winter of 2011 and the spring of 2013.

LaPlace and *TheNotebook* have many characteristics in common. There were both founded by print journalists who had worked previously for prestigious print publications. Both websites were created relatively early: *TheNotebook* started in the mid-1990s and *LaPlace* in the mid-2000. *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* both have a liberal editorial line. They mostly provide commentary and analysis but the two websites also broke important news over the years. Both websites have received major professional awards for their work. *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* rely on advertising revenue as their main source of income and have no paywall.[2] They are both owned by larger media companies. In 2012-2013, *TheNotebook* had between 10 and 12 million unique visitors per month and *LaPlace* had around 2 million monthly unique visitors.[3] The two websites are now owned by larger media companies. According to their managers, *TheNotebook* recently became profitable[4] and *LaPlace* is close to being profitable.

As of March 2014, *TheNotebook* had 56 employees (including 41 writers and editors in the editorial department) and *LaPlace* had 30 employees (including 21 writers and editors).[5] At

[2] In the spring of 2014, *TheNotebook* introduced a membership plan which allows readers to access extra content for $5 dollars per month. The rest of the content remains free.
[3] In April 2014, *TheNotebook*'s chairman announced that the website's number of monthly visitors had more than doubled over the past five months due to a change in Facebook's policies (which now favor original content). According to the chairman's statement, *TheNotebook*'s monthly number of visitors was about 30 million in April 2014.
[4] These figures concern the first quarter of 2014. As of 2012-2013, when I conducted my research, *TheNotebook* was described by its editors and managers as being close to breaking even.
[5] These figures only include employees who are entirely dedicated to the website. Since both *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* now belong to larger media companies, they also benefit from the structures of their parent company.

TheNotebook, there are 25 women in the editorial department; 6 journalists are ethnic or racial minorities. The age of the employees ranges from 22 years old (the younger blogger) to 50 years old (the chairman). All of the top editors are men, with the exception of one woman who is the deputy editor. At *LaPlace*, 10 journalists are women; the employees' age range from 21 years old (the youngest intern) to 61 years old (the company's chairman); 3 journalists belong to ethnic and racial minorities. *LaPlace*'s "bosses," as the staffers call them, are all men with the exception of one woman who was the managing editor during my days of fieldwork.[6]

Most importantly, the convergence between the two websites was built into my study (see Sallaz 2012, 2009 for a similar design), since *LaPlace* explicitly imitated *TheNotebook* from the start: they wanted to be the French version of *TheNotebook*. The two editors-in-chief, Philippe and Sam, know each other and have met several times. There was even a formal partnership between the two organizations between 2007 and 2009: *LaPlace* translated and posted articles from *TheNotebook* for free on their website. The histories, evolutions, and connections between the two websites constitute the core of Chapter 3.

Following previous research in economic ethnography (Dufy and Weber 2007, Weber 2009, Anteby 2009, Kunda 2006, Bechky 2003, Morrill 1995, Burawoy 1979), I conducted ethnographic observations at these two workplaces. These observations were complemented by semi-structured interviews with people who work or have worked at the firms. I kept detailed ethnographic notes about my days at the different newsrooms.

I began by conducting intensive ethnographic observations and interviews at *LaPlace* in Paris between January and March 2012. I spent between one and three days per week at the

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According to Sam, the editor of *TheNotebook*, around 80 employees total contribute to the daily functioning of *TheNotebook*.

[6] In 2013, towards the end of my fieldwork, Marina became *LaPlace*'s editor-in-chief. A new position of editor-at-large was created for Philippe.

newsroom during this period. I first met a young female journalist, Lise, through a common friend. Lise had been hired as a staff writer at *LaPlace* in 2011. She introduced me to the then editor-in-chief, Philippe, who gave me permission to conduct ethnographic observations in the newsroom.

During my days of observation, I sat at different desks with the journalists, followed them during their work activities and their cigarette breaks, and attended editorial meetings. In parallel, I conducted interviews with staff journalists as well as external contributors (freelancers and bloggers). I conducted a total of 33 recorded interviews with journalists, editors, bloggers, and former employees of *LaPlace.*[7] I had long email exchanges with four more journalists and bloggers. I conducted a second period of fieldwork at *LaPlace* in April 2013; I re-interviewed several editors and staffers during that time.

I conducted fieldwork at *TheNotebook*, in New York City, in three main stages: April-May 2012, September-October 2012, and February-March 2013. I conducted 28 recorded interviews with journalists, editors, external contributors, and former employees of *TheNotebook* during these three periods. After the first wave of interviews in April 2012, I contacted the editor-in-chief, Sam, and met with him for an interview. I obtained permission to spend five full days at *TheNotebook*'s offices. During this time, I observed three editorial meetings and was able to sit at the desks of the different staffers and editors. I asked them questions about their work during the time that they were working. I had a long email correspondence with two staffers and one former employee of *TheNotebook*.

In parallel, I followed the online activity of *LaPlace.com* and *TheNotebook.com* intensively, reading the articles and exploring the archives of the website. I followed the

[7] I transcribed all my recorded interviews in their entirety. The translations into English are my own. I sometimes left the original expression in French when some part of the meaning was lost in translation.

journalists and editors on Twitter and Facebook. I also attended public events where they were participating.

I relied on a slightly modified version of grounded theory to organize my research (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Charmaz 2006, Timmermans and Tavory 2012). I first arrived in the field with a broad research question on the transformation of journalistic work with digital technologies and the possible convergence between U.S. and French journalistic practices, as well as an interest in cultural sociology and economic sociology. After several months of fieldwork, I drafted a first chapter based on the material gathered at *LaPlace* (the basis of what would become Chapter 5) and became particularly interested in the role of internet metrics in web newsrooms and the idea of conflicting definitions of journalistic value. I continued my fieldwork with these specific questions in mind.

My position as an observer was different at the two websites. At *LaPlace*, overall, the team took little notice of me. For example, the "bosses" accepted my presence in the newsroom, signed the consent form immediately, and met with me for interviews when I asked them, but never asked how long or how often I would come and never formally introduced me to the team.[8] I surmised that this absence of suspicion (and meager interest) was a consequence of the other research projects that had already been conducted at *LaPlace*: several sociologists and anthropologists had done fieldwork in the newsroom before me.[9] Thus, I was "old news" for the editors and staffers, who were nonetheless generous with their time: they met with me for

[8] Each time I tried to install a more regular routine, such as coming for one week in a row or coming twice per week, the editors' response was, "Sure, just send us an email in the morning when you're coming." This is what I ended up doing: I sent an email to the three senior editors who were always in the newsroom (Philippe, Marina, and Gael) in the morning before coming to the newsroom.

[9] I have been in touch over the years with several of the researchers who studied *LaPlace* before me. We compared our observations and relationships with the staffers, which were relatively similar.

repeated interviews, invited me to join them for their cigarette and lunch breaks, and sent me information over email that they thought might be useful for my research.

At *TheNotebook*, in contrast, the top editors met my request to conduct fieldwork in the newsroom with caution. They set strict rules for my presence and sent emails to the staff that introduced me, summarized my project, and mentioned the duration of my stay. They inspected the consent form that I handed them very carefully. Staffers themselves were often surprised by my ethnographic method: they often made jokes about being interviewed, which they found unusual. They were also curious about my project and my trajectory: they often asked me questions about Paris, French journalism, and whether I liked studying at Princeton and living in New York.

Overall, during my days of fieldwork, I noticed that I had stronger affinities with the journalists who had a more "intellectual" profile, so to speak. These journalists were on average more educated than their colleagues: French journalists had studied in "*classes préparatoires*" and American journalists had attended Master's programs.[10] They were fairly critical of the growing importance of web metrics in the newsrooms; they tended to espouse the "editorial" view of journalism as information rather than the click-based approach, which they found superficial. The strong ties that I established with these journalists – who usually "vouched" for me in the newsrooms and were the ones who invited me to join the informal events organized by the journalists – inform some of the findings and interpretations provided in this dissertation.

[10] Their educational trajectories clearly matched my own, since I studied at a *classe préparatoire* and did a Master's program.

2) Four additional websites

In addition to studying the pair *TheNotebook – LaPlace*, I conducted additional research on a second circle of news sites in order to get a better sense of the field of online news in Paris and New York. In this second phase of my research, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at four other websites: three in Paris and one in New York.

In Paris, I conducted a week of observation in January 2013 at a small news website which I call *Website A*. *Website A* has 16 employees, including 9 journalists and editors. Since its creation in 2009, *Website A* had an official partnership with *TheNotebook*, which replaced the one that had existed between *TheNotebook* and *LaPlace* until then.[11] I interviewed six journalists and editors at *Website A*.

The second news website in Paris, *Website B*, is the online version of a major print newspaper. The website shares the offices and publishes articles coming from the print publication but it also employs 80 journalists who write exclusively online. I conducted a week of observation at *Website B* in August 2012 and interviewed 8 journalists and editors there.

I conducted several days of ethnographic observation at a third Parisian website, which I call *Website C*, in August 2012 and April 2013. *Website C*, which also has a partnership with a digital-native U.S. website, was created in 2012 and employs 19 journalists. It now attracts about the same number of visitors as *LaPlace*. I conducted 5 recorded interviews there.

Fourth, in New York, I spent a week of fieldwork in October 2012 at a digital native website created in the mid-2000 (*Website D*). It employs 17 writers and editors and is part of a

[11] I did not choose this second website as a main case study despite its formal partnership with *TheNotebook* because of its different position in the French field of online news. It is much smaller, less competitive, and far away from making a profit compared to *TheNotebook* or *LaPlace*. It also made a different choice in terms of business model: the website targets luxury advertising instead of standardized ad packages.

larger media group that includes 8 different sites. This website relies on aggressive traffic maximization techniques. I interviewed 4 journalists and editors at *Website D*.

Finally, I interviewed 18 journalists (13 in New York and 5 in Paris) who worked for other publications, both print and online. I recruited these interviewees through snowball sampling, based on the recommendations of journalists whom I had already interviewed.

Overall, I conducted a total 101 semi-structured interviews which ranged from 30 minutes to 4 hours. The interviews took place between October 3, 2011 and November 23, 2013. I transcribed all the interviews.

Table A-1. List of questions for the semi-structured interviews

List of questions
1. Do you define yourself as a journalist?
2. How did you become a journalist/a writer?
3. Tell me more about your journalistic career. Where did you work before starting your current position?
4. When did you start working for [this news website]? How did you first get in touch with them?
5. How frequently do you contribute to the website?
6. Could you describe the usual process of proposing, writing, editing, and publishing an article on the website?
7. Do you look at the number of page views, 'likes,' 'retweets,' and comments on your articles?
8. What are the kinds of articles that attract a lot of page views, in your opinion?
9. What are the best and worst articles you have ever published? Why?
10. Compensation
11. Socio-economic and demographic questions

Table A-1 reproduces the questions that constitute the core of these semi-structured interviews. I typically began each interview by asking about the subject's motivation for becoming a journalist. I then retraced the journalistic career of the interviewee, before focusing on his or her current position. I asked whether he or she paid attention to internet metrics in his or her daily

work, and why. When it seemed as though the interview was about to end, I asked which were the best and the worst articles that the interviewee had ever published, and why. This question gave me rich material to explore changing definitions of journalistic value. I concluded the interview with socio-demographic questions.

Table A-2 provides descriptive statistics about the interviews.

Table A-2. Description of the interview sample (N=101)

	New York			**Paris**			
Number of cases	The Notebook	Other websites	Total U.S.	La Place	Other websites	Total France	**Total**
Age:							
less than 30	6	3	9	8	6	14	**22**
30 to 45	14	12	26	20	13	33	**58**
45 and more	8	2	10	5	4	9	**19**
Women	9	2	11	16	6	22	**33**
Ethnic/racial minorities	2	1	3	3	1	4	**7**
Studied journalism	4	1	5	14	19	33	**38**
Freelancers	12	5	17	17	4	21	**38**
Editors	6	6	12	5	6	11	**23**
Total number	**28**	**17**	**45**	**33**	**23**	**56**	**101**

The U.S. and French interviewees present rather similar characteristics in terms of age (an overrepresentation of the 30-45 year-old age group), the low number of ethnic and racial minorities, number of editors (between 20 and 25% of the sample in each country), and number of freelancers (slightly less than 40% of the sample). The percentage of freelancers is misleading, however, since many journalists who are now staffers started their careers as freelancers or returned to freelancing after the time of the interview.

The main differences between the French and American interviewees are the proportion of women (25% in the United States versus 40% in France) and the percentage of people who

studied journalism after high school (11% in the United States versus 58% in France). These figures are consistent with the socio-demographic characteristics of the U.S. and French journalistic workforces (see Chapter 2).

Table A-3, reproduced below, provides additional information about the 101 interviews that I conducted for this dissertation project, such as the pseudonym of the interviewee, her organizational affiliation, and the date of the interview.

Table A-3. Anonymized names, dates, and breakdown of interviews

Names and affiliation	Date
PARIS	
LaPlace	
Editors and managers	
Philippe	February 10, 2012
Marina	February 21, 2012
Eric	January 10, 2012 and April 21, 2013
Gael	January 29, 2012 and February 10, 2013
Staffers	
Lise	December 14, 2011
Marc	January 6, 2013
Abdel	January 12, 2012
Sarah	February 9, 2012
Alexandre	February 9, 2012 and March 15, 2013
Erin	February 27, 2012
Agnès	March 1, 2012
Charles	January 15, 2012
Marianne	April 13, 2013
Louise	April 15, 2013
Martin	April 13, 2013
Gabriella	February 22, 2012
Jean	February 20, 2012
Anthony	March 2, 2012
Georges	May 6, 2013
Freelancers and bloggers	
Rose	January 28, 2012
Chloe	February 4, 2012

Alice	January 26, 2012
Anne	January 31, 2012
Nikos	February 5, 2012
Sophie	February 7, 2012
Hugo	January 30, 2012
Celia	March 1, 2012
Romain	January 31, 2012
Vincent	February 25, 2012
Etienne	May 6, 2013
Charles	May 22, 2013
Abi	March 25, 2012
Lou	March 9, 2012
Website A	
Cecilia	December 13, 2012
Marc	January 21, 2013
Gabriel	January 21, 2013
Camille	January 21, 2013
Cristina	January 22, 2013
Louis	January 22, 2013
Website B	
Amir	August 27, 2012
Jules	August 28, 2012
Léa	August 29, 2012
Lucas	August 30, 2012
Arthur	August 31, 2012
Jonah	August 31, 2012
Clément	August 31, 2012
Léo	August 29, 2012
Website C	
Laura	September 4, 2012
Judith	August 11, 2012
Antonin	December 8, 2012
Geoffrey	April 17, 2013
Additional interviews	
Baptiste	February 4, 2012
Marie	October 19, 2011
Quentin	October 3, 2011
Jean-Philippe	April 19, 2013

Theo	September 5, 2012
NEW YORK	
TheNotebook	
Editors and managers	
Sam	September 21, 2012
Tom	October 17, 2012
Matthew	October 17, 2012
Jonas	March 14, 2013
Benjamin	March 13, 2013
Staffers	
Noah	May 25, 2012
Luke	June 1, 2012
Owen	May 22, 2012
Jane	May 16, 2012
Jodie	May 15, 2012
Carter	May 21, 2012
Emma	September 18, 2012
Audrey	September 26, 2012
Claire	September 23, 2012
Jack	March 14, 2012
Martin	September 21, 2012
Alyssa	October 17, 2012
Zoe	October 17, 2012
Ian	October 19, 2012
Josh	October 18, 2012
Freelancers and bloggers	
Mara	May 17, 2012
Eric	May 16, 2012
Margaret	May 30, 2012
Sean	March 12, 2013
Adam	October 23, 2012
John	March 16, 2013
Aaron	May 9, 2012
Christian	May 24, 2012
Website D	
Damian	September 20, 2012
Oliver	October 2, 2012
Bob	October 2, 2012
Nathaniel	September 15, 2012

Additional interviews	
Peter	November 22, 2011
Sofia	May 18, 2012
Nick	October 10, 2012
Michael	September 26, 2012
Daniel	October 13, 2012
Chris	March 6, 2013
Julian	March 11, 2013
Jonas	August 20, 2012
Alexander	November 9, 2011
Patricia	October 18, 2012
Joseph	November 12, 2011
Ethan	November 5, 2011
Bill	November 10, 2013

Appendix B

Additional material (in French)

Table B-1. Email sent by Philippe to a potential investor on December 1st, 2006

Object : Le projet X grossièrement résumé

Cher [ami],

Comme je te l'ai brièvement raconté jeudi, nous songeons à lancer un site d'information/magazine excitant, original, ludique. Il serait un (le?) point de référence sur le Net pour l'actu, l'analyse et le débat en s'appuyant sur la participation des internautes.

Il n'existe rien de la sorte en France à la différence des Etats-Unis (TheNotebook.com mais aussi Huffington.com , TPM Cafe...).

L'idée est de sortir d'une logique émetteur-récepteur (actu en continu, mise en ligne du papier) de développer une communauté "accro."
Le site encouragerait tout ce que la presse écrite s'interdit: journalisme à la première personne, subjectivité assumée, regard décalé, humour. Il répondrait à la forte demande de participation au débat public.

Il serait structuré en trois cercles concentriques:

1. Premier cercle, au cœur: des journalistes chevronnés et des journalistes "natifs" de l'internet (ceux qui en ont le vocabulaire : podcast, etc.). Ils produisent 100% de valeur ajoutée, sans trop s'encombrer de l'info de base disponible gratuitement partout ailleurs. Quand le site ne propose pas ses propres

enquêtes et reportages, il rebondit sur l'actu avec un ton, un regard, une agressivité rédactionnelle, et un point de vue.

2. Second cercle: des chroniques, des experts, des blogueurs amis.
Certains blogs proposent des accès inédits à des mondes difficilement pénétrables pour les journalistes (la salle de classe, une entreprise, un parti politique vu de l'intérieur…).
Notre site aura vocation à les héberger, à leur donner une visibilité et un coup de main journalistique s'ils le souhaitent.

3. Troisième cercle : la communauté d'internautes. Commentaires, forums, chats, points de vue... Ils participent à des enquêtes de société lancées par le site, suggèrent des papiers etc.

C'est l'addition des cercles 2 et 3 qui assureront le trafic, donc la publicité, donc la rentabilité du site, financé par la publicité. Avec une équipe réduite au départ, nous pensons possible de bâtir un site profitable.

Merci de garder tout cela pour toi.

En attendant de tes nouvelles...
Bien à toi,
Philippe

Table B-2. Vademecum du Journaliste de *LaPlace*

LaPlace est un site d'information et de débat. Il cherche à surprendre chaque visiteur par l'originalité et la pertinence de ses infos. Il s'appuie sur ses internautes et sur des experts pour fournir ces informations.
LaPlace est un site "à trois voix", mais c'est la première qui donne le la.

1) A l'image de la boule, le journaliste de LaPlace est multi-facettes

- Il enquête, vérifie, écrit, photographie, filme, enregistre, monte, anime, lave les mugs.
- Il rebondit sur l'actu, mais là où on ne l'attend pas.
- Il furète sur le Web à la recherche de talents et d'infos qu'il signale à ses lecteurs ("vigies", etc).
- Il lit les commentaires, les modère, répond aux questions.
- Le fil des commentaires est pour lui une rivière aurifère: il la passe au tamis à la recherche d'idées et d'infos.
- Ses lecteurs sont aussi ses capteurs et ses sources.

S'il n'a pas écrit plus de 12 commentaires dans le mois, il s'interroge sur l'opportunité d'envoyer son CV à France Soir.

- Il “entretient” une communauté d'experts participant au site, et les bichonne pour qu'ils restent fidèles.
- Il aime les formats innovants (infographies, cartes, diaporamas...) et est obsédé par les améliorations qu'il peut apporter au site (il n'en dort pas la nuit).
- Il s'active sur les réseaux sociaux, s'en servant :
    - Comme source d'informations (avec prudence),
    - Comme moyen de promotion de son travail (avec habileté)
    - Comme lieu de conversation avec ses lecteurs (avec entrain)
    - Plus volontiers avec le compte de LaPlace qu'avec son compte perso

Il ne dit jamais non à l'idée d'**aller sur le terrain**. Quand il hésite et se demande in petto, “y vais-je ou pas”, la bonne réponse est: “Allez bouge-toi, tu sais que tu ne perds jamais ton temps quand tu y vas.”

Le journaliste de LaPlace a la chance de pouvoir avoir (presque) qui il veut au téléphone, il n'hésite pas à en faire profiter ses papiers.

Il est fier de son écriture “web” : succincte, claire, synthétique, décontractée, humoristique, aérée par des liens hypertextes. Il embedde sans lésiner (vidéos, sons, infographies...)

2) LaPlace fuit ce qui tue la presse

- Les dépêches
- Les sujets couverts par tous les autres
- Les marronniers
- Les principes dogmatiques
- Les anniversaires (sauf le nôtre)
- Le parisianisme
- L'esprit fermé (LaPlace cherche des solutions)
- Les papiers qui se prennent au sérieux
- Les papiers bavards, ceux “qui se regardent écrire”
- Les jeux de mots de Jean

3) L'angle est sacré sur LaPlace

Le truc le plus sacré après le champagne Marcoult et la boule à facette. Pour savoir si on “tient son angle”, se poser trois questions:

- Combien d'idées essentielles contient l'article que je vais rédiger (si la réponse est supérieure à une, renoncer).

- Pourrais-je résumer ce que je veux dire en une seule phrase courte?

- Si je lis cette phrase à mon voisin, va-t-il bailler ou écarquiller les yeux?

Pour savoir si le sujet tient la route, il faut répondre "oui" à la majorité de ces questions (pour la plupart pompées sur le vademecum de Politico):

- Mon article sera-t-il un "most e-mailed"? (variante: un "most RT" sur twitter)
- Est-ce que je lirais cet article si je ne l'avais pas écrit?
- Ma mère lirait-elle cet article?
- Un blogueur pourrait-il écrire un post pour commenter cet article?
- Un spécialiste apprendra-t-il quelque chose en le lisant?
- Mes concurrents seront-ils obligés de "suivre"?
- Le sujet a-t-il fait l'objet d'un débat enflammé en conf quand le j'ai présenté (critère dit "de Nono")

4) Le journaliste de LaPlace a une déontologie de fer

- Il sait "penser contre lui-même", ne cache pas d'informations qui le gênent, sélectionne les commentaires critiques étayés (et y répond).
- Il cite ses sources, ne repique rien sans le dire (cf., plus haut, pillage avoué de Politico)
- Quand il corrige ses erreurs, il le signale.
- Il mentionne les noms des personnes qu'il cite (sauf exception motivée).
- Il ne reproduit pas de propos contenant des informations douteuses, même entre guillemets.
- Il ne participe pas aux voyages de presse, refuse les cadeaux (OK, sauf une bouteille de Marcoult).
- Il ne publie pas d'info pour "rendre service à un pote".

Appendix C

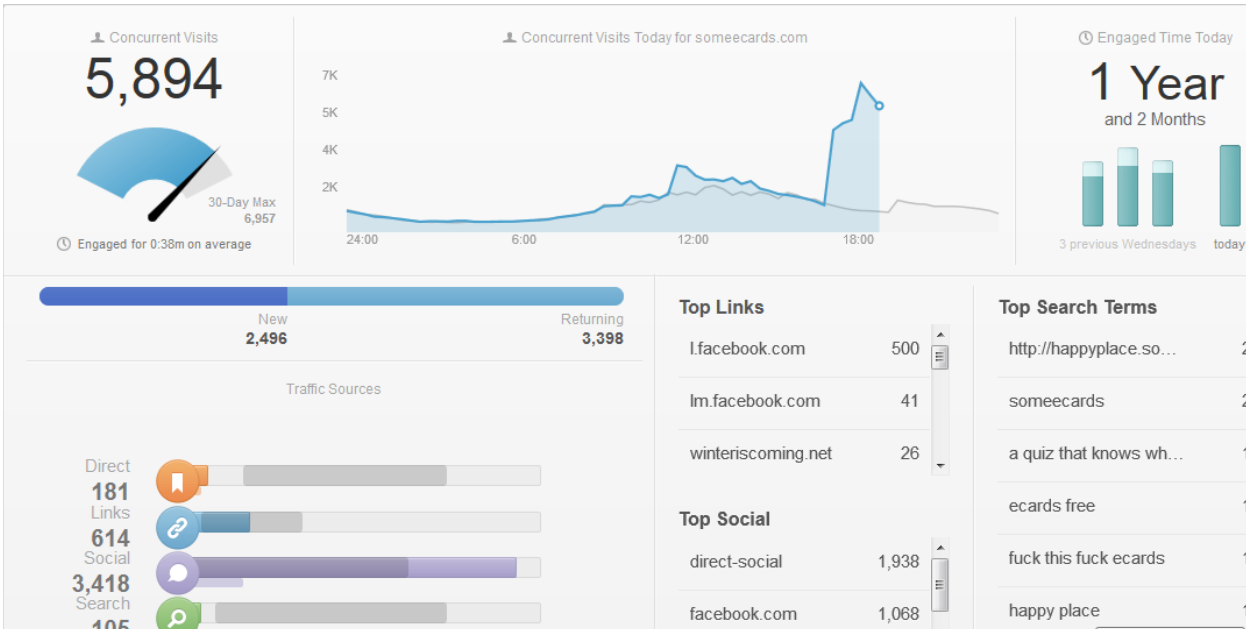
Screenshots of several analytics software programs

Figure C-1. The difference between "old analytics" and "real-time analytics" according to Visual Revenue



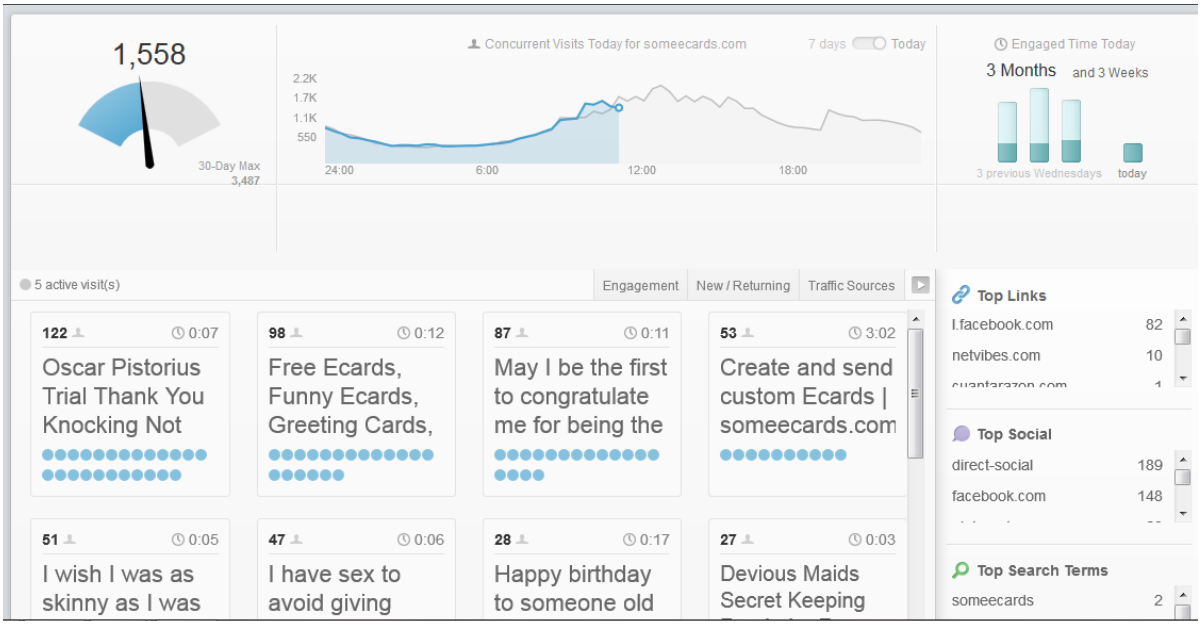
http://visualrevenue.com/product

Figure C-2. Chartbeat. Sources of Traffic Page.



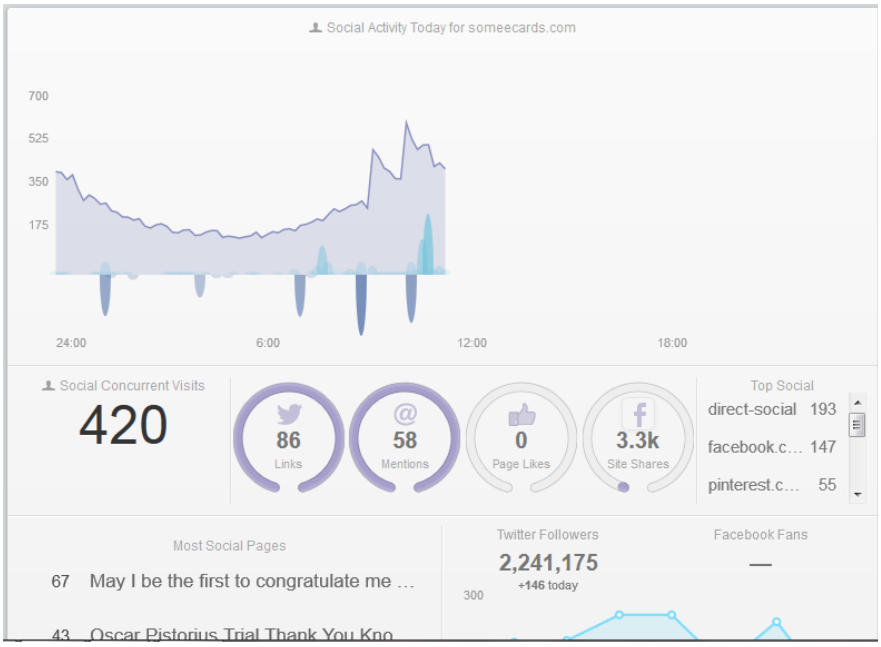
https://chartbeat.com/demo/#

Figure C-3. Chartbeat. Content page



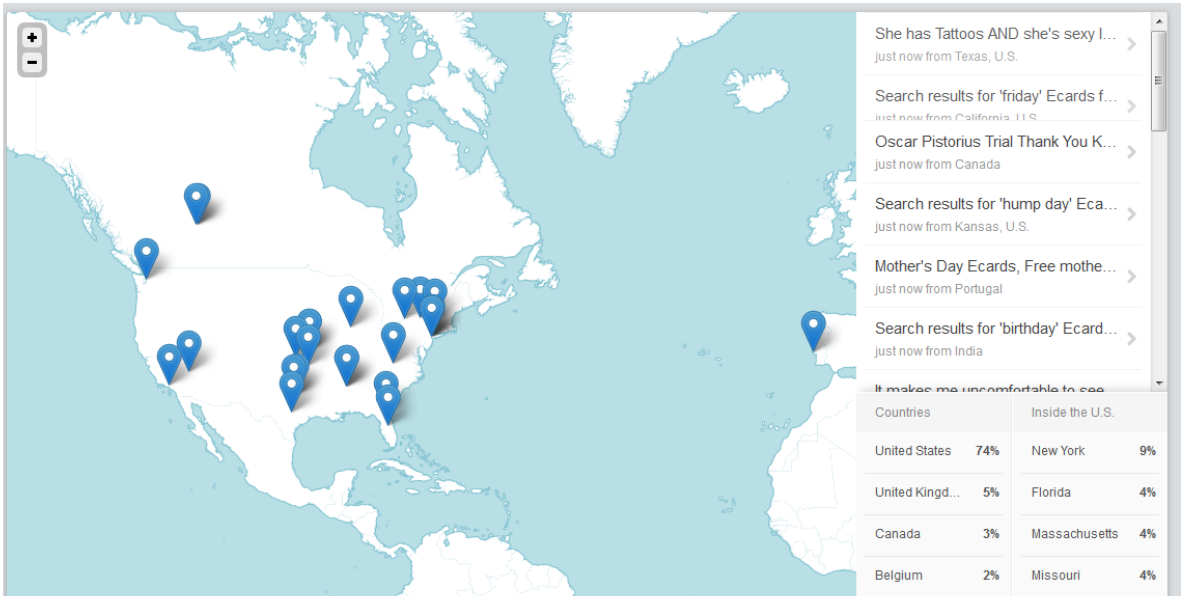
https://chartbeat.com/demo/#

Figure C-4. Chartbeat. Social Media page



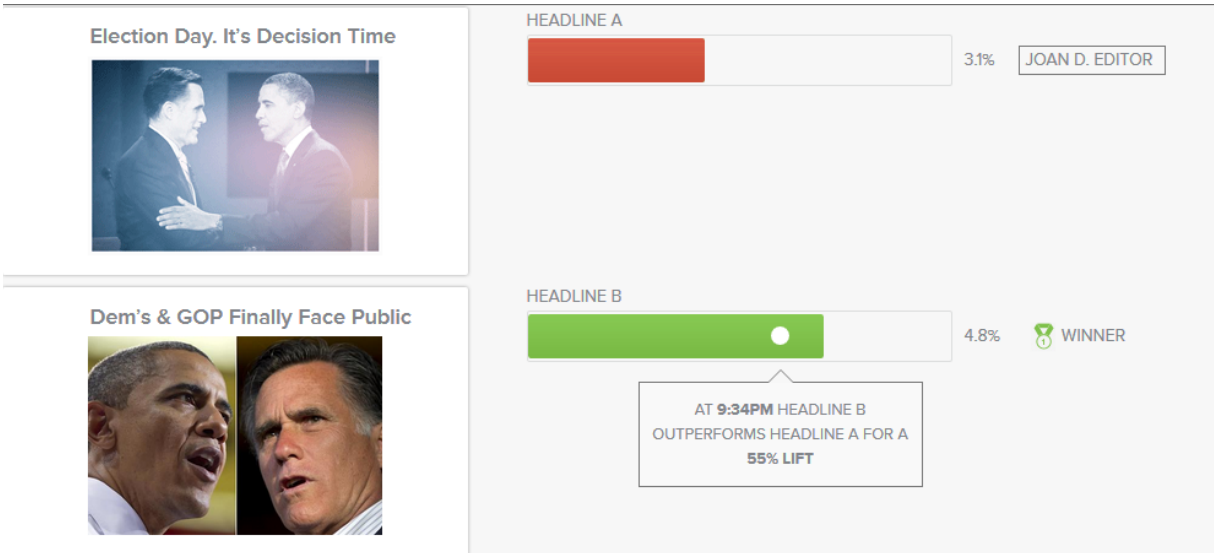
https://chartbeat.com/demo/#

Figure C-5. Chartbeat. Location page



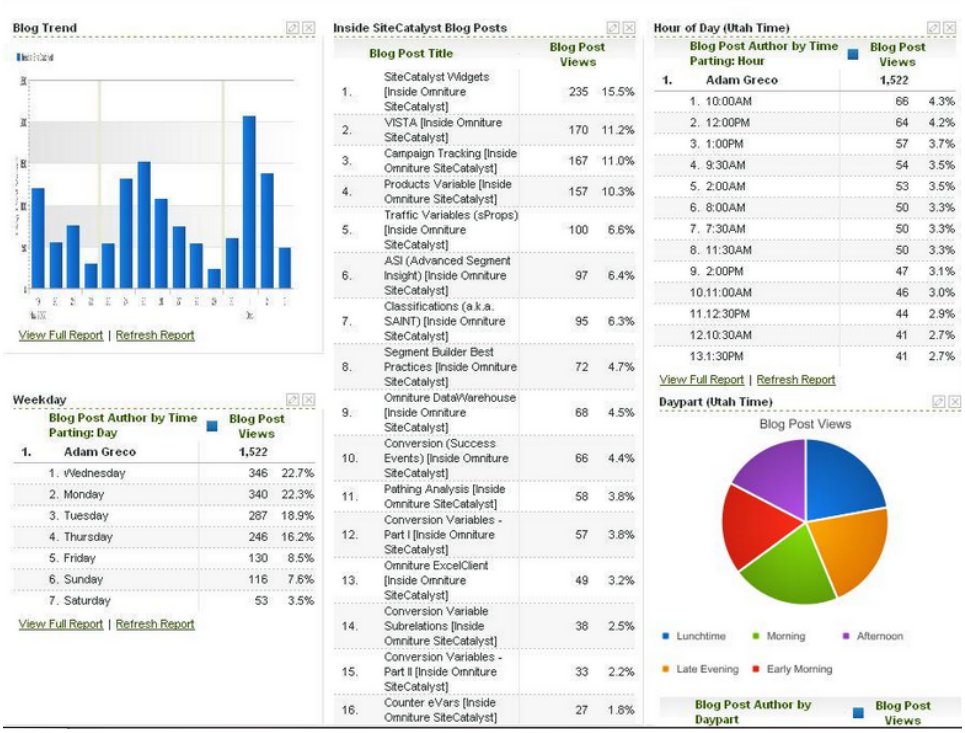
https://chartbeat.com/demo/#

Figure C-6. Visual Revenue. A/B testing page



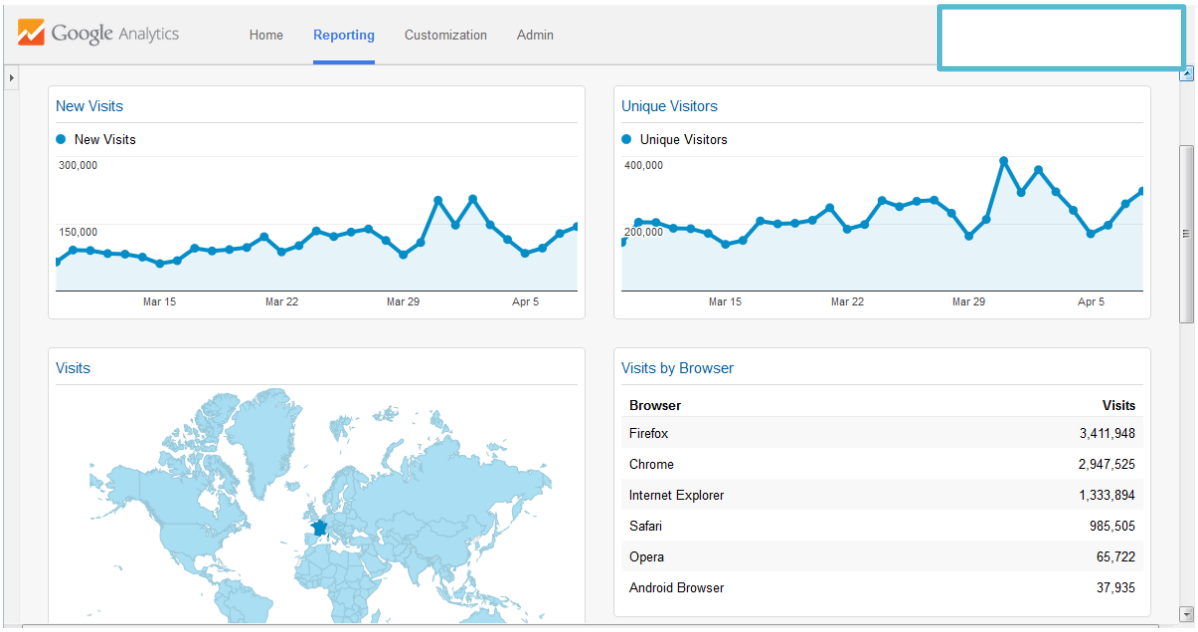
http://visualrevenue.com/product

Figure C-7. Omniture dashboard



http://assets.omniture.com/en/images/blogs/dash_9.jpg

Figure C-8. Google Analytics Dashboard



http://www.google.com/analytics/why/

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