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## **Emerging Journalist Economist**

### **Abstract.**

The article examines reinvention of journalism and its business models from the viewpoint of Finnish newsroom. The article analyses how the needs and ways of developing business models for media companies are perceived within newspaper newsrooms and how the values of journalism are contested when brought together with those of media business. The analysis is based on a case study and interview data. The interviews were analyzed by using methods of qualitative text analysis. In the light of the study, the role of a liquid modern journalist may be evolving towards a liquid journalist economist. A journalist economist combines with easy the journalistic ideals of public service, autonomy and objectivity with those of product development, marketing and advertisement. When discussing future forms and practices of Finnish journalism and media business, a considerable amount of the power to define 'good' and 'bad' advertising and journalism practice was passed to readers.

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### **Introduction**

To be able to survive in the highly competitive media environment and to meet complex changes in people's and advertisers' priorities and needs, Finnish media houses are actively engaged in developing new business models, products, as well as practices of making journalism (Hujanen 2015). Like in other Nordic countries and in many parts of the western world, Finnish media companies live with economic difficulties. Problems in achieving gains in digital revenue continue to form a major challenge for the legacy media in Finland. Fewer subscribers for printed newspapers, lower income from advertisement, and growing demand for profit have brought tightening budgets and decreased human resources for the newsrooms.

During the last twenty years or so, market and audience orientation has become a dominant point of departure when developing news media in Finland. The reason for the market orientation is the assumption that if the legacy media do not succeed in pleasing younger people, i.e. future customers, by offering them interesting products on digital platforms and in

new forms, their position in people's everyday lives will further weaken (Hujanen 2008, 2014). This means that the business of the media has become a relevant issue for almost everyone working within media house, including journalists and newsrooms.

This article examines the challenge of reinventing journalism and its business models from the viewpoint of the newsroom. The focus is set, first, on how the needs and ways of developing new business models for media companies and journalism are explained and made sense within newsrooms and among middle management working within innovation projects. Second, the focus is set on how the values of journalism and those of media business are combined and contested when brought together. The latter question is of importance because the use of market research tools and the power shifts in media companies refer to an increase in the influence of media owners and advertisers in defining not only the business models of journalism but also the ideals and practice of journalism.

In the light of the data gathered, journalism is seen as business and middle management's views on new business models of media and journalism can be seen as open-minded and tolerant. The reinvention of journalism and its business models were represented as a fairly peaceful collaborative effort between the newsroom and other departments of media house. In the following analysis, a special attention is given to the signs which indicate how the role of a liquid modern journalist (Kantola 2011) may be evolving towards a journalist economist.

## **The data and method**

The analysis is based on interview data gathered from two Finnish media companies (Sanoma and KSF-Media) and their three newsrooms. Journalists and journalistic middle management live the economic challenges and changes on the level of everyday news work and offer an exciting viewpoint to the reinvention of the business models of the news media. The persons interviewed are from Helsingin Sanomat, Metro and Hufvudstadsbladet. Besides the printed paper, the content of these media can be read on the net and mobile platforms.

Helsingin Sanomat comes out seven days a week, has a print circulation of 354, 737 and is the leading paper in Finland. Like other daily newspapers, the printed paper of Helsingin Sanomat has lost subscribers. Compared to many other newspapers, it has active development work going on. Metro is a free city paper published five times a week in Helsinki, with a print run of 140, 000. Hufvudstadsbladet is the foremost Swedish language daily newspaper in Finland. The paper is issued seven days a week with a circulation of 46, 393. The editorial offices of the all the three papers are located in Helsinki.

The interview data was gathered 2013–2015, in the situation of accelerating technological change, economic pressures and changes in people's media uses as well as media houses' active development work. The data set includes 12 interviews with key personnel dealing with innovation and development work, journalism and its management. Almost all of the interviewees had participated in innovation teams within respective media houses as a member or as a chair. The interviewees were thus able to shed light on the objectives and practices of change projects and on development of business models.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, and a written questionnaire structured the interviews. The interviews, lasting about one hour each, were taped and transcribed.

Participants were requested to give their informed consent and were accorded all due respect. The interview data was analyzed by using methods of qualitative text analysis. The persons interviewed talked freely about their work. However, there was one interviewee who did not want to tell about the product development of his company in detail.

### **Journalism is business, after all**

Anu Kantola (2011) has described the change in Finnish legacy media as a development from high modern journalism towards liquid journalism. A liquid modern journalist is flexible, producing content that appeals to both common sense and emotions. A liquid journalist combines the tasks of information transmission, storytelling, raising discussion, entertaining, and even startling the reader (also Hujanen 2014). Against this background, the persons interviewed talked surprisingly much about journalism as business, about financing news and journalism, about product development and advertising. Within the data gathered, journalism was portrayed first and foremost as business and the role of the journalist included development of the business.

As perceived by several interviewees, the brand wall which used to exist between the newsroom and other departments of the media company has vanished: "This is a joint venture, this is also business. This cannot be pure journalism." The current moment was represented economically as an especially difficult and important. On the one hand, media houses were perceived to live an intervening phase. While all the innovation work was being directed towards digital platforms, the printed version still needed to be done, i.e. printed and distributed– and that is expensive.

On the other hand, quality media and journalism were to seen to live a genuine make or break time. Media business was described as business whose traditional economic basis was crumbling for good; paying customers are leaving printed newspapers and unwilling to pay for online news. Because of this, it is simply a question of who is going to survive. As put by the interviewees, to find the subscribers and advertisers for the future is make or break time for media and journalism business. To quote several interviewees, there is no other relevant question than this one.

As topmost means for news media to survive were being perceived new digital products and services people are willing to pay for, as well as finding new forms of funding journalism. Even though the interviewees were primarily journalistic middle management in the light of their work and previous experience, a need for new and innovative forms of online and mobile advertising was actively brought up. As stated by one of the interviewees, new forms of advertising are the blurring of the news media at their best.

### **Journalistic and economic goals going hand in hand**

As regards the invention of new business model of journalism, journalistic products and practices, the evident contradictions between views and aims of the financial management and newsroom were to a large extent missing from the interviews. It had not been easy to intertwine journalistic and economic goals in the beginning of innovation work, but there were not anymore big conflicts between the visions regarding the future. Instead, journalistic

and economic goals were seen to go well hand in hand, and journalism was not seen to be in danger.

Somewhat unexpectedly, reinvention of journalism and its business models were thus represented as a fairly peaceful collaborative effort between the newsroom and other departments of media house. Collaboration and interaction happened increasingly on day to day basis. Both sides seemed to understand and respect each other's needs and aims. For example, in Helsingin Sanomat, people from the newsroom and financial and PR department met several times a day. As stated by an interviewee, there did not exist one journalist anymore who would flinch at a suggestion made on the journalistic content by someone from the "economic side" of the company.

### **Open-minded journalists**

Journalists' views on new business models of media and journalism can be described as open-minded and tolerant. As regards new forms of digital advertising, some of the assumed problems were represented as hype by the interviewees. Moreover, many of the interviewees did not see new forms of advertising, like advertorials, content marketing or sponsored content as good or bad per se. Instead, they expressed necessity and willingness to test how new forms and practices of advertising work in practice.

As perceived in the data gathered, a media brand relying on quality journalism cannot take a risk of adapting quickly models which can undermine reader's trust in the assumed objectivity and autonomy of journalistic content. In this way, readers' trust in news is constructed as borderline for good journalism and advertising practice, i.e. how content marketing, for example, is evaluated by media users. "Readers are not stupid", a statement made by several interviewees, illustrates this kind of discourse.

The persons interviewed talked positively also about the need to find alternative sources for funding media and journalism business. Sponsoring, for example, was approached in positive light. One journalist interviewed drew a parallel between news media and theatre. According to her, both can be seen as forms of creative arts where, besides the paying audience, there can be several funders.

The role of external funders of journalism may become bigger in the future. The interviewees did not see this development as problematic, ie. a process which will threaten the autonomy of journalism and make it impossible to follow the ethical code of journalism. Like in theatre, the sponsor cannot dictate how the issue is portrayed and presented to the audience, as stated by one interviewee. The following extract illustrates also journalists' trust in the possibility to differentiate the ideals of business from those of journalism: "The borderline between business and journalism is crystal clear".

### **Emerging journalist economist**

Within this case study, journalism was portrayed first and foremost as business, and the role of the journalist included development of new models, products and services for media and business. Noteworthy is that the representatives of journalistic middle management focused

in their talk on the economic difficulties and the demands they pose on journalism and media business. Instead of relying only on a journalism centered discourse, the interviewees brought actively up importance to come up with new forms of digital advertising and find new ways to finance news and journalism production in the future.

When compared to the high modern professional ethos of Finnish journalist and its evolution in the recent years (Kantola 2011, Hujanen 2008, 2015), the emerging role perception may tell about a fundamental change. In the light of data gathered, there are signs that the role of a liquid modern journalist is evolving towards a liquid journalist economist. On the level of the middle management, a liquid journalist economist combines with easy the traditional journalistic ideals of public service, autonomy and objectivity with those of the product development, marketing and advertisement.

When the ideals and needs of journalism and business intertwine it seems that what journalism and advertising practices are seen as 'good' and 'acceptable' and what are not seen as 'god' blur. The emergence of a liquid journalist economist may thus foster and reflect a fundamental change in professionals' understanding of the ideals of journalism. Within this study, when inventing and discussing new business models for the journalism, key persons within newsrooms and media companies passed a considerable amount of their power to readers to define 'good' and 'bad' advertising and journalism practice. Because the wishes of the sponsors and advertisers were also increasingly taken into account when developing journalism and new business models, it is likely that the notions of 'public service' and 'autonomy' (Deuze 2005) are and will being redefined when translated into the everyday code of journalistic practice.

## Literature

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