

# 1 Unifying Theories of Journalism through the Principles 2 of Quantum Physics

3  
4 Journalism theories are more alike than they appear. Deep down, at a  
5 quantum-like scale, they are interconnected as emanations of the same  
6 fundamental oneness. This paper explores that concept in two ways. It first  
7 develops the concept by comparing Kholod's "quantum journalism" with two  
8 quantized perspectives of mass media. Then it seeks proof of the concept in  
9 quantizing critiques of two dissimilar theories of journalism. It finds an  
10 inherent unity between the theories.

11  
12 *Keywords:* journalism theory, quantum journalism, quantizing critique,  
13 quantum social science  
14

## 15 Introduction

16  
17  
18 Journalism theories are not as independent from each other as they seem.  
19 We observe each one as being tangibly unique in how it conceives of and knows  
20 the slice of journalism that concerns it. Yet at a deeper level, they all are  
21 emanations of an intangible whole. They are waves of the same ocean. Dancers  
22 in Bohm's (1990) ballet of electrons, separate yet moving together, "guided by  
23 a common pool of information in the form of a score" (p. 281).

24 Bohm used the "dance" as an analogy for the concept that incredibly tiny  
25 electrons and the human mind behave with a "basic similarity." That is because  
26 they are aspects of the same fundamental essence. "In some way, and to some  
27 degree,

28  
29 everything [in the universe] enfolds or implicates everything. ... [T]his enfoldment  
30 relationship is not merely passive or superficial. Rather, it is active and essential to  
31 what each thing is. It follows that each thing is internally related to the whole, and  
32 therefore, to everything else ... in the primary reality of the implicate order. (Bohm,  
33 1990, p. 273)

34  
35 The implicate "everything" unfolds into infinite "many things" in the shared  
36 social reality that is the explicate order. So, too, would it be for journalism  
37 theories. They are cognitive artifacts of the mind that unfold as (seemingly)  
38 discrete intellectual proffers to explain something about journalism. Yet, they all  
39 are connected; they are of the same whole.

40 Pulling the curtain back on that is this paper's purpose. To be clear, the goal  
41 is not to stir all existing journalism theories into a "theory of everything" but to  
42 introduce the concept of interconnectedness into journalism studies.<sup>1</sup> Quantum  
43 social theory (QST), from the interdisciplinary field of quantum social science,  
44 is an apt framework for the task.

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<sup>1</sup>The phrasing is borrowed from Scolari (2012).

1 QST holds that unlike planets, intergalactic dust and other large bodies in  
 2 the universe, human activity is not neatly explained by the orderly, mechanistic  
 3 rules of classical Newtonian physics. Instead, the theory says, the ways of we  
 4 humans make a better fit with odd and probabilistic behavior that quantum  
 5 physics ascribes to subatomic particles (Barad, 2007; Holtfort & Horsch, 2023;  
 6 Zohar & Marshall, 1994; Wendt, 2015). Humans are not particles, of course, but  
 7 the gist of QST is that the same quantum theory that explains them also explains  
 8 us and our social systems.

9 As its toolkit, this paper takes up Murphy’s (2021a) “strategy of quantizing  
 10 critique ... through translation” (p. 10). It involves acknowledging the  
 11 Newtonian underpinnings of existing theory and replacing that with a new  
 12 “physical imaginary” (p. 3) fashioned out of the vernacular of quantum physics.  
 13 Clothe it, if you will, with a “new set of assumptions that sketches the contours  
 14 of the possible within which a theory can operate” (p. 8). Open a new door for  
 15 it. Enable it to explore new questions.

16 To open journalism theory to new possibilities by revealing their deeper  
 17 holism, that is the paper’s importance and contribution to the literature. First, it  
 18 develops proof for the concept of theory interconnectedness by standing up  
 19 Kholod’s (2021) quantized journalism against two other expressions of  
 20 quantizing mediated communication. One is Myers’s (2025) Quantum Media  
 21 Theory, and the other is Bhadra’s (2024) quantized framework for interpreting  
 22 digital media content.

23 Next, the paper moves to its core task: testing the concept on two existing  
 24 theories of seemingly irreconcilable approaches to journalism. One is news  
 25 ecology, which, as a theoretical framework, likens news and journalism to the  
 26 workings of natural ecosystems. The other is field theory, which turns journalism  
 27 into a conceptual arena of competition for symbolic power.  
 28

### 30 **Proof of concept**

31  
 32 Kholod, Myers and Bhadra do not describe it this way, but their work fits  
 33 the strategy of quantizing critic through translation. They each recast non-  
 34 quantum aspects of their subjects into the language and physical imaginary of  
 35 quantum physics. Each of them, in some way, and to some degree, moves into  
 36 the next step of quantizing through application (Murphy, 2021a) by fashioning  
 37 their subjects into quantum versions of themselves. Only Myers reworks an  
 38 existing theory.

### 40 **Starting Points**

41  
 42 Kholod approaches his quantizing of journalism through “monistic  
 43 idealism” (2021, p. 1). It is an amalgam of ancient transcultural philosophies of  
 44 oneness: that “reality is, in some fundamental sense, one rather than irreducibly  
 45 many” (Phiolopedia, 2026). It is upon monism that Kholod erects his focal  
 46 argument that journalism is best understood not by its many parts but by the

1 unity of them. To actualize that, he turns to quantum physics, which itself is  
 2 embedded with elements of monism (Päs, 2023). The outcome is a reworking of  
 3 normative journalism into a “social institution, [meaning] a theoretical and  
 4 practical form of social activity of specialists in social communications and  
 5 based on ideas that are hypothetically formulated in mathematics and quantum  
 6 mechanics”<sup>2</sup> (2021, p. 1).

7 Myers frames “quantum media theory” (QMT) as an “emerging field”  
 8 (2025, p. 25) and quantized variant of the media ecology theorizing that began  
 9 with McLuhan (1964) and Postman (1970). Myers’s focal argument is that media  
 10 ecology theory is self-constrained by its *raison d’être* focus on the technologies  
 11 of mass communication—the proverbial “medium”—as being far more  
 12 impactful than any content they deliver to audiences. That, he finds, leaves media  
 13 ecology conceptually ill-equipped for the dawning “Quantum Era,” where AI  
 14 “blur[s] the lines between technology and the message it deliver” (2025, pp. 13-  
 15 14) by functioning as both medium and content co-creator. He describes QMT  
 16 as a “dynamic model of media as nonlinear, entangled systems operating across  
 17 dimensions of time, identity, and information” (p. 24).

18 Bhadra’s focal argument is that the classical way to interpret legacy, or  
 19 linear, media content is not up to the task of taking on multimodal digital content.  
 20 Compared to “old media” content, he says, digitally delivered content is  
 21 embedded with far more linguistic, visual and auditory complexity. It speeds  
 22 across networks of digital platforms. It gets remixed and recontextualized into  
 23 “divergent meanings” (2024, p. 6056) and re-distributed by audience members.  
 24 Bhadra’s solution is a quantized reworking of the “old” interpretive frameworks.

### 25 26 **Seeking unity in translation**

27  
28 Despite their different starting points and subjects, Kholod, Myers and  
 29 Bhadra each find parallel translations in the quantum principles of *superposition*  
 30 and the *observer effect*. They each, in some way, conceive of “meaning” vis-à-  
 31 vis “information” as existing in a superposed-like state of all probable meanings.  
 32 They each, in some way, define “audience” as a collective observer who discerns  
 33 a meaning from the possible many. With Kholod, the journalism is also an  
 34 observer.

35 To the layperson, superposition no doubt seems bizarre. To the physicist, it  
 36 is a state of existence where subatomic particles are anywhere at any momentum  
 37 (Huges et al., 2021, p. 4). The observer effect is the phenomenon of observation  
 38 changing reality. Social scientists know it as the Hawthorne effect, whereby  
 39 people behave differently when they know they are being studied (Spencer &  
 40 Mahtini, 2017). In quantum physics the effect manifests as the concept of wave-  
 41 particle duality.

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<sup>2</sup>“Quantum mechanics” and “quantum physics” are often used interchangeable to mean the theories and study of the behavior of matter and energy at the scales of atoms and subatomic particles. Technically, quantum physics is the broad *study of*; quantum mechanics is a facet of that. It provides the math.

1 In its wave form, the particle is in a *superposition*—it is not directly  
 2 observable because it is “flowing” as a probability of all positions and momenta  
 3 (Ananthaswamy, 2023; Caltech Science Exchange, n.d.-a; Fortier, 2025).  
 4 Observation changes that. When the wave is put under measurement, it reveals  
 5 itself as its visible particle form. In that moment, it “fixes” into one of many  
 6 probable positions or momenta. Physicists call the reveal a “wavefunction  
 7 collapse.” A wave function is a mathematical expression of the probability of  
 8 any superposed particle becoming visible at a singular position or momentum.  
 9 To catch sight of a particle is to actualize one of the probabilities. With that, the  
 10 job is done for the probability-prediction math, and it “collapses.”

11 Kholod conceives of information as being in superposition. But we can directly  
 12 see “information” as a tangible event, activity, facts and figures. Meaning is  
 13 probabilistic; it is superposed as all possible probabilities of it. As Kholod describes  
 14 it, information is “a portion of energy (quantum)” (2021, p. 6). In physics,  
 15 “quantum” denotes the smallest unit of energy. While he does not use the word  
 16 “meaning,” Kholod connects it to what he calls the “‘charge’ of information” (p. 6).  
 17 As Kholod describes it, the quantum journalist-observer actualizes one of many  
 18 possible (energetic) meanings for a unit of information and embeds it into a unit of  
 19 news content that disseminated to an audience. Members of the audience download  
 20 their own probability meanings for the news content. Different journalists, different  
 21 audiences, different meaning-interpretations.

22 By comparison, QMT, as Myers describes it, sees the way media operate as  
 23 being in a “state of superposition—where multiple meanings, interpretations,  
 24 and realities exist simultaneously until observed and engaged by an audience”  
 25 (2025, p. 26). That is, audience members discern the medium’s effect on them  
 26 by actualizing one of many superposed probabilities of it. Bhadra, like Kholod,  
 27 sees content as tangible and meaning of superposed probabilities.

## 28 29 **Divergences**

30  
31 Kholod alone invokes the principle of uncertainty. It holds that the observer  
 32 can measure either the particle’s position or momentum with the greater  
 33 precision. It is a tradeoff: the more certainty about position, the more uncertainty  
 34 about momentum and vice versa (Hilgevoord & Uffink, 2024). The quantum  
 35 journalism parallel is the “journalistic product” (Kholod, 2021, p. 5), presumably  
 36 the day’s newspaper, broadcast or website, or any of the individual units of news,  
 37 opinion and advertising content the product contains. He defines uncertainty as  
 38 product quality, and he argues that one can precisely know it for either the  
 39 product or a content unit.

40 Myers writes that besides superposition, QMT also parallels “entanglement,  
 41 and uncertainty” (2025, p. 24), but does not explicitly address the latter. He and  
 42 Bhadra both discuss quantum entanglement, which NASA Science (2025) calls  
 43 “one of the most far-out phenomena of quantum theory.” Entanglement is an  
 44 interconnection between two or more particles that lets them influence each other  
 45 no matter how far apart they are in spacetime. It is like “observing one dancer  
 46 and finding them in a pirouette, then automatically knowing the other dancer

1 must also be performing a pirouette” (Caltech Science Exchange, n.d.-b). Myers  
 2 describes “media entanglement” as a principle of QMT. He defines it as “digital  
 3 information ... [being] instantaneously interconnected across platforms and  
 4 geographies” (2025, p. 26). Bhadra (2024) discerns entanglement in the  
 5 “synchronized reactions” (p. 6057) of social media audiences to trending or viral  
 6 content.

## 7 8 9 **Quantizing to find unity**

10  
11 Kholod’s quantized version of journalism stood up well in comparison to  
 12 Myers’ and Bhadra’s quantized approaches to mass media. Unity in theory came  
 13 as parallel translations of quantum superposition and the observer effect. The  
 14 question now is whether the concept of theory interconnectedness will hold up  
 15 when it is applied to the non-quantum aspects of two very different approaches  
 16 to journalism. It turns out that by inheritance from their “parents,” the two  
 17 approaches already share elements of the quantum.

## 18 19 **Origins**

20  
21 **Ecological perspectives.** News ecology and the construct of a news  
 22 ecosystem are offspring of media ecology (Wiard, 2019), which itself is a  
 23 reimagining of the basics of ecology, the academic discipline. Ecology is the *study*  
 24 of “natural organisms, their relationships with their physical environment and  
 25 the interactions among them” (Hellenic Ecological Society, n.d.). The *place of*  
 26 *study* is the ecosystem. In Odum’s (1953) foundational definition, the ecosystem  
 27 is a place of energy flows that make the circle of life. Flora, fauna, microbiota  
 28 and their environment are “inseparably interrelated and interact upon each other”  
 29 (p. 9) in the ecosystem. Sunlight, soil and rain sustain the plants, which sustain  
 30 the herbivores, which sustain the carnivores, and in time, they all feed nature’s  
 31 cleanup crew, the decomposers.

32 There are undertones of quantum entanglement in the definition. By the  
 33 1971 third edition of his book, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, “the principle of  
 34 ‘wholeness’” in in nature (p. 8) had joined the definition. So did the “idea of the  
 35 unity of organisms and environment (as well as the oneness of man and nature)”  
 36 (pp. 8-9).

37 Ecologists operationalize “ecosystem to be a “geographic area ... [such as]  
 38 a natural wilderness area, a suburban lake or forest, or a heavily used area such  
 39 as a city” (Ecological Society of America, n.d.). Likewise, media ecologists see  
 40 media ecosystems as spaces of interactions that interconnect the technologies of  
 41 mass communication and human perceptions, behaviors and organizations.  
 42 Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) takes it full circle by tying media ecology back to the  
 43 emergence of the concept of “urban ecology” in the 1920s.

44 **Field theory.** Journalism field theory derives from Bourdieu’s (1993)<sup>3</sup> field  
 45 theory. Thousands upon thousands of words have already been spent on

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<sup>3</sup>The book is a compilation of Bourdieu’s seminal works dating back to 1968.

1 interpreting the thoughts of Bourdieu. This paper takes the summarizer’s path.  
 2 To no doubt over-simply, a “field” is a theoretical space of competition for the  
 3 power to determine the legitimacy of a social domain. Law, politics, education,  
 4 the arts, the sciences, they and more are social domains. Within domains, human  
 5 activity creates cultural goods: a dance, song, government policy, toy, car,  
 6 research paper, news story. They inherently carry intangible meanings and in  
 7 that sense, they become what Bourdieu calls “symbolic goods ... a two-faced  
 8 reality, [as] a commodity and a symbolic object: Their specifically cultural value  
 9 and their commercial value remain relatively independent” (p. 113).

10 The competition is waged within and among fields, and it basically is a  
 11 struggle over who gets to hold the reins of “cultural consecration.” That is  
 12 Bourdieusian shorthand for the power to confer recognition and legitimacy upon  
 13 a symbolic good or social domain. The struggle itself involves hierarchies of  
 14 actors within a field and among different fields. Relationality is an organizing  
 15 feature. As Bourdieu explains,

16  
 17 one cannot fully comprehend the functioning of the field ... as a scene of competition  
 18 for properly cultural consecration—i.e., legitimacy—and for the power to grant it  
 19 unless one analyzes the relationships between the various institutions. (p. 116).

20  
 21 Relationality, networks of relationships, parallels quantum entanglement.  
 22 Superposition and the observer effect are implicit in the nested constructs of  
 23 symbolic goods, value and capital. Symbolic *goods* are metaphorical vessels of  
 24 symbolic *value*, which can be built up into symbolic *capital* as prestige,  
 25 reputation, power or authority (see, Bourdieu, 1970/1984; Ihlen, 2018;  
 26 Southernton, n.d.-a,b). Or perhaps not. It depends on which meaning an observer  
 27 downloads from the “cloud” of all probabilities of meaning for the constructs. It  
 28 is the observer who “means” the symbolic things into existence.

### 29 30 **Quantizing Critique**

31  
 32 **To the ecological.** News ecology is the study of the effects on audience and  
 33 society from the technologies of news distribution and consumption. Wiard  
 34 (2019) defines news ecology as “an approach, a process” for investigating “how  
 35 citizens get acquainted with the news as well as the diversity of technologies  
 36 involved in news use.” Wahl-Jorgensen finds that scholars tend to invoke  
 37 “ecological metaphors ... as a sensitizing concept; a ubiquitous and general  
 38 shorthand for the complexities of the technological, social, and legal  
 39 environment in which we now communicate (2016, p. 15).

40 Wiard (2019) defines the news ecosystem as “an actual condition of news  
 41 ... a given, something that is there.” It is the place of study—and the terrain for  
 42 quantizing critique through translation. Monism runs through notions of a news  
 43 ecosystem. A oneness is implicit in Nielsen’s (2015, p. 27) depiction of the news  
 44 ecosystem as “individual actors [who are] parts of a wider environment.” It is  
 45 apparent in the proposition that Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) discerns from studies in  
 46 the news ecology genre. “[I]n the era of a networked and highly diverse media  
 47 landscape,” she writes, “we can no longer study individual media organizations,

1 texts, and practices in isolation” (pp. 15-16). Morgan (2019) makes the momism  
 2 clear: “A news ecosystem, like a natural ecosystem, is made of networks of  
 3 interdependent parts.”

4 Morgan does something else in that single sentence. She implies parallels to  
 5 quantum entanglement (interdependency). The entangled parts manifest as  
 6 “ensemble[s] of individuals, organizations, and technologies” gathered as a  
 7 geographic community or “around a particular issue,” and engaged in the  
 8 production and consumption of news (Anderson, 2016, p. 412). They present as  
 9 audience interactions with news platforms and cultural influences on news  
 10 production (Boyles, 2017), and as “24/7 news outlets, different news platforms  
 11 and diverse production arrangements” (Cottle, 2007, p. 2).<sup>4</sup>

12 Superposition comes into the news ecosystem as the being and knowing of  
 13 the medium’s effects on those that inhabit a news ecosystem. Any “effect” is an  
 14 interpretation by meaning-making. And meaning is superposed in a state of all  
 15 probabilities of it. Journalist, audience member or researcher, each can realize a  
 16 different probability of meaning.

17 **To the field.** From the view of field theory, journalism is a sphere of cultural  
 18 activity, which makes it a social domain and a field of competition for symbolic  
 19 capital. It is an intra- and inter-field competition for control over the normative  
 20 journalistic task of defining which events, issues and social actors as legitimately  
 21 “newsworthy.” To be judged newsworthy is to be judged as meriting recognition  
 22 and attention, first, by journalists, broadly defined (see Basinée & Nollet, 2019),  
 23 and second, by the public as audiences of the symbolic goods of journalism.  
 24 Those who control the judging are engaged in a journalistic version of  
 25 Bourdieusian cultural consecration. Journalism’s main competitors are the fields  
 26 of economics and politics, as Swartz (2019) sees it, or politics and science, as  
 27 Benson (2019) sees it. To the victors go the “symbolic power ... to impose a  
 28 viewpoint as the legitimate one, the true one” (Benson, 2019, p. 36).

29 Competitors are inherently entangled through their interrelatedness as  
 30 contestants vying for symbolic power as “the” dominant arbiter of what is and is  
 31 not a legitimate news reality. Benson (2019) invites the analogy of hierarchical  
 32 “many-body” entanglement by mapping journalism as a field within fields. He  
 33 nests journalism within a “field of cultural production,” which is nested within a  
 34 “field of power,” which is nested within a far larger and “all-encompassing field  
 35 of social classes” (p. 465-466).

36 There are echoes many-body entanglement in Maares and Hanusch’s (2022,  
 37 p. 737) depiction of journalism field theory as the study of “social structures and  
 38 power relations.” Willig, Waltrop, and Hartley (2015) implicitly depict news  
 39 reception, content and production entangled arenas for the competition for  
 40 symbolic capital. Couldry (2003, p. 657) affords journalism a competitive  
 41 advantage as a “pivotal” field that passes the “knowledges of other, more  
 42 specialized fields” to “wider audiences.”

43 Likening the sociological concept of “field” to philosophical concepts of  
 44 “oneness” is an easy reach. Waging power struggles within and across fields  
 45 culminates in a singularity of purpose. Superposition is an easy reach too.

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<sup>4</sup>Cottle calls it “news ecology,” but the description fits the news ecosystem.

1 Newsworthiness, symbolic value and symbolic capital cannot self-create. They  
 2 cannot unfold out of the implicate order of their own accord. They are meanings,  
 3 indeterminate and superposed until an observer downloads one probability out  
 4 of the many.

### 5 Conclusion

7 Murphy (2021a) argues that when we translate the non-quantum “core  
 8 concepts” of theory into the vernacular and physical imaginaries of quantum  
 9 physics, we create a “common parlance for [expressing] their complexity” (p.  
 10 66). Quantizing is a standardizing tool, in other words. It renders theories and  
 11 theoretical perspectives comparable, in other words, by taking them back to their  
 12 fundamental unity of oneness. Quantizing opens the door to a new ontological  
 13 perspective of journalism theories as interconnected on a fundamental scale.

14 At its core, journalism is a quantum-like macrosocial system of superposed  
 15 meanings and entangled actors and activities. At their core, each theoretical  
 16 conception of journalism is an enfoldment of them all. They are like stem cells:  
 17 an undifferentiated “one” in the implicate order but capable of differentiating  
 18 into varied intellectual proffers in the explicate. To put it into a quantum  
 19 vernacular, journalism theories look different because scholars “mean” them that  
 20 way. Each theory is the manifestation of the probability-meaning scholars  
 21 downloaded from the superposed cloud of all possible meanings of “theory.”

22 Nadler (2019) offers a reminder that finding the interconnectedness among  
 23 theories is a necessary beginning step. The “ecosystem metaphor,” he writes,  
 24 “pushes us towards thinking of news media [as] self-organizing structures ruled  
 25 by an order of intelligence more complex than human planning” (p. 834). The  
 26 same can be said of the constructs of field theory and Kholod’s quantized  
 27 reimaging of normative journalism. The next step, and all that follow, put us on  
 28 a quest for the “common pool of information” (Bohm, 1990, p. 281) that  
 29 synchronizes music and movement into a ballet—and probabilistic meaning into  
 30 a unity of varied forms of journalism theory.

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