

Epic Snowmen, Expert Takes, and Audience Orientation: How Journalistic Roles are Performed in Canadian Media

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Abstract

Exploring the differences between normative visions and actual practices (Mellado, 2020), through a content analysis of more than 3,700 news stories contextualized with surveys, and further unpacked by interviews with journalists, this article provides a comprehensive overview of journalistic role performance in Canada. Findings show few, yet distinct, differences between French and English media, and that Canadian journalists are often present in their stories; use high levels of infotainment; and demonstrate strong performance of both the civic and service roles compared to other countries, but perform far less of the watchdog role than journalists surveyed perceived.

Keywords: journalism; journalists; newsroom; journalistic role performance; content analysis; surveys

INTRODUCTION

How does Canadian journalism stack up against journalism the world over, and what roles do Canadian journalists see as most important? This article explores journalistic role performance in Canada, or how journalistic roles are conceived, enacted, performed, and manifested in editorial decision-making and content creation—the differences between normative visions and actual practices (Mellado, 2020). This is the second wave of the Journalistic Role Performance (JRP) project. The methodology was tested in the first wave of this international study, conducted between 2013 and 2018 (Canada was not part of that wave), and combines a content analysis used to measure the performance of journalistic roles, and a survey used to measure journalists' conception of journalistic roles and perception of enactment of these roles. The first wave of the study only examined national print media, while this second wave has expanded to investigate how different professional roles materialize in news content across platforms,

adding radio, television, and online news to the analysis. In Canada, there are 12 sites of study from English and French media. The Canadian study also included participant observation at one site and interviews with journalists representing a variety of the outlets being studied, in the hopes of providing better contextualization of news practice.

For analysis, journalistic roles are divided into six dimensions. The first is the interventionist role, where a journalist is present in a story's narrative, for example, by using first person or by describing cause and effect without quoting a source. The second and third roles are centred in power relations—in the watchdog role a journalist could be critiquing the government, while the loyal facilitator would support government narratives. The last three roles examine the relationships journalists have with their audience: in the service role, journalists offer consumer tips and health recommendations; in the infotainment role, reporters create content that is designed to entertain; and, finally, in the civic role, journalists focus on the viewpoint and rights of citizens (Mellado, 2020).

This article provides a comprehensive view of Canadian journalism using more than 3,700 stories gathered during two constructed weeks of 2020, as the COVID pandemic erupted, with findings that offer insight into what makes Canadian journalism, including more performance of the infotainment role than the watchdog role, despite a high conception of the importance of the latter; one of the highest displays of interventionism worldwide, characterized by the presence of the journalist in the story; and strong performance of both the civic and service roles. We will also address a much higher use of expert sources compared to other countries and fewer, yet distinct, differences than might be expected between French and English media, and between the diverse platforms of delivery being studied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Complex intersecting forces continue to shape the workplace climate and conditions in Canadian newsrooms, and even developments that appear at first glance to offer increased stability may actually contribute to the apparent nadir in Canadian audiences' overall trust in journalism. News organizations have benefitted from increased federal government support in the form of tax credits and other funding specifically earmarked to support Canadian journalism (News Media Canada, n.d.); many also received assistance in the form of COVID-relief subsidies available to a wide range of Canadian employers (Lindgren et al., 2022; Brin & Charlton, 2022). The federal government also recently committed \$400 million in additional funding to the national public broadcaster to help reduce its reliance on advertising revenue (Brin & Charlton, 2022). But government support for news organizations may carry some reputational cost for the industry (Coynes, 2021), with Canadians' trust in media declining precipitously over a four-year period, from 58% to 42%, a decline attributed at least in part to skepticism about whether government-supported news media can effectively serve as an independent monitor of power (Brin & Charlton, 2022).

There is a lack of consensus regarding the

severity of the industry's decline in Canada (Lindgren & Wong, 2022) and the corresponding impact on newswriters. While there is evidence of significant cuts to newsrooms and the number of journalists working in them, particularly local newsrooms (Public Policy Forum, 2022), even while acknowledging the deep impact of such cuts, questions have been raised about the actual number of jobs lost in Canada (Winseck, 2021). There are also positive signs in newsroom reinvestment by major legacy brands (Brin & Charlton, 2022), and studies that show that the loss of traditional newsroom jobs has been largely offset by roles not traditionally considered journalistic but that are nonetheless staffed by people who would self-identify as journalists (Wilkinson & Winseck, 2019). There seems to be more widespread agreement that, on the proverbial shop floor, journalists face significant stressors, including increased harassment and threats (Eschner, 2022; Campion-Smith, 2022; Fenlon, 2022) and job precarity (Wilkinson & Winseck, 2019) that, according to one study of 100 Canadian journalists, forces many practitioners to rely on family members for childcare, household labour, and financial support (Reid & Ghaedipour, 2021).

For all newswriters, the field is changing at both the technological and narrative level. Foundational journalistic ideals such as objectivity (Stead, 2022; Shapiro, 2021; Ingram, 2020) are no longer agreed-upon doxa (Willig et al., 2015), and the once seen as (or claimed as) unbreachable wall between the business office and the newsroom has come crashing down with the platformization of media production (Nieborg, 2021) and use of audience data now ingrained in newsroom practice and editorial-decision making (Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Blanchett, 2021a; Tandoc, 2019; Petre, 2021). Such audience data doesn't just impact news online, but can determine where resources are used to cover stories in newspaper or television, in newsrooms delivering to multiple platforms (Blanchett 2019; Blanchett 2021b). However, despite the merging of platforms of delivery within a singular newsroom, content creation is still shaped by media logic (Altheide & Snow 1979; 1991), or the use of standardized formats based on whether a story has "the necessary requirements for the medium" (Altheide, 2019, p.

212), something often tied to economic interests. Within the same newsroom one journalist might deliver the same story in a variety of ways (Duffy et al., 2018; Hanusch, 2017) with a particular plan for social media engagement (Tandoc & Vos, 2016; Walters, 2021). In certain instances, the platform of delivery can still hold more influence over journalistic roles than the type of media producing the content (Hallin & Mellado, 2018).

The first wave of JRP analyzed journalistic role performance between 2013 and 2018 in 64 newspapers from 18 countries and included surveys from 800 journalists. The results revealed that professional roles are fluid and dynamic (Mellado, 2020). The findings also demonstrate that there is a significant gap between how journalists perceive their role and what is seen in their journalistic output (Mellado & Mothes, 2020). The first wave of JRP challenged assumptions that journalists are using a clear set of practices and principles: “There are mixtures and nuances in terms of how journalists perform different roles in news” (Mellado et al., 2017, p. 17). Even within an individual newspaper there was no homogeneity between the news stories; individual stories and journalists embody different characteristics of role performance within the same news organization (Mellado, 2020). Other research shows Western ideals no longer epitomize global journalistic norms and practices (Waisbord, 2013), and the first wave of JRP found that similarities and differences in journalistic role performance are often not related to any one framework such as a country’s political landscape, geographical location, or specific media system (Mellado et al., 2017).

International comparative research of media systems and journalistic roles provides subtle, if any, evidence of distinct linguistic professional cultures (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Mellado et al., 2017; Mellado, 2020). Bonin et al. (2017) found modest differences between francophone journalists in Canada, Belgium, and Switzerland and their majority-group counterparts, in terms of their perceived professional roles:

Specifically, francophone journalists appear to be more likely...to perceive themselves as part of a ‘fourth estate’ with a politicized role that includes agenda-setting, citizen motivation,

and scrutinizing power. Conversely, francophones are less driven by a mission of attracting and satisfying audiences (by providing entertainment, daily-life advice, etc.). (pp. 543, 546)

Hallin and Mancini (2004) hypothesized that a distinct subnational media system existed in Quebec, possibly more politicized, with stronger journalistic autonomy. Structural differences between the French and English-language media also suggest the idea of a Québécois journalistic culture, such as the geographically concentrated media market, stronger presence of the national public broadcaster, greater role of provincial government in media policy and funding, and relative vitality of professional organizations such as the Quebec Press Council and *Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec* (see for example Le Cam, 2009). French-speaking Canadians also consistently exhibit stronger trust in news media than anglophones (Brin & Charlton, 2022).

Although a previous survey of Canadian journalists found that francophones and anglophones shared similar professional cultures, Pritchard, Brewer, and Sauvageau (2005) found that attachment to values such as “accurately reporting the views of public figures, providing analyses of complex problems, and giving ordinary people a chance to express their views,” had declined among English-speaking journalists, suggesting the “possibility of an emerging cultural divide” (p. 289). More recently, an expert survey conducted to test Hallin and Mancini’s assessment of the Canadian media system showed more variation among news organizations than by language or province (Thibault et al., 2020). How journalistic role performance might differ between English and French media and between platforms will be explored throughout this article.

METHODOLOGY

The JRP project uses a mixed-methods approach and includes content analysis of news stories and an online survey of journalists. Content analysis was used to establish journalists’ performance, while survey data were

used to establish both an individual journalist's conception of their roles and perceived enactment of journalistic roles at an organizational level. The gap between what journalists did (the role performance) and their conception of what roles are important and what they believe their news organizations are doing (role conception and role enactment) was measured by comparing the content analysis to the survey responses. Data for the content analysis were collected from January to December 2020, and surveys in Canada were collected from September 2020 to July 2021. All international teams have access to the shared, cleaned, and merged data from 365 news media outlets in 37 countries in order to perform cross-cultural analysis. The Canadian study also included both participant observation and semi-structured interview components, with the hope of bringing greater insight into data gleaned from both the content analysis and surveys.

This article focuses on the following research questions:

RQ1: How does Canada's journalistic role performance compare to other countries?

RQ2: Is journalistic role performance different in pandemic-related reporting?

RQ3: Are there differences in role performance between French and English media in Canada?

RQ4: Are there differences in role performance in Canada dependent on media type?

RQ5: What roles do Canadian journalists think are most important?

Sampling

As with all of the countries participating in JRP, the media selected had to collectively represent a broad audience, a diversity of businesses and platforms, and a widely recognized influence on public debates on a national scale. Regional and local outlets were included where they were considered important to the media landscape. There were 12 sites of study in Canada.

Television

CTV National News
CBC: The National
Global National
TVA Nouvelles (evening network edition)

Newspapers

Toronto Star
National Post
Globe and Mail

Radio

CBC Radio: World at Six
ICI Radio-Canada Première: L'heure du monde

Online media

La Presse
CBC.ca
HuffPost Canada¹

Content Analysis

A systematic stratified sample of two weeks was selected for each media outlet in each country from January 2 to December 31, 2020. Because daily and monthly variations are important factors to consider when conducting a news content analysis, we divided the year into two six-month periods: January-June and July-December. For each six-month period, we created a constructed week, randomly selecting starting dates on a Monday in January and a Monday in July. Then, using three to four week skip intervals, we selected each of the subsequent six days: a Tuesday, a Wednesday, a Thursday, a Friday, a Saturday, and a Sunday. This procedure allowed us to include seven days in each six-month period for a total sample of 14 days during the year, thus creating two constructed weeks. Whereas our selected television and radio news programs and newspapers are static in the sense that they are unique and appear at fixed times, news websites are dynamic and change constantly. Therefore, we captured the homepages of the websites at two fixed points during the sampled days: once at 11:00 a.m. and once at 11:00 p.m.

Only stories that were created by the organization itself (in whole or in part) were

¹ HuffPost Canada was closed down on March 9, 2021.

included in the analysis. For example, stories with a Canadian Press (CP) reporter byline or those taken from another media outlet or news agency that were published by the unit of study were not coded;² however, stories “with files” from CP or another agency but with a reporter byline from the outlet of study were coded. Content created by freelance journalists was also coded. In the case of online media, embedded video or audio clips specific to the story were coded.

All types of news stories were included in the sample, from politics to sports to lifestyle to business; however, no opinion pieces or editorials were included in the sample. The global sample consisted of a total of 148,474 news stories from

365 news outlets. The Canadian sample includes 3,727 news stories: 1676 online; 976 newspaper; 834 television; 241 radio. The full sample of stories in the content analysis were weighted in order to ensure fair representation by platform.

Measurement and Coding

We relied on the operationalization proposed by Mellado (2015) and validated in previous studies (Mellado et al., 2017; Mellado and van Dalen, 2014; Mellado, 2020) to measure professional roles in news content. Table 1 provides a summary of the roles and associated indicators.

² Acknowledging some broadcast or other stories may not have been labelled as CP content.

Table 1. *Role Performance Indicators*

Role	Indicator
Interventionist	Journalist’s point of view Interpretation Call to action Qualifying adjectives First person
Watchdog	Information on judicial/administrative processes Questioning by the journalist Questioning by others Criticism offered by the journalist Criticism offered by others Uncovering performed by the journalist Uncovering performed by others Reporting on external investigation Investigative reporting
Loyal-Facilitator	Defense/support activities Defense/support policies Positive image of the elite Progress/success Comparison to other countries National triumphs Promotion of the country Patriotism
Service	Impact on everyday life Tips and advice (grievances) Tips and advice (individual risks) Consumer information Consumer advice

table continues p. 6

Infotainment	Personalization Private life Sensationalism Emotions Morbidity
Civic	Citizen reactions Citizen demand Credibility of citizens Education on duties and rights Local impact Social community impact Citizen questions Information on citizen activities Support of citizen movements

Survey of Journalists

SAMPLING

To capture journalistic role conceptions and perceived role enactment, we surveyed journalists who worked for the media outlets included in our study at the time of the data collection (2020), including freelancers. We used quota samples of journalists to match their responses with the average content of their news media organizations, depending on the size of each newsroom. The team in Canada used websites and social media feeds to harvest contact information for journalists, including those whose work was part of the data in the content analysis. There were two versions of the Canadian survey, one English and one translated from English to French. The surveys were largely conducted as web-based questionnaires, with some completed by telephone. Journalists were informed of the purpose of the study and all participants expressly consented to participate and were given information about data use, sharing, and publishing.

A power analysis was conducted to determine the minimum number of survey responses required per outlet by size, based on the global sample of 365 news organizations. Based on this analysis, we included all media outlets that contained at least four cases in the analyses for small newsrooms (fewer than 50 journalists), eight for medium-

sized newsrooms (50 to 200 journalists), and at least 12 cases for large newsrooms (200+ journalists). In the end, the global valid sample consisted of 2,615 survey responses from 252 news outlets. In Canada, we were able to achieve 113 valid responses from the 12 sites of study that were included in the global dataset.³

MEASUREMENTS

The members of this project collaboratively designed 40 statements to measure professional roles at the evaluative level, translating the indicators included in our content analysis into reporting practices that journalists were asked to rate in terms of their importance. These are listed in Table 2.

The goal was not to provide statistical inferences to the wider population of journalists regarding role conception, but to use results as a resource to analyze the gap between ideals and practice. In order to analyze the size and direction of the gaps between journalists' perceptions and role performance, we first calculated the average score of journalists based on their answers to the survey questions representing each role. We then calculated the average score of role performance for each media outlet with regard to each role, considering all of the news stories from each specific outlet, then compared the results.

³ Surveys completed by journalists at the *National Post*, CBC radio and CBC television were not included in the global dataset as those outlets did not have a sufficient sample size to meet the requirements of the JRP study. These excluded surveys may be used in future national-only analysis.

Given that the scale range used to measure role performance (0–1) was different from the scale range for measuring role conception and perceived role enactment (1–5), we recoded the average scores for role conception (ranging from 1 to 5) into ranges of 0 to 1. Finally, we calculated the absolute differences between the two by subtracting the average role performance score of each media outlet from the average role conception score of the journalists.

It should be noted that the absolute values

of the “gap” scores have no substantive interpretation. The focus of the analysis is the relative sizes and directions of these gaps, and the factors that increase or decrease the gaps between journalists’ perceptions, and the average performance of their news organizations. Likewise, the “gap” is defined as the difference between two variables. As such, factors that reduce the gap can do so by increasing the performance of that role or by decreasing the priority assigned to it by journalists (Mellado, 2020).

Table 2. *Survey Items on Role Conception and Perceived Enactment*

Roles	Role conception/perceived role enactment Items (survey)
Interventionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing your opinion on the issues you are reporting, as an expression of approval or disapproval. • Providing your own proposals or ideas regarding potential policies or solutions to problems. • Calling the public to behave in a certain way regarding an event or issue. • Using evaluative terms about events or persons in your news reporting that reveal your own way of seeing things. • Campaigning for a political or social cause. <p>Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76/ .76$</p>
Watchdog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning the truthfulness of what powerful individuals or groups in society such as politicians and political parties, governing bodies, business, the church, and the cultural elite, say or do. • Uncovering illegal /irregular behavior of powerful individuals or groups in society, such as politicians and political parties, governing bodies, business, the church, and the cultural elite. • Including information on judicial or administrative processes regarding powerful individuals or groups in society. • Providing information on abuses of power or wrongdoing based on your own extensive inquiry and research. • Quoting sources that question, criticize or uncover wrongdoings of powerful groups or individuals in society. <p>Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83/ .83$</p>

table continues p. 8

table continued from p. 7

Loyal-Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing positive feelings about being a citizen in your country. • Presenting in a positive light public policies or official activities of governing elites. • Favourably stressing the leadership, management skills or personal characteristics of institutional powers, economic leaders, and powerful elites. • Looking for opportunities to share social, sporting, political, or economic achievements of your country. • Praising the achievement of individuals, groups or organizations in your locality or country. • Defending your country's national values. <p>Cronbach's $\alpha = .83/ .83$</p>
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicating how a particular event or action might influence the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. • Giving the public tips and practical guidance on how to deal with everyday life problems. • Providing consumer information about trends, advances and new products or services. • Appealing to the audience to help other people with specific and personal problems they may be facing. • Helping the audience to recognize the good and bad quality of specific products or services. <p>Cronbach's $\alpha = .71/ .71$</p>
Infotainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Featuring individuals in the news, by providing information on their intellectual, physical, or social characteristics. • Including explicit references to emotions of people. • Including information on the private lives of people being covered in the news. • Including details to heighten the impact of stories about violence, crime, extreme poverty, sex, etc. • Using humor, exaggeration, sarcasm, or other storytelling devices to provide information in an entertaining way. <p>Cronbach's $\alpha = .71/ .74$</p>
Civic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informing people on their economic, social and/or political duties and rights. • Including background information and in-depth context for citizens, regarding specific events in the news. • Mentioning the impact of decisions on the periphery of your country beyond the capital city and other main cities. • Including different perspectives in the news in order to better inform citizens. • Depicting the impact of authorities' decisions on specific socially defined communities such as social classes, sexualities, races or ethnicities. • Informing the public about citizens' activities. • Explicitly supporting citizen movements and demands. <p>Cronbach's $\alpha = .74/ .76$</p>

*The Cronbach Alpha coefficients were calculated for the full survey dataset of the 37 countries.

FINDINGS

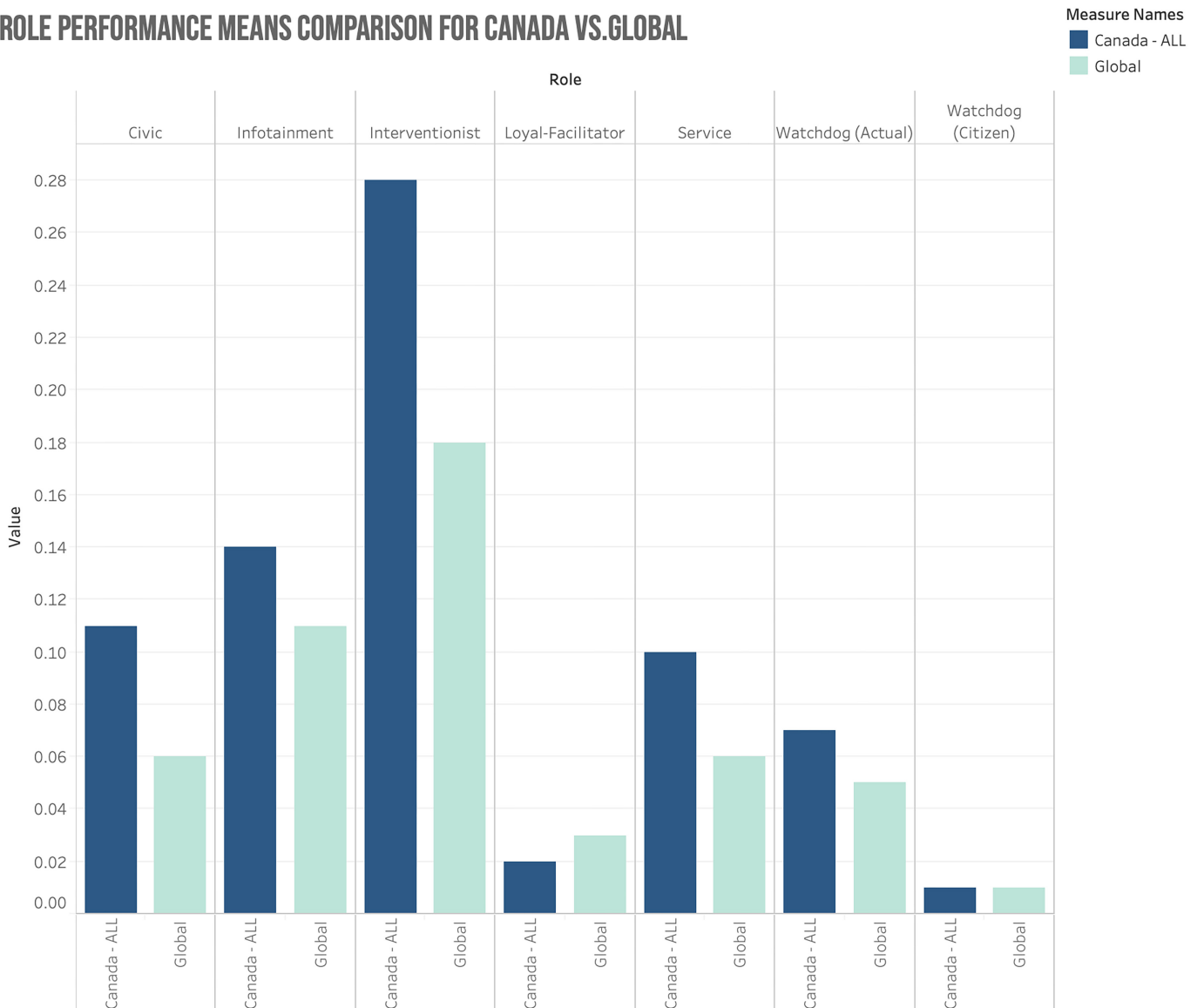
Findings from the JRP study in Canada show the unique ways in which role performance is exhibited in Canadian journalism. Below, we will explore the specific indicators that helped shape Canada’s ranking in each of the journalistic roles and share where the biggest gaps are found between the roles journalists surveyed believe to

be important and the content that was actually produced. For the overall scores and individual indicators, means scores are reported.

For the tables exploring individual indicators, we also provide the standard error in brackets. All results and standard error calculations referenced in this article are rounded to two decimal points.

Figure 1

ROLE PERFORMANCE MEANS COMPARISON FOR CANADA VS.GLOBAL



Civic

“The civic role focuses on the connection between journalism, the citizenry and public life...helping them to make sense of their own communities, and on how they can be affected by different political decisions” (JRP Codebook).

Of the 37 countries participating in the JRP study, Canada’s mean score for the civic role was second-highest (see Figure 1 and Table 3). There were interesting aspects to how this role presented itself across platforms and which indicators drove Canada’s high ranking. For example, for one indicator, ‘citizen reactions,’ which could either be a direct quote from a citizen or reference to a citizen’s opinion/actions, the Canadian mean of 0.18 was close to double that of the global mean of 0.10; however, this is one area where there were notable differences between French and English performance, with the mean for English content containing citizen reactions notably higher than that of French (see Table 5). The mean for references to political impact on a social community in Canada (for example, race or gender) was more than double compared to the global average (see Table 3), and double for local

community impact (particular to a geographic area), as was information on citizen activities. Local impact is another area where English media had a much higher mean of 0.27 compared to the French mean of 0.16.

In terms of platform differences, citizen voices were least prevalent in print (see Table 4), with TV having more than double the mean and radio almost double. There was also a higher mean in broadcast for content that provided information on citizen activities, such as protests (see Table 4). TV had the highest mean across the majority of indicators for the civic role, including local impact, at 0.32, with online not far behind, and both of these platforms notably outperformed both print and radio in this category. Online news also had a notably higher mean for news that educates citizens on their duties and rights compared to all other platforms.

When it comes to the relevance Canadian journalists place on the civic role, however, there is a sizable gap between journalists’ conception of its importance, with a mean of 0.70 (see Figure 3 and Table 24 in appendices), and perception of how often this role is enacted at the organizational level. It is the second-biggest gap, next to ‘watchdog,’ when comparing results for all roles.

Table 3. *Civic Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Global vs. Canada*

Indicator	Global Mean	Canadian Mean
Citizen reactions	.10 (<.01)	.18 (.01)
Citizen demand	.05 (<.01)	.08 (<.01)
Credibility of citizens	.03 (.00)	.07 (<.01)
Local impact	.12 (<.01)	.24 (.01)
Social community impact	.09 (<.01)	.22 (.01)
Educating on duties and rights	.04 (.00)	.04 (<.01)
Citizen questions	.01 (.00)	.03 (<.01)
Information on citizen activities	.05 (<.01)	.10 (.01)
Support of citizen movements	.01 (.00)	.02(<.01)

Table 4. *Civic Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores and Standard Deviations: Canada Platform*

Indicator	Newspaper	TV	Radio	Online
Citizen reactions	.11 (.01)	.23 (.01)	.21 (.01)	.15 (.01)
Citizen demand	.07 (.01)	.08 (.01)	.07 (.01)	.08 (.01)
Credibility of citizens	.03 (.01)	.07 (.01)	.10 (.01)	.07 (.01)
Local impact	.18 (.01)	.32 (.02)	.18 (.01)	.27 (.02)
Social community impact	.19 (.01)	.23 (.01)	.19 (.01)	.26 (.01)
Educating on duties and rights	.02 (.01)	.03 (.01)	.01 (<.01)	.08 (.01)
Citizen questions	.03 (.01)	.03 (.01)	.02 (<.01)	.03 (.01)
Information on citizen activities	.06 (.01)	.14 (.01)	.12 (.01)	.09 (.01)
Support of citizen movements	.01 (<.01)	.04 (.01)	.01 (<.01)	.03 (.01)

Table 5. *Civic Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: French vs. English*

Indicator	Canada FR	Canada EN
Citizen reactions	.13 (.01)	.19 (.01)
Citizen demand	.05 (.01)	.09 (.01)
Credibility of citizens	.02 (<.01)	.09 (.01)
Local impact	.16 (.01)	.27 (.01)
Social community impact	.17 (.01)	.23 (.01)
Educating on duties and rights	.04 (.01)	.04 (<.01)
Citizen questions	.02 (<.01)	.03 (<.01)
Information on citizen activities	.10 (.01)	.10 (.01)
Support of citizen movements	.01 (<.01)	.03 (<.01)

Infotainment

“The infotainment role of journalism uses different stylistics, narrative and/or visual discourses in order to entertain and thrill the public. Here, journalism borrows from the conventions of entertainment genres (e.g., action movies, TV dramas, suspense novels) by using story-telling devices and establishing characters and setting” (JRP Codebook).

Canada ranked eighth of 37 countries for the prevalence of infotainment in reporting (see Table 6). Canada was above the mean for all but one infotainment indicator, but there was particular prevalence of the use of emotions, which could be expressed by a source or the journalist, with a mean of 0.24 compared to the 0.14 global mean.

However, this high mean for use of emotions was driven much more by English reporting than French (see Table 8). The same was seen in the use of personalization, or “specific information regarding one or more persons and their different intellectual, physical, mental or social characteristics” (see Tables 6 and 8). Stories that contained information about people’s private lives that they would “normally prefer to maintain in their personal sphere,” for example, relationships or identifying the location where a public figure was vacationing, were also higher compared to the global mean, but, in this instance, it was French media in Canada with a higher mean (see Table 8).

Canada’s mean for sensationalism, 0.04, was far below the global mean of 0.13. Sensationalism is described in the codebook as “the use of style elements or descriptions in the story that highlight or emphasize the unusual, incredible

and spectacular”—this indicator is meant to code content that demonstrates “exaggeration, the use of dramatic superlative adjectives and storytelling devices that heighten suspense.” Although the French mean for sensationalism was notably higher than the English mean in Canada (see Table 8), it was still roughly half that of the global mean.

An analysis of platforms provides further insight (see Table 7). The mean for use of emotions was highest in TV and online at 0.29; however, it was also high in print with a mean of 0.22. TV also received the highest mean for sensationalism and morbidity, although the mean for these indicators

was relatively low overall and still below the global mean.

In terms of the gap between the importance journalists place on this role conceptually and its actual performance, with a mean of 0.25, it is, relative to the gap seen with other roles, somewhat small, although notably larger for perception of how often this role was performed at the organizational level, with a mean of 0.32. These positive gaps suggest journalists surveyed placed more importance on this role compared to how often it was performed, and perceived it was being performed more than it actually was.

Table 6. *Infotainment Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Global vs. Canada*

Indicator	Global Mean	Canadian Mean
Personalization	.16 (<.01)	.24 (.01)
Private Life	.07 (<.01)	.11 (.01)
Sensationalism	.12 (<.01)	.04 (<.01)
Emotions	.14 (<.01)	.24 (.01)
Morbidity	.04 (.00)	.05 (<.01)

Table 7. *Infotainment Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Platform Comparison*

Indicator	Newspaper	TV	Radio	Online
Personalization	.21 (.01)	.25 (.01)	.22 (.01)	.27 (.02)
Private Life	.09 (.01)	.09 (.01)	.10 (.01)	.16 (.01)
Sensationalism	.02 (.01)	.06 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.04 (.01)
Emotions	.22 (.01)	.29 (.02)	.18 (.01)	.29 (.02)
Morbidity	.02 (<.01)	.09 (.01)	.05 (.01)	.04 (.01)

Table 8. *Infotainment Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: French vs. English*

Indicator	Canada FR	Canada EN
Personalization	.16 (.01)	.27 (.01)
Private Life	.14 (.01)	.10 (.01)
Sensationalism	.07 (.01)	.03 (<.01)
Emotions	.14 (.01)	.29 (.01)
Morbidity	.02 (.01)	.06 (.01)

Interventionist

“The interventionist role refers to a kind of journalism where the journalist has an explicit voice in the story, and sometimes acts as an advocate for individuals or groups in society. In this sense, a greater level of participation by the journalist implies higher levels of interventionism, and vice versa” (JRP Codebook).

Canada ranked third globally in the interventionist role. There were two indicators that drove this high interventionism ranking in Canadian reporting: interpretation, and the use of qualifying adjectives. The use of qualifying adjectives⁴ was a variable in which there was a sizable difference between the global mean of 0.33 and the Canadian mean of 0.59, with a notably higher mean for French stories (0.67 with 0.56 for English, see Table 11). Canada also scored notably higher in interpretation measured when a journalist explains causes, meanings and

possible consequences of certain facts and/or actions (see Table 9). Although Canada’s mean score for the use of first person was close to the global mean, it was much higher in English (0.13) compared to French media (.05).

TV, radio, and online stories were the most likely to contain qualifying adjectives, with sizable differences in the highest mean for television at 0.70 and the lowest for print at 0.39 (see Table 10). The difference between means for interpretation between the four platforms is not as stark (see Table 10).

The survey data show that, compared to the performance of all other roles in Canada, the interventionist role has the smallest gap between conception and performance, with a mean of 0.07, and perceived enactment and performance, with a mean of 0.10 (see Figure 3 and Table 24), signifying that there was near-alignment with journalists’ conception of the importance of this role, their perception of how often it was enacted, and its actual performance.

⁴ For coding purposes, the use of qualifying adjectives was only measured if the descriptor came directly from the journalist and was in direct relation to the subject of the story, for example, an “epic snowman.”

Table 9. *Interventionist Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Global vs. Canada*

Indicator	Global Mean	Canadian Mean
Journalist’s point of view	.17 (<.01)	.18 (.01)
Interpretation	.29 (<.01)	.48 (.01)
Call to action	.04 (<.01)	.03 (<.01)
Qualifying adjectives	.33 (<.01)	.59 (.01)
First person	.08 (<.01)	.11 (.01)

Table 10. *Interventionist Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Platform Comparison*

Indicator	Newspaper	TV	Radio	Online
Journalist’s point of view	.16 (.01)	.19 (.01)	.13 (.01)	.26 (.01)
Interpretation	.43 (.02)	.51 (.02)	.55 (.02)	.42 (.02)
Call to action	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.00 (<.01)	.07 (.01)
Qualifying adjectives	.39 (.02)	.70 (.02)	.61 (.02)	.67 (.02)
First person	.11 (.01)	.13 (.01)	.08 (.01)	.12 (.01)

Table 11. *Interventionist Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: French vs. English*

Indicator	Canada - FR	Canada - EN
Journalist's point of view	.19 (.01)	.18 (.01)
Interpretation	.48 (.02)	.48 (.01)
Call to action	.02 (<.01)	.04 (<.01)
Qualifying adjectives	.67 (.01)	.56 (.01)
First person	.05 (.01)	.13 (.01)

Loyal-Facilitator

“This type of journalism can be materialized in two facets. First, journalists cooperate with those in power, and accept the information they provide as credible....In its second variation, journalists support their nation-state, portraying a positive image of their country” (JRP Codebook).

Canada ranked 23rd globally for loyal-facilitator role performance, a generally less prominent role (as seen in Figures 1 and 2) that tends to be higher in countries with lower political, legal, and economic freedom (Stępińska et al., 2020). Canada's mean scores are consistently lower than the global mean (see Table 12) for all indicators of this role, except

“comparison with other countries” (equal with a mean of 0.01 for Canada and globally). However, Canadian online sources have higher mean scores than other platforms for some indicators of the loyal-facilitator role (see Table 13).

Our JRP data show a moderate gap between performance of the loyal-facilitator role measured through content analysis and journalists' assessments of this role as an important part of their work. However, surprisingly, it is a positive gap, meaning journalists surveyed placed more importance on the loyal-facilitator role than on its frequency of performance, with a gap mean of 0.34, and an even larger gap for perception of how often it is performed at the organizational level, with a mean of 0.44.

Table 12. *Loyal-Facilitator Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Global vs. Canada*

Indicator	Global Mean	Canadian Mean
Defense/support activities	.04 (<.01)	.02 (<.01)
Defense/support policies	.02 (.00)	.01 (<.01)
Positive image of the elite	.07 (<.01)	.05 (<.01)
Progress/success	.03 (.00)	.02 (<.01)
Comparison to other countries	.01 (.00)	.01 (<.01)
Nationals' triumphs	.02 (.00)	.01 (<.01)
Promotion of the country	.03 (.00)	.01 (<.01)
Patriotism	.01 (.00)	.00 (<.01)

Table 13. *Loyal-Facilitator Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Platform Comparison*

Indicator	Newspaper	TV	Radio	Online
Defense/support activities	.02 (<.01)	.02 (<.01)	.00 (.00)	.06 (.01)
Defense/support policies	.01 (<.01)	.01 (<.01)	.00 (.00)	.01 (<.01)
Positive image of the elite	.06 (.01)	.03 (.01)	.03 (.01)	.10 (.01)
Progress/success	.00 (<.01)	.02 (<.01)	.00 (.00)	.06 (.01)
Comparison to other countries	.01 (<.01)	.01 (<.01)	.01 (<.01)	.02 (.01)
Nationals' triumphs	.01 (<.01)	.01 (<.01)	.00 (<.01)	.01 (<.01)
Promotion of the country	.00 (<.01)	.01 (<.01)	.00 (<.01)	.02 (.01)
Patriotism	.00 (<.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.01 (<.01)

Service

“Journalism that prioritizes this role provides help, tips, guidance and information about the management of day-to-day life and individual problems (news you can use)” (JRP Codebook).

Canada placed fifth in world rankings for the service role. From an international perspective, Canada was an outlier in most of the top countries, which included the United Arab Emirates, Poland, Egypt, and Qatar. Canada’s mean of 0.21 was notably higher than the global mean of 0.12 for the individual indicator “impact on everyday life,” something with more prevalence in French than English content (see Table 16). There was also significant prevalence of content with consumer information (see Table 14), again with French content having a higher mean, as was also seen with tips and advice with regards to individual risks (see Tables 14 and 16).

There were also significant differences in

how this role appeared in content on particular platforms (see Table 15). The mean for the indicator ‘impact on everyday life’ was highest in online content at 0.28 and television reporting at 0.25, but notably lower in radio and print. Tips and advice for both grievances and individual risks were much higher online compared to all other platforms, and the mean for the ‘consumer information’ indicator (the latest trends or advances in products or services) was more than three times higher for print and online (see Table 15) than TV and radio, while consumer advice (helping the audience distinguish between products/services of different qualities) was non-existent in the television stories coded in our sample and minimal in radio.

There was a moderate gap in the importance journalists placed on the service role at the conception level compared to performance, with a mean of 0.44, and a larger gap in their perception of how it was enacted at the organizational level, with a mean of 0.51.

Table 14. *Service Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Global vs. Canada*

Indicator	Global Mean	Canadian Mean
Impact on everyday life	.12 (<.01)	.21 (.01)
Tips and advice 1 (grievances)	.03 (.00)	.04 (<.01)
Tips and advice 2 (individual risks)	.04 (<.01)	.07 (<.01)
Consumer information	.09 (<.01)	.13 (.01)
Consumer advice	.03 (.00)	.05 (<.01)

Table 15. *Service Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Platform Comparison*

Indicator	Newspaper	TV	Radio	Online
Impact on everyday life	.14 (.01)	.25 (.01)	.17 (.01)	.28 (.02)
Tips and advice 1 (grievances)	.01 (<.01)	.03 (.01)	.01 (<.01)	.12 (.01)
Tips and advice 2 (individual risks)	.06 (.01)	.05 (.01)	.04 (.01)	.11 (.01)
Consumer information	.21 (.01)	.06 (.01)	.04 (.01)	.22 (.01)
Consumer advice	.08 (.01)	.00 (<.01)	.02 (.01)	.08 (.01)

Table 16. *Service Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: French vs. English*

Indicator	Canada FR	Canada EN
Impact on everyday life	.24 (.01)	.19 (.01)
Tips and advice 1 (grievances)	.03 (.01)	.05 (<.01)
Tips and advice 2 (individual risks)	.08 (.01)	.06 (.01)
Consumer information	.16 (.01)	.12 (.01)
Consumer advice	.07 (.01)	.04 (<.01)

Watchdog

“The watchdog role seeks to protect the public interest and to hold various elites in power accountable, serving as a ‘fourth estate’” (JRP Code book).

The watchdog role, for international comparison, was divided into two categories: how the journalists held elites accountable, ‘watchdog actual;’ and how journalists also held ordinary citizens up to public scrutiny, ‘watchdog citizen’ (Mellado et al., forthcoming). Canada ranked 10th globally in the actual watchdog role and 21st globally in the citizen watchdog role. These results not only indicate a global standing, they also demonstrate Canadian journalists were more likely to focus on questioning various elites, such as elected officials and CEOs of major corporations, rather than ordinary citizens, such as someone charged with a crime. For Canadian analysis, individual indicators of stories demonstrating the watchdog role were grouped together (as opposed to analysis of the actual and citizen roles separately) due to the small sample size on a national level. The starkest difference between Canada and the rest of the world was with regards to the use of ‘criticism by others’ in journalistic output, where Canada had a mean of 0.78 and the global mean was 0.39. However, this high ranking was driven

by English content, with a mean of 0.90 compared to the French mean of 0.49.

The use of information on judicial and/or administrative processes, such as court proceedings, was one of the areas where Canada sat below the global mean (see Table 17); however, again, there was a notable difference in the English mean of 0.40 and the French mean of 0.17. Also of note, investigative reporting did not play a large role either nationally or globally (see Table 17).

Due to the small sample size of watchdog stories resulting in an increased standard of error, findings based on platform have to be considered with caution. That being said, among the four platforms, radio was most likely to include criticism by others and use information on judicial/administrative processes in stories (see Table 18). However, radio had the lowest mean for journalists acting as the critic and reporting on external investigations.

The most significant finding with regards to the watchdog role is likely that of how important it is seen as a journalistic ideal compared to how often it is practiced. The overall gap between the conception of this role’s importance and its actual performance, with a mean of 0.84, is the largest of any role, and the gap for perception of how often this role is performed at the organizational level is only slightly smaller (see Figure 3).

Table 17. *Watchdog Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Global vs. Canada*

Indicator	Global Mean	Canadian Mean
Information on judicial/administrative processes	.43 (<.01)	.34 (.02)
Doubting by the journalist	.11 (<.01)	.03 (.01)
Doubting by others	.19 (<.01)	.12 (.01)
Criticism by journalist	.10 (<.01)	.07 (.01)
Criticism by others	.40 (<.01)	.78 (.03)
Uncovering by journalist	.04 (<.01)	.02 (.01)
Uncovering by others	.13 (<.01)	.11 (.01)
Reporting on external investigation	.07 (<.01)	.09 (.01)
Investigative reporting	.01 (.00)	.01 (<.01)

Table 18. *Watchdog Role Individual Indicators Mean Scores: Platform Comparison*

Indicator	Newspaper	TV	Radio	Online
Information on judicial/administrative processes	.30 (.04)	.29 (.04)	.47 (.05)	.28 (.04)
Doubting by the journalist	.03 (.01)	.01 (<.01)	.04 (.01)	.04 (.01)
Doubting by others	.14 (.02)	.06 (.02)	.12 (.02)	.18 (.03)
Criticism by journalist	.07 (.02)	.09 (.02)	.02 (<.01)	.10 (.02)
Criticism by others	.80 (.06)	.73 (.06)	.90 (.06)	.70 (.06)
Uncovering by journalist	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.03 (.01)
Uncovering by others	.13 (.02)	.05 (.01)	.07 (.01)	.19 (.03)
Reporting on external investigation	.10 (.01)	.10 (.01)	.03 (.01)	.12 (.01)
Investigative reporting	.02 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.00 (00)	.02 (.01)

Table 19. *Watchdog Role Individual Indicators Means Scores: French vs. English*

Indicator	Canada - FR	Canada - EN
Information on judicial/administrative processes	.17 (.03)	.40 (.03)
Doubting by the journalist	.02 (.01)	.03 (.01)
Doubting by others	.12 (.02)	.12 (.01)
Criticism by journalist	.03 (.01)	.08 (.01)
Criticism by others	.49 (.04)	.90 (.04)
Uncovering by journalist	.01 (<.01)	.02 (.01)
Uncovering by others	.06 (.02)	.13 (.01)
Reporting on external investigation	.05 (.01)	.10 (.01)
Investigative reporting	.01 (<.01)	.02 (<.01)

DISCUSSION

Interviews with Canadian journalists provided critical context to journalistic role performance in Canada. There were distinct commonalities in issues noted by the journalists we spoke with, including frequent references to drastic cuts in the numbers of journalists working in newsrooms on all platforms, as outlined by one reporter:

When I started at [redacted] we had a full editorial staff of 39 people: reporters, editors, assignment editors. Today we have a staff of five reporters. We have two photographers that work for all three [redacted] regional dailies and we have one editor responsible. He's the managing

editor for all three papers and [there are] two copy editors for three papers. That's it. That is it. And we cover a region of half a million people. (Reporter 2, personal communication, June 17, 2020)

There was also frequent reference made to increased use of freelancers, and the innumerable tasks required on a daily basis for journalists who have chosen to stay in the profession. As noted by another reporter, "When you read the job descriptions for what is expected it's like you're asking for a superhero" (Reporter 5, personal communication, May 21, 2021). Pressure to manage social media was also top of mind, with one reporter describing Twitter as "a horrible place...where women are bullied and battered" (Reporter 3, personal communication, October 23,

2020). The journalists we spoke to were also all working in the midst of a pandemic, in conditions one editor described as “not sustainable” (Editor 2, personal communication, March 20, 2020). Despite these difficulties, however, journalists also spoke with passion and hope about their work, new business models, more inclusive practice, and innovative storytelling. Discussion of findings will be organized around the research questions.

RQ1: How does Canada’s journalistic role performance compare to other countries?

As detailed in the findings, there were distinctive differences in Canadian role performance. With the interventionist role, Canada’s high ranking globally was primarily driven by use of interpretation and qualifying adjectives. But what does this look like in a news story? In one instance, an approximately four-metre-high snowman was described as an “epic snowman.” In another, describing a city council’s budget shortfall, a journalist wrote in the lead sentence of a story, “Facing a pandemic budget apocalypse.” The arguably overused term “breaking news” was also coded as a qualifying adjective. Sometimes, a qualifying adjective might simply be considered a good descriptor, as in the case of the epic snowman. However, the use of “apocalypse” could be interpreted as hyperbolic, while the use of “breaking news” is more about efforts to position an organization in the news market than an individual journalist’s presence or voice in a story. As such, what the use of qualifying adjectives actually infers, and how best to measure the use of qualifying adjectives as an act of interventionism, is worth further exploration.

Our content analysis revealed interventionism in Canada is less about a journalist’s viewpoint, and more about interpreting events based on available evidence—or, in other words, helping to explain cause and effect. However, interviews with journalists also revealed that there is still negotiation of journalistic doxa when it comes to notions of interpretation and objectivity, as seen in differing views expressed by reporters. For example, one said, “I still think you should be impartial, just tell the story. Now columnists have their opinions and that’s a different thing. But I do think the news story should stay impartial” (Reporter 1, personal communication, October 15,

2020), while another stated, “I don’t agree with the objectivity part and giving equal space to all parties in a story. That’s fallen by the wayside, I would say, and that’s good” (Reporter 5, personal communication, May 21, 2021).

The civic role was another area where Canada stood out. From a global perspective, “journalistic cultures that rank the highest in the performance of this role are full democracies” (Mellado et al, forthcoming). In Canadian reporting, speaking with citizens as sources and focusing on how political decisions might impact the audience at the community level appear to be more common than in other media systems. The former Canadian journalists on the research team believed the empirical evidence supported their own newsroom practice, where finding people to share experiences or express their concerns was considered an essential part of many stories.

RQ2: Is journalistic role performance different in pandemic-related reporting?

As Canada was not part of the first wave of JRP, specific changes with regards to reporting outside of the pandemic are difficult to determine; however, previous studies, global findings, interviews with journalists, and an analysis of specific variables provide insight. For COVID coverage specifically, we expected to find higher levels of the loyal-facilitator role, based on the unprecedented circumstances of the health crisis and comments from journalists, such as this television reporter:

If a public health authority person says, listen, you have to avoid big crowds or cohorts...that’s good enough for me, and I’m going to push that message and reinforce it, you know, if I’m asked ... I don’t feel pressured to do that. I just think it’s the responsible thing to do as a human being. (Reporter 4, personal communication, September 28, 2020)

While the loyal-facilitator role mean was slightly higher in Canadian COVID stories (0.018) compared to non-COVID stories (0.016), (Hallin et al., forthcoming), it is important to situate that this increase was within a very low performance of this role compared to all others (as seen in Figure

2). However, this increased mean for content exhibiting the loyal-facilitator role was not the case for the overall global sample, and was only seen in nine other countries in pandemic reporting (Hallin et al., forthcoming). The Canadian media's apparently more deferential coverage in some pandemic reporting also dovetails with the growing critique of journalism, which increased in velocity after our data collection and was particularly visible during the convoy protests of early 2022. Further, survey data collected during this period indicate a decline in trust in news media, as well as a more negative perception of media independence from political and business pressures (Brin & Charlton, 2022). However, recent reports suggest the issue may be more about trust in institutions, in general (Anderson & Coletto, 2022). This lack of trust in the face of the very low level of loyal-facilitator role performance raises a question for future research: Do some roles require less performance than others to be noticed by the audience, or at least a particular segment of the audience?

The service role is another where findings suggest the time period of this study could have impacted levels of certain indicators due to, for example, frequent stories about topics such as how to wear a mask or the best types of hand sanitizer. However, as the rest of the world was also experiencing a pandemic during data collection, Canada's high ranking would suggest Canadian journalism is more apt to take a "news you can use" approach in reporting. As noted by one editor,

We bring [that] information, regardless of what the problem is, in a way that really helps people make smart decisions about their lives, their jobs. We really want to apply what we produce down to "How does this affect me and why should I care?" (Editor 1, personal communication, March 20, 2020)

From a global perspective, particularly Canada's high ranking alongside countries classified to be in authoritarian regimes, there is evidence that "the higher levels of service role in authoritarian societies could relate to the more educational approach of the media in authoritarian contexts, where 'being a guide' and telling people what to

do in every situation is part of the journalistic culture" (Mellado et al., forthcoming). The need to provide guidance may have been something more commonplace in pandemic reporting in Canada, where reporting on COVID was done more frequently. In Canada, stories that mentioned COVID made up a much larger percentage of overall content than in other countries (52.3% compared to 35% for global overall, which drops to 34.5% when you take out the Canadian stories). However, it could also be related to consumerism, and there is room for exploration to determine if aspects of the service role may be getting muddled with concerns over trust previously noted. If "only a small minority believe most news organizations put what's best for society ahead of their own commercial interest" (Kleis Nielsen, 2022, p. 6), could a variety of advertorial-style content that looks like news also be impacting audience trust? This is another area for future research.

One factor of pandemic coverage that is difficult to determine is the impact on the use of expert sources. In Canadian content in our sample, expert sources (defined as "specialists in their specific area" in the JRP codebook, such as a scientist or financial planner) were used in 30% of all stories, basically double the percentage of the global average of 15.4% (which also included Canadian data); however, in Canadian health stories this number rises to 40%, compared to 22% globally. In Canada, this could speak to more reliance on experts for reporters covering COVID stories who were not familiar with this type of reporting, and concern to get information correct during an unprecedented health crisis. However, it could also just be the norm for Canadian journalists to include contextualization from experts in a story, again, something that was supported by researchers working on this project who had previously worked in newsrooms. Analyzing journalistic content published outside of a pandemic period would provide further insight.

RQ3: Are there differences in role performance between French and English media in Canada?

From April through June 2020 Canada was experiencing the first wave of COVID-19, which was especially deadly in Quebec, in particular for seniors in long-term care homes. Because of

this and the fact that French-language media are more strongly focused on provincial than federal institutions, in addition to the hypothesis of a more politicized journalistic culture, we expected to find at least some differences in role performance, conception, enactment or in gaps between these different measures. This was largely not the case.

Generally speaking, there were no major differences in the overall performance between French and English journalists; however, there were some distinct differences, particularly at the level of individual indicators for certain roles. For example, with regards to the civic role, English media had a sizably higher mean of 0.27 compared to 0.16 for French media for “local impact.” This is somewhat surprising, given that one might expect Quebec outlets to perform more regional reporting, and even considering one of the English newspapers, the *Toronto Star*, has extensive national coverage but is situated locally.

Another notable difference is the use of “criticism by others” in the watchdog role. French media was close to the global mean whereas English was almost double. For the interventionist role, French media used more qualifying adjectives, English more frequently used first person, while there was no difference in use of interpretation. In infotainment, emotions were more present in English media, sensationalism more present in French, although still at low levels. How French and English media differ at a more qualitative level with analysis of specific stories demonstrating each of these roles, and multilayered analysis of what indicators drive role performance in particular types of stories, would help determine why these differences might occur.

Looking at the gap between perceived conception/enactment and performance for the interventionist role, there is a small negative gap in the French sample between interventionist role performance (content) and enactment (perceived organizational practice) and especially between role performance and conception (journalists’ personal values). In the English sample the gap is positive, but also small. French journalists surveyed seem to place less importance on this role in their organizational practice and personal values, although conception, perception, and enactment are nearly aligned in this role for both French and English media.

RQ4: Are there differences in role performance in Canada dependent on media type?

Findings show that there are significant differences in role performance based on media type (see Figure 4), but few are consistent across all sites from a specific platform, or unique to one platform. Performance of the watchdog role was fairly consistent across all platforms, but radio had a notably higher mean for two indicators in this role, while the outlet with the highest mean, overall, was CBC.ca (see Table 21), with newspaper the *Globe and Mail* not far behind. Results for the service role were quite different across platforms, with particularly high rankings in online content that could demonstrate media logic having a more significant impact on this role, in particular, due to the formatting of certain types of stories, for example, “best of” online listicles. However, even here there are anomalies. The *Globe and Mail*, a newspaper, has a notably higher mean (0.14, see Table 22) than all other newspapers, television, and radio outlets. It sits third in the top four outlets in this category along with our online sites of study. Perhaps the *Globe’s* reliance on its in-house analytics tool, Sophi (Kalim, 2020), results in more alignment in editorial decision-making between platforms, as seen in other news organizations (Blanchett, 2021a).

Infotainment is another role with distinct, yet not consistent, performance across platforms. This is a role that is often equated with typical media logic, generating lower-calibre news content because the goal is more about promoting clicks/boosting ratings and finding advertisers than informing the public about information that is critical to their understanding of important events. Bourdieu identified television as particularly susceptible to this type of reporting, describing it as “a threat to political life and to democracy itself” (1998, p. 10). Although television may have been highest in the majority of categories for infotainment, as might be predicted given acknowledged format precedents that might shape this outcome, the range of mean was often quite close, with the exception of morbidity. The highest ranked outlet for infotainment overall was actually an online site, HuffPost Canada, well above the Canadian mean (see Table 23—noting video in online stories was also coded and HuffPost used

significant quantities of video). CTV television news was close to HuffPost, but television outlet TVA had the second-lowest performance of infotainment, notably lower than newspapers the *National Post* and the *Toronto Star*. Overall, infotainment is practiced across all platforms in Canada, and, according to journalists interviewed, is used with intent. An editor (who had worked on multiple platforms) described the overarching goal of his news organization to hold power to account, but also said there is “no shame” in doing viral stories or covering the “water skiing squirrel,” as long as you are also doing stories of import (Editor 4, personal communication, February 20, 2020). Another editor said, “Let’s make sure we are the first ones there with information that is useful to them and contextual and interesting and you know, fun, when appropriate, serious when not” (Editor 2, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

One of the infotainment indicators, sensationalism, overall, is very low in the content produced for the wide range of Canadian news outlets. Of note, however, is that our sites of study include the biggest and most well-recognized Canadian media; content analysis did not include often polarizing opinion pieces, and stories published/broadcast on our sites of study that were generated from other outlets/agencies were not coded, but could still impact the overall performance and audience perception of a particular news outlet. Examining role performance on a wider scale could prove a productive area of future research.

The civic role is another area where there were differences in performance across platforms. For example, radio and television had higher means for coverage of citizen activities. As recognized in media logic literature identified previously, this might be expected given broadcast formats that commonly include citizen voices and coverage of demonstrations and events that meet visual/auditory demands for these types of stories. A higher mean for online compared to print in this category could be explained by the presence of video in some stories. As media logic is highly related to processes geared to revenue generation, further research might examine how media logic presents in converged environments, and what factors, for example, type of ownership, might

influence production practices.

RQ5: What roles do Canadian journalists think are most important?

Canadian journalists surveyed conceived the watchdog role to be most important, and believed it was being performed at a much higher level than seen in content analysis. It was the largest gap between ideals and practice. However, interviews with journalists often highlighted how lack of resources and time could get in the way of this primary function of journalism. The gap might have less to do with intent than restraints. Talking about holding power to account, one reporter said,

I don’t expect all journalists to be able to live up to their ideals. I don’t think we have an industry structured in a way that supports them in that. So I don’t see people who have time to do that as morally superior to people who don’t have time to do that. (Reporter 6, personal communication, November 17, 2021)

Civic performance had the second-highest gap. In other words, although journalists surveyed acknowledge that informing citizens of the impact of political decisions and hearing from citizens is important journalistic work, that level of importance is not reflected in the content produced by the organizations being studied, even though Canada ranked second overall for civic performance globally.

The smaller gap between conceived importance of infotainment, its enactment, and performance, suggests that although Canadian journalists may not place high importance on this role, they are somewhat accepting and aware of how infotainment is used in Canadian journalism. This might also reflect better understanding that just because a story is “entertaining” it can still be “informing,” or the presence of positive media logic (Blanchett, 2021b) within the Canadian media system. Future research could further distinguish how Canadian journalists are working to find a balance with creating content that engages the audience in a way that doesn’t cross the line to sensationalism, how infotainment can coexist with

other journalistic roles at a given organization and even within a specific story, and what aspects of newsroom culture most influence the prevalence of infotainment indicators.

The gap between conception of the importance of the service role and its perceived enactment and actual performance is also quite interesting in terms of journalistic doxa—not because it’s relatively large compared to other roles, but because it is similar in size to that of the loyal-facilitator gap. It might be unexpected that similar importance would be placed on service/stories that impact everyday life as there would be on supporting the narratives of those in power for Canadian journalists. However, this may be another impact of pandemic reporting.

CONCLUSION

Whether they be reporting for a public broadcaster, privately-owned newspaper, or digital-native, in French or in English, Canadian journalists, our study found, perform a variety of journalistic roles depending on the story, or even within one story. The homogeneity lies in the heterogeneity of practice, challenging notions that certain roles are distinct to a specific medium, and supporting findings related to role performance in the first wave of the JRP study (Mellado, 2020). As seen in many other countries, there is a significant gap between the importance placed on the watchdog role and how often it is performed, and minimal evidence of journalists acting as loyal facilitators. However, there are unique aspects to Canadian reporting when compared to other countries.

Speaking with citizens as sources, outlining how political decisions might impact the audience at the community level, and providing service-

Notes:

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oriented journalism are more common in Canada. Use of emotion is high, but sensationalism is not. A family member speaking about loss, or anger being expressed over political issues, could be a representation of reality/circumstances, versus a trope to heighten entertainment value. Canadian journalists frequently use interpretation, but they also get context from experts more often than the international outlets examined in this study.

This is not to suggest that Canadian journalism is without flaws. There were headlines and stories that did not seem to reflect journalistic doxa and that led to questions about the ethics of revenue mechanisms, such as content that bordered on advertorial but was not marked as such.

It is also important to acknowledge that our sample does not capture all of the nuances of journalistic practice in Canada. As noted previously, overall, the most mainstream, conventional Canadian organizations are being studied and, due to the focus on national content, only public broadcasters are represented in our radio sample.

Even given these limitations, and although there is still much more data to unpack, a primary conclusion from this first analysis of JRP data is that audience-oriented roles are prevalent in Canadian journalism. Journalists are working to engage the audience on all platforms, using both citizen voices and expert sources. While convergence is leading to similar practice across media and languages, there remain distinct differences. In terms of long-standing debates regarding objectivity and whether a journalist has a place within a story, sometimes an epic snowman is just an epic snowman—use of descriptive language and interpretation does not, necessarily, equate to pushing an agenda. Whether the audience comes to the same conclusion, though, is a more complex issue. 

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APPENDICES

Figure 2

SURVEY GAP MEANS COMPARISON - CANADA VS. ENGLISH VS. FRENCH

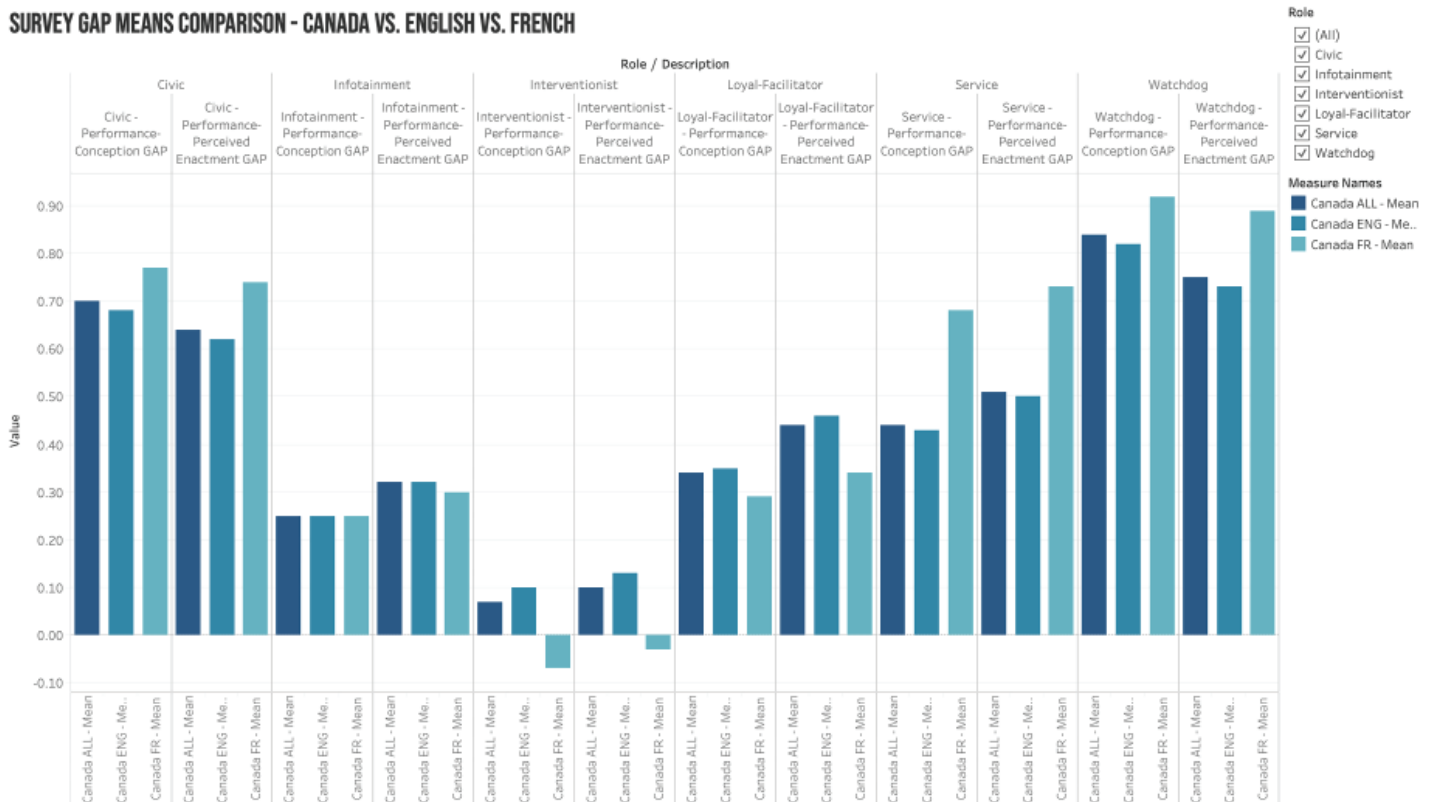


Figure 3

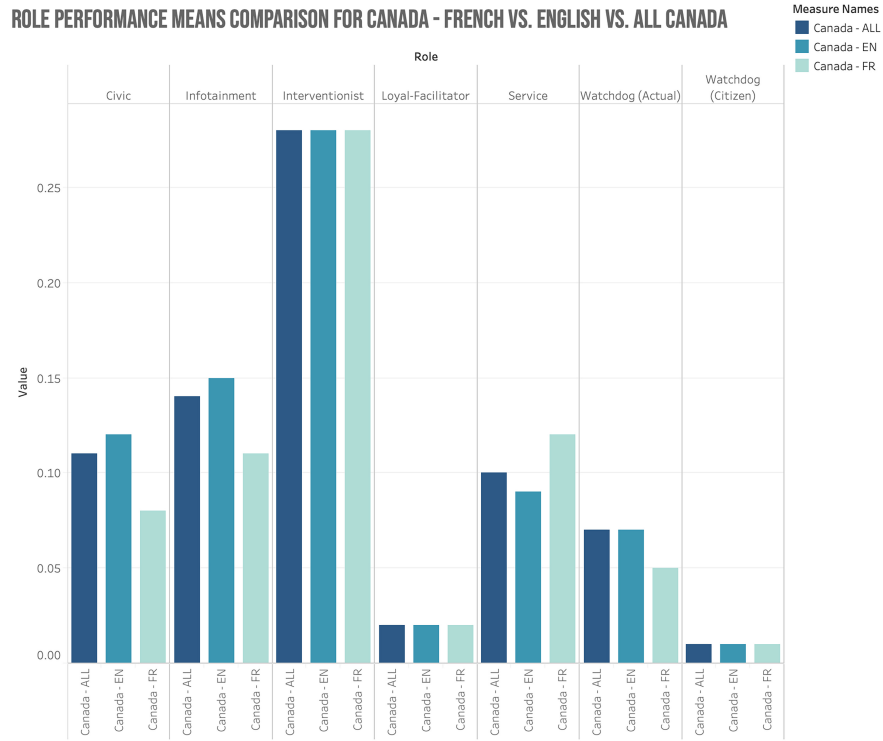


Figure 4

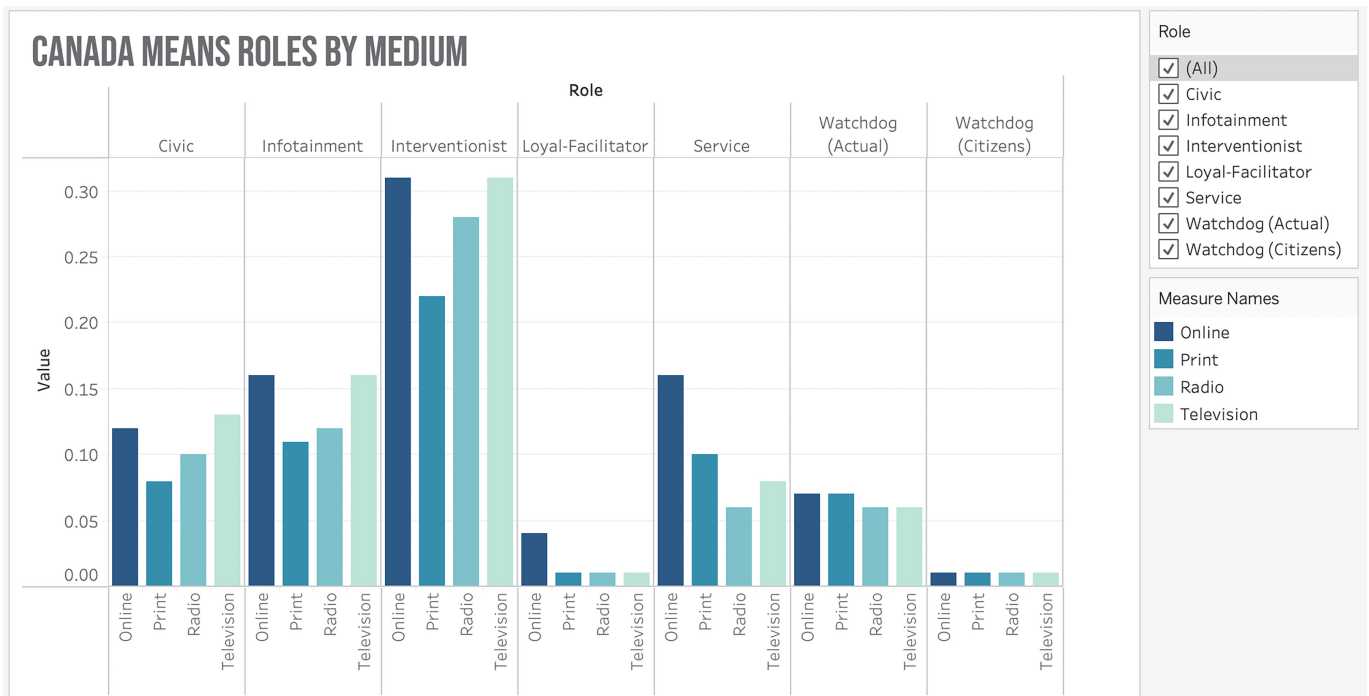


Table 20. Means comparisons per role - Canada EN vs. Canada FR vs. Canada Overall vs. Global

Role	Canada - EN		Canada - FR		Canada - ALL		Global	
	Mean	Standard Error	Mean	Standard Error	Mean	Standard Error	Mean	Standard Error
Interventionist	.28	<.01	.28	.01	.28	<.01	.18	<.01
Watchdog (Actual)	.07	<.01	.05	<.01	.07	<.01	.05	<.01
Watchdog (Citizen)	.01	<.01	.01	<.01	.01	<.01	.01	<.01
Loyal-Facilitator	.02	<.01	.02	<.01	.02	<.01	.03	<.01
Service	.09	<.01	.12	.01	.10	<.01	.06	<.01
Infotainment	.15	<.01	.11	.01	.14	<.01	.11	<.01
Civic	.12	<.01	.08	<.01	.11	<.01	.06	<.01

Table 21. Watchdog Role Mean Scores by Canadian Outlet

Outlet	Mean
CTV	.06 (.01)
CBC TV Canada	.07 (.01)
Global	.05 (.01)
TVA	.05 (.01)
CBC Radio	.07 (<.01)
Radio-Canada	.05 (<.01)
Globe and Mail	.09 (.01)
National Post	.05 (.01)
Toronto Star	.07 (.01)
La Presse	.04 (.01)
cbc.ca	.11 (.01)
HuffPost Canada	.06 (.01)

Table 22. *Service Role Mean Scores by Canadian Outlet*

Outlet	Mean
CTV	.09 (.01)
CBC TV Canada	.06 (.01)
Global	.07 (.01)
TVA	.09 (.01)
CBC Radio	.04 (<.01)
Radio-Canada	.07 (.01)
Globe and Mail	.14 (.01)
National Post	.09 (.01)
Toronto Star	.08 (.01)
La Presse	.18 (.01)
cbc.ca	.13 (.01)
HuffPost Canada	.15 (.01)

Table 23. *Infotainment Role Mean Scores by Canadian Outlet*

Outlet	Mean
CTV	.20 (.01)
CBC TV Canada	.19 (.01)
Global	.14 (.01)
TVA	.09 (.01)
CBC Radio	.12 (.01)
Radio-Canada	.11 (.01)
Globe and Mail	.08 (.01)
National Post	.13 (.01)
Toronto Star	.13 (.01)
La Presse	.11 (.01)
cbc.ca	.17 (.01)
HuffPost Canada	.23 (.01)

Table 24. Survey Mean Scores by Role- Canada EN vs. Canada FR vs. Canada Overall

Role	Canada EN	Canada FR	Canada ALL
Interventionist			
Performance-Conception GAP	.10 (.02)	-.07 (.03)	.07 (.02)
Performance-Perceived Enactment GAP	.13 (.02)	-.03 (.04)	.10 (.02)
Watchdog			
Performance-Conception GAP	.82 (.01)	.92 (.01)	.84 (.01)
Performance-Perceived Enactment GAP	.73 (.02)	.89 (.02)	.75 (.02)
Loyal-Facilitator			
Performance-Conception GAP	.35 (.02)	.29 (.04)	.34 (.02)
Performance-Perceived Enactment GAP	.46 (.02)	.34 (.04)	.44 (.02)
Infotainment			
Performance-Conception GAP	.25 (.02)	.25 (.04)	.25 (.02)
Performance-Perceived Enactment GAP	.32 (.02)	.30 (.03)	.32 (.01)
Service			
Performance-Conception GAP	.43 (.02)	.51 (.03)	.44 (.02)
Performance-Perceived Enactment GAP	.50 (.02)	.53 (.03)	.51 (.01)
Civic			
Performance-Conception GAP	.68 (.01)	.77 (.01)	.70 (.01)
Performance-Perceived Enactment GAP	.62 (.01)	.74 (.03)	.64 (.01)

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