Journalists’ creative process in newsgathering: A Grounded theory study from the Philippines
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Journalists' Creative Process in Newswork: A Grounded Theory Study from the Philippines

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Abstract: Creativity in journalism has always been a challenging concept. Journalism has not often been seen as creative due to its structured conventions. In response, a few journalism scholars claim there is creativity in journalism. However, no studies reveal a creative process in journalistic writing. This grounded theory research from the Philippines revealed a creative process of journalists (N=20): A Bicycle Wheel of Journalists' Creative Process in Newswork. This model sees journalists undergo the phases of cognizance, cultivation, captivation and introspection in their efforts to be creative. Motivation and experience, plus their work environments, even contextualize these creativity-related efforts of journalists. Understanding this journalistic creative process will help practitioners and editors aspire for high journalistic standards, and write engaging stories that are of public interest, and that are also relevant and significant.
Journalists’ Creative Process in Newswork: A Grounded Theory Study from the Philippines

Abstract

Creativity in journalism has always been a challenging concept. Journalism has not often been seen as creative due to its structured conventions. In response, a few journalism scholars claim there is creativity in journalism. However, no studies reveal a creative process in journalistic writing. This grounded theory research from the Philippines revealed a creative process of journalists (N=20): A Bicycle Wheel of Journalists’ Creative Process in Newswork. This model sees journalists undergo the phases of cognizance, cultivation, captivation and introspection in their efforts to be creative. Motivation and experience, plus their work environments, even contextualize these creativity-related efforts of journalists. Understanding this journalistic creative process will help practitioners and editors aspire for high journalistic standards and write engaging stories that are of public interest, and that are also relevant and significant.

Keywords Creativity; creative process; journalism; news writing; Filipino journalists
Introduction

Creativity has made rounds across various domains of knowledge and in psychology (Runco, 2014). Creativity is defined (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Boden, 2004; Sawyer, 2006) as a production of an idea (concepts, recipes, theories and other intangible materials) or artifact (e.g., sculptures, pottery, paintings and other tangible products) that are original (Weisberg, 2006; Runco, 2007), valuable (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013), and useful (Hayes, 1989) in its respective domain.

Across time, creativity has been associated with writing (Cowley, 1958; Sawyer, 2006). This association is through “imagination-based” forms of writing like fiction and poetry. However, some think creativity is less linked to the journalistic craft because journalism contradicts creativity given the former’s “objective” and “fact-based” structure (Liao et al., 2016). Criticisms include calling literary journalism “an oxymoron” (Zdovc, 2007: p. 1). In contrast, some assert journalism and novel writing were strongly linked; talented journalists apply techniques from novel writing to write “accurate non-fiction” (Liao et al., 2016: p. 12).

Psychology had studied creativity in different domains of knowledge. Many of these works focused on creativity as a product and as a process, and on the creative person (Runco, 2007; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). Fulton and McIntyre (2012) also said creativity is a “product of a system.” Meanwhile, creativity has been studied in different fields and disciplines. However, creativity has been less tackled in journalism as much as it is in creative writing (fiction and poetry). Moreover, some journalists and scholars think journalism is not a creative endeavor given the field’s structured conventions.

This grounded theory study aims to analyze the creativity of journalists in their newswork in order to see how journalism may be a creative endeavor. Such study is anchored on the execution of one’s work as possibly where creativity processes by journalists can be seen. This perspective emanates from Sawyer (2006) who stated two
views in creative processes: *idealist theory* and *action theory*. Idealist theorists argue that once you come up with an idea then the process itself is done; action theorists give emphasis on the execution of one’s work. Newswork contextualizes this study, yet researchers aim to show the presence of a creative process of journalistic writing —that which has been missing in the literature. Findings here, coming from the Philippines, may even bring forth implications unto the work of journalists and news organizations.

**Literature Review**

**Creativity discourse.** This review starts off the discussion with defining creativity. Philip McIntyre (2006, p. 41) defined creativity as “a productive activity whereby objects, processes and ideas are generated from antecedent conditions through the agency of someone, whose knowledge to do so comes from somewhere and the resultant novel variation is seen as a valued addition to the store of knowledge in at least one social setting.”

Views, approaches and processes on creativity have been pursued since the late 19th century. The earliest scholars have assigned processes to creativity. Helmholtz (1896) developed a three-stage process —preparation, incubation and illumination— to refer to the formation of a new thought. Poincare (1908 [1982]) advanced a two-step process in the context of mathematical discoveries: incubation and illumination.

Soon after, succeeding scholars took off and developed their own processes of creativity. Wallas (1926) proposed five stages: (1) *Preparation*, or consciously finding solutions to a certain problem; (2) *Incubation*, consisting most of the unconscious state; (3) Intimation, or the coming up of an idea; (4) *Illumination*, where the idea is finally made yet is subject to verification and development; and (5) *Verification*, where the “illuminated” idea is tested and developed (also in Sadler-Smith, 2015). Cowley (1958) then applied creativity into writing and developed four stages: (1) *Ideation*, where the
idea unconsciously begins; (2) Meditation, where there is a “more” conscious effort to shape the story; (3) First draft, putting the idea into text; and (4) Revision, where the first draft is analyzed and edited to produce the final piece.

The aforementioned models and processes were only applied to the objective fields of science and mathematics (Hadamard, 1954) and creative writing (Cowley, 1958). However, such models and processes have yet to be applied in journalism. As for the field of journalism, researchers put forward here a stipulative definition of creativity (adopting McIntyre, 2006): a product and a process where journalists, with their talents and background, learn and use the rules, procedures and previous works in the journalism domain to write articles that are both novel and appropriate to the contexts these were written for.

On this score, the systems model of creativity by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997) may provide some contexts unto viewing journalism as a creative process. He said creativity can be found in the interaction of a system which has three elements: a domain of knowledge (the cultural structure of the system), a field (the social structure), and an individual. In this model, an individual must learn about its domain —its rules, conventions, techniques, guides and procedures— for a creative product to be produced (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Hennessey (2017) supported Csikszentmihalyi, saying creativity must be viewed as “a system of interrelated forces operating at multiple levels.” Creativity is even a confluence, as well as a product, of social and psychological processes, as well as cultural and cognitive influences (Hennessey, 2017). Other factors have to be considered as well: neurological, affect, cognition, training, individual differences and several socio environmental factors like motivation, workplace, work environment and even culture (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). All these factors may have to be incorporated into a single, interactive and non-linear whole (Hennessey, 2017).

Amid the diversity of approaches, views, models and processes in creativity, rationalism and romanticism have been the two established approaches to creativity (Sawyer,
2006). Rationalism believes creativity is generated by the conscious, deliberating, intelligent and rational mind. In romanticism, on the other hand, creativity comes from an irrational unconscious; the rational mind interferes with the creative process (Sawyer, 2006).

Ideas and factors. Creativity must start with something for it to occur. Ideation begins creativity in Cowley (1958). Journalists, on the other hand, produce their story ideas — may it be encouraged or not by their editors (Fulton and McIntyre, 2012), or coming from various sources such as media releases, wire services, peers, beats, audience (Fulton, 2011) that may serve as the ideation to creativity by the journalist.

In debates among creativity scholars, unconscious effort and conscious thinking produce ideas (Helmholtz, 1896; Poincare, 1908 [1982]; Wallas, 1926; Hadamard, 1954; Cowley, 1958; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). Journalism also conceptualizes ideas through such means since journalists analyze current issues that lead them to construct journalistic ideas. These ideas are produced through conscious and even unconscious efforts, like when a news event suddenly breaks. Csikszentmihalyi (1996 as cited in Sawyer, 2006) once said: “You don’t know when you’re going to be hit with an idea; you don’t know where it comes from.”

In order to produce a creative journalistic piece, certain elements may be involved. Creative journalistic activity cannot result solely from an individual; it is a product of a system (Fulton and McIntyre, 2012). Thus, the journalism field itself and its activities such as the interaction between and among journalists, editors’ “abrasive style of teaching,” capability building activities (e.g., on-the-job trainings, cadetships), and awards (Fulton, 2011) may influence a journalist’s creative process positively or negatively.

Newswork and verification. News making decisions see journalists ponder and decide what kind of story is newsworthy based on news values. Certain combinations of news values appear almost to guarantee coverage in the press (Harcup and O’Neill, 2010).
Journalists use raw materials, containing news values or hard facts, in a story (Newhagen and Zhong, 2009). Other assessments of newsworthiness include opportunities for good pictures and headlines, for entertainment, the involvement of popular personalities (Harcup and O’Neill, 2010) and editors’ interest on the importance of the news event (Strömbäck et al., 2012).

The process of identifying what is news appears to be diverse, with no set of well-developed ideas on what and how to produce good news outputs (Matheson, 2003) and what stories are newsworthy. These news values shape up the journalistic idea at hand so as to become a full-blown story (in reference to Cowley’s [1958] second stage of writing: meditation).

News gathering thus becomes essential. Sources play a vital role in this regard. While exercising doubt, journalists trust sources on varying levels depending on the type of information the latter gives (Newhagen and Zhong, 2009). Meanwhile, information from official documents are said to be the most reliable (Shapiro et al., 2013) since these provide the most useful information (Newhagen and Zhong, 2009). This is where verification matters. Verification is an interweaving between corroboration and original information-gathering (Muñoz-Torres, 2007), demanding journalists to filter and select facts. For this reason, verifying information given by sources greatly influences a journalist’s decision-making in newwork. If a source or information is deemed unreliable, the product itself may also be deemed as such. Verification may then be paralleled to the last stage of the creative process by Wallas (1926): the creative product undergoes critical evaluation for it to be truthful and valuable.

Writing processes and structures. Journalists try to keep a sense of impartiality and fairness (Thomson et al., 2008) in newwork. However, such values do not hinder journalists to go beyond their journalistic sense of writing. The harder the writing product is to be achieved, the more it is valued (Matheson, 2003).
There are various guiding elements to a journalist’s writing process. Voice is one element: journalists write either using the reporter voice, the correspondent voice or the commentator voice (Thomson et al., 2008) in order to be authoritative. Journalists also use framing and angling depending on the story’s relevance and the original approach applied unto the story (Grunwald and Rupar, 2009). Therefore, studying elements affecting the journalist’s writing process matters in knowing their creativity.

Journalism values what is called “skilled writers” and “good writing” or “stylish and well-constructed” articles (Matheson, 2003). Journalists also usually follow a certain structure, reflecting their style of writing (Fulton and McIntyre, 2012). Examples of story structures include the inverted pyramid (Munoz-Torres, 2007), the “martini glass,” the “kabob” structure (Harrower, 2012 —the latter reflecting the appearance of the Arabian skewer), and the “unconventional” inverted pyramid (Johnston and Graham, 2011).

There are certain elements that constitute a journalist’s style in news writing: language (Grunwald and Rupar, 2009), voice (Zdvoc, 2007), narrative tools and techniques (Johnston and Graham, 2011), angling (Grunwald and Rupar, 2009), and forms of journalistic pieces (Fulton and McIntyre, 2012). These elements show how journalists think outside of the box to produce the creative product.

**Personality and attitude.** Most studies on creativity focused on the creative person since understanding this person leads to understanding her or his creative process (Csikzentmihalyi, 1997; Runco and Kim, 2018). Rhodes (1961) identified the “4Ps” of creativity, with person being mostly about the personality as a primary factor in studying creativity. The complex personality of creative people also reflects one’s flexibility and adaptability (Runco, 2009). Some characteristics of a creative person include passionate, motivated, intelligent, open-minded, humble, proud and physically fit (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; 2013).

More so, creative researchers have emphasized the importance of motivation, be it intrinsic (the pleasure one feels when doing something or extrinsic (outer desire to work
People tend to be more creative when they are working on a task they truly enjoy (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010), or if the field fits one's personality and working style (Sawyer, 2006).

This literature review reveals how creativity has been studied in different fields and disciplines. However, creativity is less tackled in journalism compared to abundant discussions in creative writing (fiction and poetry). Moreover, the creativity of journalism is still disregarded given its structured conventions (Liao et al., 2016). We explore in this paper the processes surrounding the creativity of journalists in their newswork.

**Methods and Design**

This grounded theory study sought to answer this central research question: *How do Filipino journalists execute their creativity in daily news reporting?* Grounded theory was used due to its rigid coding structure for analysis, as well as its stress on verification and validation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

**Sample.** A total of 20 Filipino journalists —18 working in the Philippine capital region of Metro Manila and two in the provinces— were interviewed over a two-month span. The nine male and 11 female respondents were selected through reputational case sampling (chosen by experts in the industry) and through referral sampling (recommended by participants earlier interviewed) (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Researchers adopted the following selection criteria: a) S/he is a current practitioner; b) S/he has at least three years of work experience; and c) S/he works for any news organization regardless of platform (print, online, broadcast).

**Instrumentation and ethical considerations.** Researchers used a two-part qualitative instrument to surface the activities of journalists in relation to unleashing their creativity in newswork. The first part is a robotfoto (in Dutch, an initial sketch of the subject or, in
the case of this paper, the respondents [De Guzman et al, 2012]), putting together respondents' demographic profiles [see Table 1]. The second part of the instrument, an aide memoire (interview guide), mostly carried questions on the processes journalists undergo vis-à-vis their professional experiences. Questions during the interview were asked in English but respondents were allowed to speak using the Filipino language. Interviews ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 hours.

[Insert Table 1 here]

An institutional review board of a university's journalism program granted ethics approval. All respondents signed consent forms where their identities were anonymized (examples of respondent codes in this paper: "J1," "J14"). Researchers also went to suggested interview locations of respondents (e.g. offices of assigned beats, newsrooms, drinking joints, etc.) so that the former captures data in these comfortable environments of journalists.

**Data explication / Mode of analysis.** Data from the robotfoto were described descriptively [refer to Table 1]. Interviews were all transcribed verbatim as field texts, which were then subjected to the steps under the **grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990).**

Researchers employed combinations of first- and second-cycle coding methods. These include initial coding, sub-coding, descriptive coding, *in vivo* coding, process coding, theoretical coding (Saldaña, 2013) and open coding (Given, 2008). The eclectic use of various coding methods helped in sorting, categorizing (*cool analysis*) and thematizing (*warm analysis*) the field texts.

Researchers employed axial coding, a procedure where data "are re-assembled so that the researcher may identify relationships more readily" (Given, 2008: p. 51). To flesh out the context, causal conditions, intervening conditions and consequences, a within- and cross-case analysis table was used and subjected to axial coding. Researchers then
derived phases of respondents’ creative writing process to unfold the *lebenswelt* (life world) of journalists interviewed.

The grounded theory outcome was applied to a diagrammatic metaphor to best illustrate the creative process of respondents. This diagram is called a *metaphorical visual display*, a type of qualitative data display that portrays “in a metaphorical way the topics of themes found… in a structured and organized way” (Verdinelli and Scagnolli, 2013: pp. 225, 230). Themes were subjected to member-checking procedures to establish the trustworthiness of the data.

**Limitations.** Researchers acknowledge the limited number of respondents given time constraints and the professional work commitments of the targeted respondents. About 90 percent of respondents were based in the National Capital Region (where national news outlets operate). Rural contexts of journalists —environment, resources and journalists’ capabilities— were minimally captured here.

**Findings**

Given the richness of respondents’ descriptions, the *Bicycle Wheel of Journalists’ Creative Process in Newwork* model was developed [see Figure 1]. This model sees journalists undergo four sub-processes: *cognizance, cultivation, captivation and introspection* (the major grounded theory themes). The four phases of this model were found to be cyclical, similar to a bicycle tire's shape and movement. The speed of the tire’s motion signifies the rate of how the creative process happens. The rim of the tire is where the whole creative process takes place. The spokes that connect the central hub to the rim symbolize the experiences and motivations of journalists interviewed; in technical terms, having more spokes means having a stronger tire. That being said, more experiences and motivations bolster the creativity of a journalist.
However, at the same time, this *Bicycle Wheel* process shows that journalists go back-and-forth to each of these phases when needed. This reflects how iterative or recursive (thus, non-linear) this creativity process is.

**Cognizance phase: Ideating the news story**

This phase involves the conscious effort and awareness to ideate a news story due for submission to news desks. Creativity springs when journalists consciously get story ideas from almost anywhere, this act being creative in itself. The cognizance phase has three sub-phases: *conceiving, valuing* and *validating*.

- **Conceiving.** Given daily story quotas, journalists start their work with formulating a story. All respondents said stories are everywhere: from one’s curiosity, press releases, documents, the assigned newsbeat, the newsroom, etc. [J7, J1] — and even occurring on a “slow” news day. So journalists check their human sources and available printed and electronic information and data [J11, J2]. Respondents also revealed experience and expertise in the field are important since conceiving a story idea comes with one’s knowledge and familiarity of their news organization [J16] and of assigned beats [J14].

- **Valuing.** When a story idea is conceived, journalists test that story’s newsworthiness using news values to order to give shape to that story idea. However, not all story ideas materialize because some stories are not **practical**, may have limited information collected, and may lack newsworthiness. For some respondents, getting human voices carries “stronger chances” of getting their stories published [J16].
Validating. Even if a story idea is newsworthy enough, journalists still test the feasibility of that idea in terms of available materials, sources, time and effort [J13]. Validation also involves the sense and purpose of pursuing and writing a story. Validation also subscribes to some principles of journalism — truth, objectivity, fairness and public service:

"You have to find your ‘why’ in journalism. ‘Why are you writing this story in the first place?’ If you cannot even answer that, don’t bother. Do not pursue it if you cannot answer your ‘why.’ Because it’s not enough that you know what you’re gonna write… to know how you’re going to write it. You have to answer the ‘why.’ You have to have a purpose… a reason for pursuing the story" [J1].

All respondents said they have to be creative throughout the cognizance phase in order to produce exclusives and new story angles. These efforts are not only their responses to news competition, but are means to display the social relevance of journalism:

"…When you see a story that can shake the hornet’s nest and unearth a past that has been neglected, and continues to have significance…” [J10]

Some respondents think a creative story idea contains certain elements — unconventional yet significant and socially relevant facts that are for the public interest, and that even stir social change:

"It (a story) will generate a kind of response to them whether it will generate action or discussion, inspiration, fascination. It doesn’t matter but… you have to find that core, you have to find that (something) which people who will really react to it, in your writing." [J7]

Cultivation phase: Building the news story

The cultivation phase is essentially news gathering. The two sub-phases here are collecting and analyzing.

Collecting. Journalists here have already determined the feasibility of a story idea, thus making them read press releases and e-news advisories, surf the
Internet and social media, deal with diversified sources, and uncover hidden public documents [J5, J14, J20].

A great deal of reporting involves taking time and effort to cultivate relationships with human sources. Some respondents said cultivating sources —through earning their respect and trust— is unquantifiable, and may take at least two-to-three years of reporting. [J9, J3, J16]. In order for these journalists to build strong relationships with sources, they take extra effort in getting to know them:

“Even if you don’t have a story to write, take some time in calling them and asking how their days are going.” [J2]

Ideally a news story should follow the two-source rule of news gathering. However, most respondents said this does not happen often because of deadlines, beat dynamics and the weight of a source being interviewed —like a victim of a crime [J19], or the head of state [J2].

- **Analyzing.** Journalists verify and analyze the materials hauled from news gathering. Verifying matters since this serves as the anchorage of truth, objectivity and fairness [J16], or even the basis of a journalist’s credibility [J8].

To fulfill truthfulness and accuracy, respondents claim going back-and-forth to sources, to documents and to other data they had gathered. Verification itself is a process needing, and leading to, a deeper analysis of information gathered. Some even have to pause their news gathering work and assess if the right details are gathered. Others use verification to remind of their roles as journalists:

“There is a process. I gather the data. I go over the data whether or not I’m smoking my cigarette, I will go over the data. I listen to my interviews. Whenever I find difficulty understanding the data, I confirm with the other editors. If I can’t get the data during conferences with the other editors, I look for experts to help me interpret the data I don’t understand. I never start off thinking I’ll understand everything. Then when I have all the facts clear, then I write.” [J11]
In the cultivation phase, respondents revealed creativity is closely linked to their resourcefulness in gathering information, their diligence at work, and their resilience to deadlines and source-induced pressures. Creativity also occurs when journalists break barriers of conventional news gathering and conquer all adversities to get relevant information and context (without sacrificing credibility and ethical principles):

“Did I have to get creative? Yes. Things like, the secretary's office was locked but the windows have plate glasses that are taller than me. So, I got out the fire escape, crossed the ledge, then held on to the ledge glass and started listening to the sources' conversation” (Sources eventually let the journalist inside) [J11].

Captivation phase: Writing the news story

This third phase focuses on the conscious efforts of respondents to write a story using various writing techniques and strategies. Two overlapping stages, enhancing and engaging, comprise this phase.

- Engaging. Respondents apply certain writing techniques to make the story engaging. Most said they utilize some story structures —e.g., inverted pyramid [J7] and hourglass [J20]— that would convey the news story in an organic manner. Even the length of sentences and the sentencing “styles” of journalists play a key role in this sub-phase:

  “I try to avoid the one-word lead. Sometimes it creates greater impact if your lead is short. (But) it really depends on the kind of story that you're working on.” [J14]

Journalists adopt their own writing style to make the story more engaging and compelling, and a good story structure is not enough. Some respondents are concerned with inserting the context of a story [e.g. J16]; others are
meticulous at word usage to simplify the story [J16], while some use unusual words fit for the beat so as to express creativity [J2].

Choosing the right voice for the story is also important. Voice sets the tone and mood of the text, and also helps convey the story easily to readers:

“...that they [journalists] find something new, it’s not something that’s already been talked about, also that they have strong identity, writing identities, that they have a strong voice." [J7]

The opening part (lead) of a journalistic piece matters also for respondents. The lead is crucial if readers want to hold on and read journalists’ stories, until the end:

“If the story has a magnetic pull on me: Whether it's literary or journalistic, because if you lose me at your first paragraph or at any point in the story before the end of the story, it's not good.” [J11].

The news platforms where stories get published matter in writing creatively. The nature of the news platform seems to dictate respondents’ judgment in how to structure their pieces [J1]. Says a respondent: “there are no space restrictions” for online journalists [J9].) Interestingly, all respondents said some stories beg for their own structure and style depending on the nature of a story, like investigative reporting or human interest profiles [J7], or the event (e.g. summary news leads for political news [J14]).

- **Enhancing the self.** Alongside the writing of engaging stories, all respondents claim to be aware of steps they need to continually do to further hone their journalistic craft. These are reading, practicing, exploring, and making every kind of writing an experience:

  “Journalistic writing is basically just like any type of writing, what is important is that you read and you write...It’s important that they find different approaches to seemingly overuse or maybe over utilize angles of stories —that they find something new." [J7]
Creativity springs forth during the *captivation* phase when journalists use different writing styles and structures to convey news properly to audiences. Creativity also plays a big role when respondents make their writing relevant to audiences, and when they also achieve some goals (self-fulfillment and readership considerations):

“You are creative whenever you tell the story in its best way possible without fabricating... You tell the story the way it should be.... as best you can.” [J5].

**Introspection Phase: Learning the news story**

This final phase involves the conscious effort of journalists to learn, re-learn and reflect. Through a sub-phase called *post-editing*, respondents assess their published works in hopes of improving their craft; in having a sense of career direction; in having new knowledge; and in learning from mistakes.

- **Post-editing.** This stage sees journalists engage in self- and guided-learning activities to hone their craft. Even self-editing and editorial consultations contributed to the development of respondents’ creativity.

  The editors-cum-mentors of respondents both praise and criticize published works [J1], making respondents conscious check their articles and learn how these were edited [J4]. Eventually, lessons they got from editors and from edited stories led respondents to ideate more and write better stories:

  “You will learn to correct your mistakes when you read your story once it’s published; read it through and study how your lead was edited.” [J3]

  Editors had provided lessons unto respondents, and these lessons contributed to the development of creativity by these reporters. Continuous learning stirs their creativity to come up with relevant story ideas, better data
gathering strategies, and improved writing styles and structures. These then develop respondents' sense of journalistic purpose and higher calling:

“I want to change how things were done, I wanted people to be inspired... to look at themselves and be the change that they want to be in their lives. But I am not going to look back and say that I wrote it well, I worked on it well, I worked on it great. When it comes to, whether I love the story or not, I do believe that they meant something... to people who had read it.” [J1]

Post-editing is not a linear stop to the Bicycle Wheel model. This sub-phase leads back to the cognizance phase. Post-editing also helps speed up one's creativity process when the journalist returns to the cognizance phase, depending on one's learning curve and on openness to criticisms.

Discussion

We sought to determine the creative process of some 20 Filipino journalists. Their verbalizations led to the Bicycle Wheel of Journalists' Creative Process in Newswork model. This four-phase model operates in the context that journalists accrue experience and motivation in order to become better and, in the process, creative. This model is also akin to previous studies about creative processes.

Cognizance. The cognizance phase is about the conscious effort of journalists to ideate and shape up story ideas daily. This phase can be paralleled to the combined first four stages of Wallas' (1926) five-step creative process (preparation, incubation, intimation and illumination), and the combined first two stages of Cowley's (1958) four-step creative process in writing (ideation and meditation). Meanwhile, the conceiving sub-phase is similar to the first three stages of Wallas' (1926) process —preparation, incubation and intimation— and Cowley's (1958) ideation stage.
Journalists’ daily story quotas push them to find stories. For the creative process to stir, it must start with something, with a germ of an idea (Cowley, 1958). This conscious effort to search and ideate a story idea can be seen in Wallas’ (1926) preparation stage wherein people are conscious in solving a certain problem; for journalists, the problem is their story/ies for the day.

Journalists must produce story ideas from various human and non-human sources (Fulton, 2011). In relation to producing story ideas, ideas can be products of unconscious effort and conscious thinking (Helmholtz, 1896; Poincare, 1908 [1982]; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). Journalists analyze current issues that may lead them to ideas (conscious effort), leaving the unconscious efforts that are linked with the dynamic news environment. Ideas can come whenever, wherever, whatever, and to whoever.

The second sub-phase, valuing, involves journalists consciously shaping (a) story idea/s through the guidance of news values. Valuing is similar to Cowley’s meditation stage (1958), the shaping up of a story idea. Meditation is the stage wherein writers determine the details of a possible story (e.g., characters and setting). On the other hand, Wallas (1926) argues there is an incubation stage, the sinking of a story idea into the subconscious, and anticipating the moment of eureka. This eureka can be linked to the valuing stage at only some circumstances because journalists do not have the luxury of time (given deadline pressures) to put a story idea into the subconscious state. As some of the respondents verbalized:

“Deadline is always at the back of my mind. So aside from the things I want to express, I’m conscious about the number of words, accuracy and prose.” [J2]

“I get up, I stretch, I sit down, I do it. Get back to the job. It’s called discipline. I work through the difficulty. I don’t have the luxury to let deadline wait.” [J11]

The last sub-phase, validating, leads to the practicality of the story idea. Valuing is similar to Wallas’ (1926) illumination stage: the idea is ready for research and development. Interestingly, an idea should be novel and original (Boden, 2004), valuable (Sawyer, 2006) and useful (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006) in its respective context,
i.e., journalistic products being new, up to date, relevant, and significant to readers. These characteristics of a news idea are weighed further through news values (Harcup and O’Neill, 2010). The cognizance phase is evident in the systems model of creativity proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1997): journalists are aware of subscribing one’s self to the existing domain (journalism knowledge and history) to write the day’s news.

Cultivation. This phase covers the nitty-gritty work of gathering information and data to concretize a story idea. This phase can be mirrored as a continuation of Cowley’s meditation stage, involving a “more conscious effort of shaping up the story” (1958, p. 8). The shape of a news story does not end in the idea’s validation through news values; that shape continues until the idea is materialized through documents, interview, statistics, etc. The cultivation phase can also be paralleled to the last stage of the creative process (verification) by Wallas where the story idea is put into “test and development” (Wallas, 1926: p. 10).

The first sub-phase, collecting, deals with the back-and-forth gathering of relevant and necessary information (e.g. documents, human sources, press releases, statistics, observational details). Respondents were aware they need to have two polar sources since this is the usual rule in journalistic sourcing for objectivity. However, respondents admitted they do not frequently follow this rule due to deadline pressures and unavailable sources. Between this collecting sub-phase and the next sub-phase analyzing, verification is being done (Muñoz-Torres, 2007). Journalists’ trust unto these sources, as part of their verification, depends on the level of information given to them (Newhagen and Zhong, 2009) and if these sources may carry an agenda.

Verification and accuracy are exercised also in the analyzing sub-phase. Journalists believe official and legal documents are the most reliable sources (Shapiro et al., 2013) and authorities (Newhagen and Zhong, 2009). The analyzing sub-phase helps journalists filter and select facts (Muñoz-Torres, 2007) as well as determine if the story can be written, and if information hauled may warrant another round of data gathering or not.
Captivation. The captivation phase has two overlapping sub-phases—enhancing and engaging readers—that reflect the meticulous news writing proper. Captivation involves the consideration of readers’ interests and tastes, leading journalists to tell stories in compelling ways. Journalists here use various writing tools like sentencing, story structuring, wording and voice—all of which are considered part of framing and angling (Grunwald and Rupar, 2009). Study respondents also explore the limits of language by using simple words; varying sentence length; having the correct voice; and even going beyond the usual “inverted pyramid” news structure. Respondents also consider the nature of their news platforms in efforts to let their writing hook audiences given their writing styles. Matheson (2003) notes the harder the writing is to achieve, the more it is valued by journalists. All these experiences under the captivation phase are analogous to previous researches that documented journalistic use of language (Grunwald and Rupar, 2009; Fulton and McIntyre, 2012), voice (Zdvoc, 2007), narrative tools and techniques (Johnston and Graham, 2011), and angling (Grunwald and Rupar, 2009).

The enhancing sub-phase focuses on the personal goals and reasons of journalists in producing well-crafted stories, such as their interest, self-improvement and fulfillment. These goals and reasons also affect the way journalists write. The process of writing offers something other domains do not provide: the opportunity for self-disclosure (Runco, 2009). A journalist has a conditional agency that allows her/him to choose, amid the existence of a field that constrains them (Fulton and McIntyre, 2012). Employing conditional agency is used on top of how journalists employ techniques coming from fiction writing to “make the facts clearer to readers, and enhance a reader’s ability to understand these facts” (Fishkin as cited in Liao et al., 2016: p. 10). (As to be explained later, motivation is one of two factors that affects the creativity of journalists interviewed.)

Introspection. This last phase of the Bicycle Wheel model involves the post-editing sub-phase where journalists learn from their editors. Journalists make efforts to assess their work/s and learn from mistakes during this whole phase. This is reflective practice
(Schön, 1983) at work. Post-editing also helped respondents ideate better ideas and prospective stories.

The model as recursive. The Bicycle Wheel model is not linear. Yes, journalists interviewed undergo cognizance, cultivation, captivation and introspection as a process, but the daily journalism set up sees the tendency of these phases to overlap. Intersections between and among these phases arise when journalists gather and verify information; when information springs forth a new story idea or a different story angle; or when journalists write their stories. Such experiences of respondents associate the creativity process to a bicycle wheel: cyclic. A creative process is more cyclical and does involve a lot of hard work: “Creative people are good at switching back and forth at different points in the creative process” (Sawyer, 2006: p. 45).

Factors affecting the creative process. Interview field texts identify two factors that affect the whole creative process of these journalists: motivation and experience. In our Bicycle Wheel model, the spokes of the bicycle represent motivation and experience since spokes support the rim, i.e., the four phases. Motivation plays an essential role in creativity (Sawyer, 2006); even enjoying one’s work will increase one’s chances to reach the fullest potential and capabilities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). Be they intrinsic (the drive to do something for sheer enjoyment, interest and personal challenge) or extrinsic (expected rewards, evaluation, surveillance, competition and restricted choice), motivation is affected by individuals’ social environment which, in turn, can significantly influence their creative performance (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). If journalists receive useful information in a supportive way, or if their stories enable readers to do something good, these extrinsic forms of motivation can actually enhance intrinsic motivations —especially if the latter is already strong (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). Extrinsic motivation in journalism can be paralleled to awards, commendations from editors, editorial mentoring, and audience recognitions which inspire respondents to write better. These extrinsic forms of motivation also support the love for writing by respondents, and their desire to learn new things and applying these to future stories.
A conjoint factor here is experience. Continuous reporting helps journalists become adept, more flexible and plausible at their craft (Fulton, 2011). Experience is anchored on the interaction between journalists, mentoring, and basic training activities like internships (Fulton, 2011). Motivation and experience, like the spokes in the bicycle wheel, support the entire Bicycle Wheel process. Motivation and experience buoy a journalist’s chances of fortifying her/his creativity.

**Omniscience, and being both conscious and unconscious.** Creativity by journalists in their newswork is seen to be omniscient throughout the Bicycle Wheel process. The value and weight of a story idea (as mentioned in the cognizance phase) begins the creative process, followed by cultivation (when journalists get into newsgathering and make human sources to talk without sacrificing their credibility and ethical principles). Evident also in the whole creativity process are the conscious efforts of journalists to use certain words, length of sentences and types of leads; to consider capturing the reader’s attention; and to be conscious of one’s pursuit of self-fulfillment.

Creativity here also seems to be both an unconscious and conscious outcome. It is conscious because journalists know there are stories of great social significance needing exhaustive legwork, and that must be told / written in compelling ways. Creativity is also unconscious since journalists are already exploring and extracting their own creative strategies through daily newswork. Creativity is also the reason behind exclusive stories and stories that highlight original news angles.

**Conclusion**

The Bicycle Wheel of Journalists’ Creativity in Newswork is a humble contribution to the understudied theme of creativity in actual journalistic practice and theory. The paper even graphically answered a question earlier posed by Fulton and McIntyre (2013): “How can a journalist be creative?” (p. 20).
This Bicycle Wheel Model has also somehow helped include journalism as a domain or profession with its contextualized processes of creativity, similar to other domains or fields (e.g., McIntyre, 2012). Amid criticisms that journalism and creativity are incompatible (Zdovc, 2007; Liao et al., 2016), viewing journalism in the rationalist point of view—focusing on the process itself (Fulton and McIntyre, 2013)—unravels the creativity of journalism.

Creativity in journalism lies in the whole process of producing a highly journalistic craft. Beyond that, creativity also springs from the daily hard work of a journalist. Creativity by journalists not just covers the written piece, but also involves non-writing engagements (e.g. cultivating human sources, editorial engagement). Motivation and experience even play pivotal roles on this regard. Our Bicycle Wheel Model can be used to encourage journalists to comprehend and value the creative processes they undergo. Valuing the creativity of journalists will ultimately lead them to work further in producing better journalistic pieces. This eventually benefits the journalism profession, and news audiences.

Editors and broadcast producers can also find the Bicycle Wheel model useful, especially by knowing how their reporters become ingenious in their work. Knowing such usefulness may benefit news managers in terms of aspiring for more conducive working environments, and systems of motivation within and outside newsrooms, for journalists. These conducive environments and mechanisms can lead new and aspiring journalists to know that writing and producing good stories are always process-laden. May journalists and editorial supervisors consider the above-mentioned possibilities of being creative in journalism.

Researchers also recommend further explorations to the concept of creativity in journalism, particularly the intricacies of the creative processes of journalists. As Runco (2009) argues, writing is best described as a process rather than a product: Writing may be that very process that benefits the writer. This research theme can also lead to
further studies, using larger numbers of respondents and even multiple country contexts (the latter being an exciting prospect), to determine how creativity works in the general scheme of journalism. Other researchers, through ethnographic methods, can also tackle the creative personalities of journalists and the creative environments where they belong to. Creativity processes by journalists may also help future studies where psychology and journalism intersect naturally.
Bibliography


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The Bicycle Wheel of Journalists' Creative Process in Newswork