**JRP Canada Podcast Transcript — Episode 3 with Dr. Xin Zhao**

*[Upbeat intro music begins. It plays into the background of the voiceover]*

**Karen Owen** 00:03

Hello, my name is Karen Owen from Mount Royal University in Calgary, and I am part of the Canadian JRP group. Welcome to another episode of our Meet the Researcher podcast, a series of interviews in preparation for our upcoming event Between Ideals and Practices: Journalistic Roles in Transformative Times. This is a one day pre-conference to ICA taking place at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) on May 24 2023. Visit [jrpcanada.ca](https://jrpcanada.ca/) to register now. Joining us today is Dr. Xin Zhao. from Bournemouth University in the UK, she is one of the presenters at the Between Ideals and Practices conference. Thanks so much for joining us today on our podcast. And Dr. Zhao, you'll be presenting some of your original research at the conference, can you give us just a sneak peek of what you're going to be talking about?

*[Music fades out]*

**Xin Zhao** 01:07

Hello, Karen, thank you very much for having me. My presentation will be about the patterns of the journalistic role performance during public health crises. We focused specifically on the UK news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. So I will present the findings on the patterns, which will you illuminate the functions of journalism during public health crises.

**Karen Owen** 01:34

Can you give us a little insight into some of the interesting data that you collected? What did you find?

**Xin Zhao** 01:44

Well, we actually focused on all the six roles of the journalistic role performance. And we have done the content analysis with more than 4000 news articles across four platforms in the UK news outlets. So we actually zoom in on the six roles of performance during this public health crisis. Well, we found some complicated patterns really, but I will present all the patterns during the - our presentation at a conference. But just to give you one, the findings of one role. So for example, the power relationships between the journalism and also the government. So it actually shows a really complicated picture: The UK journalist performed a watchdog role by maintaining a seemingly skeptical and distant-approach to the government sources, yet also showed traces of cooperation with the government agendas in ensuring the compliance with the public health messaging. And also, we have interesting findings in the other five roles as well. And I can't wait to share our findings with our audience by then. Thank you.

**Karen Owen** 03:02

And one final question for you: Why do you think it is important to study journalistic roles?

**Xin Zhao** 03:08

Well, I would like to say - I would like to refer back to our paper, because our paper is actually contextualized in the journalistic performance in the transformative times, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic. Because if you're in this pandemic, we need a functional journalism to sufficiently inform the public to navigate the crisis, right? But the previous studies have found that in say, so for example, in health care coverage, journalists tend to transmit without questioning the information from the health-related authorities because of their scientific expertise. It is also established that during periods of a societal crisis, so for example, the public health crisis, journalism may suspend a watchdog role and tend towards consensus by following the agendas of the elites. And the scholarship also shows that during crisis events, there is a tendency for the news media to sensationalize, which actually demonstrates the infotainment role. So all these findings actually lead to the criticism leveled against that the news media in being functional in crisis coverage, which might limit the public's ability to make informed decisions. But seldom have studies captured how JRP (journalistic role performance) during public health crisis, reflect on the all around influence of such crisis on journalism practice. By this I mean how the crisis influenced all six roles. So our study contributed to this discussion by focusing on the performance of all six roles in the UK news coverage of the pandemic. So this is why I think it is really important to study the journalistic roles

**Karen Owen** 04:59

Thank you so much. Thank you for that insight. That's very much appreciated. And thank you for joining us today. *[Outro music fades in]* We're very much looking forward to your presentation at the Between Ideals and Practices: Journalistic Role Performance in Transformative Times conference.

**Xin Zhao** 05:07

Thank you very much for having me, Karen.

**Karen Owen** 05:21

And for those of you listening if you have not already, please don't forget to register for the conference taking place on May 24 at Toronto Metropolitan University. We have presentations by researchers from around the world, and there's affordable accommodations available in TMU's residence for the duration of our conference, and the ICA 2023 conference. Check out details on our website [jrpcanada.ca](https://jrpcanada.ca/).

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