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Article

Journalism as the new knowledge profession and consequences for journalism education

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Abstract

The article starts with observations about an increasing marginalization of professional journalism in public communication. This development is mainly driven by two factors, decreasing interest in the public sphere and increasing selective exposure. Based on these observations, the author develops a definition of the core societal functions of journalism, that is, validation and shared reality. Assigning to professional journalism the role of the ‘new knowledge profession’ he looks for areas of competence that would need to be taught in academic programs to furnish the profession with the necessary skills and make journalism a ‘de facto profession’. Finally, he discusses constraints on such a strategy in educational philosophies, the trade, and the changing demand of professional news.

Keywords

Academic journalism programs, journalism education, journalistic skills, knowledge profession, professional values, professionalization

Journalists’ marginalization in public communication

The most salient change in the public communication of all democratic and developed societies over the last two decades is a silent marginalization of professional journalism within public communication. The content of what people communicate about with other people and what they hold as their personal views of reality originates less and less with professional journalism. We can think of this development as either an opportunity or a risk for public communication.

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Many authors see it as a step forward that today a smaller proportion of public communication has its origin in and is 'controlled' by a single profession – a profession that itself is barely representative of the whole of society. Proponents of the brave new world of internet communication therefore have talked early on about a 'democratization' of news with more and different sources and viewpoints, and less dependency on large corporations. Further, on the side of users and 'producers', the Internet leads to positive effects for information intake and participation (Bakker and De Vreese, 2011; Drew and Weaver, 2006; Quintelier and Vissers, 2008; Vowe et al., 2007). 'The web politically empower(s) individuals' (Johnson and Kaye, 2003: 28) and increases 'social connectedness and the sense of community' (2003: 11). Although the main argument is quantities (more sources and voices), many authors also expect a normatively superior outcome for society and the political system through non-mainstream- and non-power-related viewpoints. But besides these chances there are also risks.

Studies on people's information and news intake almost unanimously come to similar assessments: that exposure to news and public affairs is on the decline. While general questions on time spent with the news do indeed show an increase in the total time that Americans expose themselves to news sources, it is likely that respondents overrate the time actually spent with news content when turning to the Internet.

Actual knowledge about concrete news items and their sources are a more valid way of measuring real exposure. In a representative survey of the German population age 14 plus we tested news awareness and news knowledge. A panel of ten experts (senior editors and social scientists) assessed each day for a period of 30 days what was believed to be the most important news items. This approach is based on normative assumptions: first, that some news is – from a democratic theory perspective – more important than other news; and, second, that, therefore, the societal importance of news can differ from the taste of the larger population.¹ In this study based on 1800 interviews we found that only two out of three Germans were aware of the most important news of the previous day. The second most important news item caught the attention of only 57 percent. Our analyses show a clear and linear correlation between age and news awareness. The younger the citizens, the less they have encountered news on politics and current affairs: 24 percent of the adolescents (14 to 17 years), 34 percent of the young adults (18 to 29 years), and 42 percent of the older adults (30 plus years) were aware of both most important news items. The results for information intake on these news items (in addition to just hearing about the event) are even more alarming and confirm a considerable age bias. Traditional mass media still dominate exposure to news. Only 10 percent of the youngest and 18 percent of the middle age group stated the Internet as their source of information.

Similarly, the percentage of Americans who say that they 'enjoy keeping up with the news' has decreased from a consistent plus/minus 50 percent to 45 percent in 2010 with the youngest age group of 18- to 29-year olds showing the steepest drop of 11 points (from 38 to 27%; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010). Thus, the 'duty to keep informed' as 'a civic obligation' (McCombs and Poindexter, 1983) seems to be on the decline. This is the consequence mainly of two developments, shifting values and a proliferation of new and often more exciting offers and activities on the web.

Reasons behind the changes

Here is not the place to discuss broader value changes in our societies. However, there are indicators that these changes exist and that they are most relevant for journalism and its products. Studies in the USA and in Germany unanimously show a ‘silent revolution’ (Inglehart, 1977) in that the younger generation is losing interest in topics of the ‘public sphere’, that go beyond peculiar interests of the individual and its immediate reference group. According to Soule (2001), ‘over the past forty years, no generation has begun with such low levels of interest in politics’ (see also Lupia and Philpot, 2005). Whether these changes are of a long- or short-term nature is hard to tell. It is also hard to tell which factors are driving them. Periods of material well-being and the absence of crises (in the Western countries) are possible causes, as are a more hedonistic and self-centered worldview among the younger generation (Shell Deutschland Holding, 2010). The latter is certainly fostered by the commercial culture and a culture of personal vanity as it shows up in popular TV programming.

Others attach this retreat of citizens from the public sphere (and from the news as part of it) to failures of the product itself which ignores the interest of younger people. As Delli Carpini (2000: 344) writes:

The news media is aimed at an older and increasingly shrinking audience. Traditional civic organizations and interest groups are dominated by issues, governing structures, policy solutions, and/or civic styles that are anathema to younger Americans raised in a faster-paced, entrepreneurial, mass-mediated, and global environment.

This argument leads to the old struggle between normative and empirical assessments of what is newsworthy that Walter Lippmann (1922) dealt with: should journalists cover what is deemed important from a public policy point of view or from an economic point of view of what sells best? A Pew Report on the state of the media in 2010 sees a major paradigm shift in that the ‘old model of journalism’ that had news media taking the money from advertisement ‘and using it to monitor civic life ... and conducting watchdog investigations’ is breaking down. The popularity of a story is no longer subordinate to its value (Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010).

While this shift probably started before the advent of the Internet, it certainly has become accelerated by it. For today’s users it is much easier than ever to escape politics among the news, or the news among anything else that is available – and still enjoy the illusion of news consumption. This is probably one reason why respondents in surveys are overrating the time they spend with news.

Thus, people become considerably more selective according to their subjective interests and also their beliefs. The latter has led to a revival of studies based on the concepts of selective exposure and cognitive dissonance (see e.g. Donsbach and Mothes, 2012; Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2010). This selectivity hits primarily the content produced by professional journalists and their media organizations, because it is still focused primarily on ‘civic life’ and events and processes occurring in the public sphere.

Assigning a social function to journalism

The marginalization of professional journalism mainly has two consequences: people's less validated and less joined cognitions. First, they are less validated because – despite all known deficiencies – professional journalistic sources on average provide a better picture of events and processes in the world than other sources (Donsbach et al., 2012; Maier, 2010). Results by Kaufhold et al. (2010) indicate that those who consume news through professional news outlets – online and offline – as compared to citizen journalism sites tended to score higher in political knowledge. The authors see these results as a natural consequence of the fact that these sources 'lack professional oversight or editing, or training in the norms of reporting'. Moy and Hussain (2013, forthcoming) write:

This new media terrain – with countless outlets, a heavy reliance on technology, and greatly popularized content – also carries implications for democratic engagement ... citizens' use of 'niche news' can profoundly shape what they know about their social world, how they feel about issues, and potentially mobilize them to action.

Second, people share fewer common perceptions of reality, because they go to different sources and are interested in different topics and arguments. The overlap of issues, evidence, and arguments between citizens decreases. Thus, the traditional model of the public sphere (Gitlin, 1998; Habermas, 2006; Hauser, 2007) breaks down. But there are also some more optimistic voices. Michael Schudson, who criticized the media for having been overtaken by a focus on efficiency and profit since the 1990s, sees in the collapse of those ownership structures some rebirth of community connection and public motive in news. How this can sufficiently come about, though, without the resources of professional media investing in people and technology awaits to be seen (cited in Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010).

This situation suggests a rethinking of the social function of journalism. As the 2010 Pew study on the state of the media reports 'there are certainly exciting things happening' with former journalists creating their own news sites, citizens covering neighborhoods, local blogs and the social media coming into the food chain of news (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). Does all this make 'traditional journalism' obsolete? I doubt it for three reasons: first, we need validated information; second, we need a 'shared reality' (see below); and, third, we therefore need trusted and trustworthy institutions.

Validation

The first argument has a lot to do with the general definition or 'identity' of journalism. Barnhurst and Owens (2008: 2557) define journalism as follows: '(It) is a constellation of practices that have acquired special status within the larger domain of communication through a long history that separated out news-sharing from its origins in interpersonal communication.' Thus, while sharing new information with others in one's social surroundings has always been a common human activity, at some point we needed a social role that ascertained truth and distinguished 'intelligence from gossip'. We pay

journalists to do this job for us (Schudson, 1978). It is not an easy one and it requires resources. As George (2011: 260) writes:

... an individual citizen at her computer may have the ability to reach an audience as large as that of a newspaper or television station, but she will not be an effective journalist if she cannot pry information out of unwilling sources and if she has no time to do any research because it is not her paid job to do so ... The public will always need the help of professional journalists.

The assessment of relevance is part of journalists' validation task. We also pay journalists to separate the important from the unimportant facts, processes, and arguments. Of course, defining 'relevance' is as tricky as assessing 'truth', but throughout the history of modern journalism we have assumed that the profession is able to do this in a more or less comprehensible and functional manner. Without this function we would be drowned in innumerable representations of reality – unable to comprehend and unable to act in the environment.

The discovery and assessment of relationships is part of the validation function. Facts and events are not just discrete entities but are related to each other, have causes and effects, and are part of larger processes. If we want not only to know reality, but to understand it somebody has to put the news of the day into context, explain it to us – and in a way that enables us to come to our own conclusions. Thus, validation is a multi-faceted construct that consists of truth, relevance, and relationships.

Shared reality

In order for societies to function, citizens need, to a certain degree, a reservoir of common knowledge, experiences, and values. The German Weimar Republic in the 1920s lacked this coherence, partly because of a combination of biased media and strong selective behavior. Jarren (2008), therefore, describes the professional media as indispensable 'intermediates' who act as brokers of communication between the different parts of society. Their task rests on the other actors' belief in their credibility and neutrality (see also Habermas, 2006).

The psychological theory of 'shared reality' assumes that human beings can only perceive reality if shared with others in communicative acts. Its major proponents, Hardin and Higgins (1996), combine the theory of symbolic interaction with empirical evidence on the communication process. They assume that even basic cognitive processes are defined by the social activities in which they are manifested.

In particular we suggest that in the absence of social verification, experience is transitory, random, and ephemeral ... But once recognized by others and shared in an ongoing, dynamic process of social verification we term 'shared reality', experience is no longer subjective; instead it achieves the phenomenological status of objective reality. That is, experience is established as valid and reliable to the extent that it is shared with others. (1996: 28)

Only sharing one's perceptions, experiences, and beliefs with others makes them intersubjective, that is reliable, valid, and generalizable. The channel for achieving shared reality is communication: 'a hold on reality requires cooperative social activity; in

particular, consensually validated social roles and relationships are required for the mutual creation, monitoring, and maintenance of the individual experience of reality' (1996: 38).

Trust in journalism

However, the functions of validation and shared reality as described above can only be accomplished when people accept these as roles of professional journalists. This is primarily a question of credibility and trust. And here, journalism in many countries shows indicators of erosion. As Cronke and Cook (2007) for the USA and Donsbach et al. (2009) for Germany have shown, fewer and fewer people attribute credibility to the work of journalists and the content of the media. In the USA, the loss of trust in the media has shown a sharper decline than the average trust in all other social and political institutions. But if the press is not trusted, even a coverage in the most valid manner will have little to no effect on people's reality perception. And it will not lead to shared perceptions, because this coverage loses its social significance and, as a consequence, exposure.

Several authors have dealt with the reasons for this development (see Donsbach et al., 2009; Ladd, 2011). This is not the place to go into detail and deliberate on the different hypotheses, but there is evidence that the loss of trust is in part a consequence of the media's own performance, including an increasing sensationalism and tabloidization, a convergence of news and entertainment. Whatever the reasons are, a lack of trust matters because it hinders the press from fulfilling its societal roles.

Journalism as knowledge profession

This very general and basic definition of journalists' role can best be described as the 'knowledge profession' of our times.² Societies live on knowledge. In a technical sense, knowledge is important to enable humans to cope with the challenges of the environment; for example, how to build fire, store water or fight diseases. In a sociological sense, knowledge is a basis for the functioning of societies, because shared knowledge forms the basis for communication and common action in a society. Before Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, it was the clergy and, to a lesser extent, the secular powers of the state who played this role. After Gutenberg, the printers and librarians and – with the spread of compulsory education in the modern state – teachers and university professors assumed this role. Later, with further dissemination of newspapers, journalists complemented the role of librarians and educators – the former being more in the business of storing knowledge and the latter in the business of conveying it. But journalism has focused primarily on gathering and conveying the news of the day and less – if at all – on connecting this information with other areas of knowledge (Hjarvard, 2008).

It seems necessary that journalists widen their societal role for three reasons. First, with the rapid acceleration of knowledge, the educational system is less able to identify which subjects among a myriad of others need to be included into a relatively fixed school curriculum. Second, the quasi-monopoly of libraries as knowledge archives has ended through the growth of the Internet, which holds almost all information on almost everything. Third, the new information technology empowers the individual to take

control of the knowledge-retrieval process. As a consequence, exposure to knowledge is more personalized, more selective and thus more fragmented. With the ready availability of hundreds of millions of websites, each catering to a tiny slice of society, people looking for information on exactly the same subject – a political candidate, for example – can find very different, even contradictory, evidence. As a consequence, communities are at risk of falling apart and splitting into many different units – each of which have their own reality, but very little shared reality and therefore lack the capability to communicate with each other (for an overview of hypotheses and evidence see Donsbach and Mothes, 2012).

Consequences for journalists' competences³

If we do regard journalism as the 'new knowledge profession', we have to define its specific competencies. This new role requires, in my view, five basic fields of competence all of which are not new to journalism education but rarely, if ever, exist in a single educational program: A journalist should (1) possess a keen awareness of relevant history and current affairs, as well as analytical thinking, (2) have expertise in the specific subjects about which he or she reports, (3) have scientifically based knowledge about the communication process, (4) have mastered journalistic skills, and (5) conduct himself or herself within the norms of professional ethics.

General competence

General competence simply means that journalists, in order to assess the salience of events and issues and to connect knowledge to context, need the broader, intellectual perspective that enables them to make sound news decisions. Furthermore, journalists need to know how to apply analytical thinking to everything they do, from challenging the veracity of information or news sources to understanding the behavior patterns and motivations of people. As Scheuer put it:

Journalists, like scholars, formulate knowledge by knitting facts to contexts. They need analytical and critical as well as narrative skills and substantive knowledge ... subject knowledge and practical skills will always jointly affect the quality of reporting, just as they jointly affect the quality of teaching. (2007a: e23; see also Scheuer, 2007b)

The issue of general competence extends beyond journalism schools to the university as a whole. In an era of specialization, the issue is whether college graduates in large numbers will continue to get the broad education that is essential to an enlightened citizenry. As specialized units within the university, journalism programs have a responsibility to guide their students' choices outside their major. The late Columbia professor James Carey stated:

[T]he natural academic home of journalism is among the humanities and the humanistic social sciences. Journalism belongs with political theory, which nurtures an understanding of democratic life and institutions; with literature, from which it derives a heightened awareness

of language and expression and an understanding of narrative form; with philosophy, from which it can clarify its own moral foundations; with art, which enriches its capacity to imagine the unity of the visual world; with history, which forms the underlying stratum of its consciousness. (cited in Gregorian, n.d.: ix)

Subject competence

Journalists also need deeper knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are covering; that is, subject competence. Only then will journalists be able to make sound judgments on the newsworthiness of events, only then can they ask critical questions to the actors, find the right experts, and only then can they resist infiltration of non-professional factors into their decision-making. While the level of this knowledge journalists have will rarely compare to the level that the experts in the respective field have, it has to be sufficiently deep so that the structure of the field is understood and the main actors are known.

This competence could be achieved by any of several paths: an integrative dual major at the undergraduate level; an undergraduate journalism degree followed by graduate work in a substantive field; an undergraduate degree in a disciplinary field followed by graduate work in journalism; graduate training in both journalism and a substantive field; or mid-career subject-area training for practicing journalists. It is important, however, that teaching the subjects, e.g. economics or politics, is at some point integrated with teaching the other fields of competence through interdisciplinary courses. Only then will journalism students be able to integrate their subject majors into the whole curriculum and their professional knowledge.

The general aim is that journalism students receive instruction in the process of knowledge-tested reporting. Such training would educate journalism students to be truth-seekers in the scientific sense and provide evidence that is always tested against alternative explanations. Philip Meyer has long argued that journalists need to apply the logic of the scientific method to their work – for instance, applying the technique of replication so that other journalists can ‘get the same answer’ (2004a). As in the sciences, ‘true objectivity,’ Meyer says, ‘is based on method, not result’ (2004b).

Process competence

Process competence relates to knowledge about the communication process, from the factors influencing a journalist’s own news decisions to possible effects on the audience or the role of social media for news exposure. If journalists know about, for instance, socio-psychological factors and group dynamics, they might resist more of the drives of ‘pack journalism’ and its often irrational decision-making. If journalists know more about audience research, they be able to present their messages in a way that might maximize not only attention to news but also, if employed in a responsible way, its cognitive processing by the audience. If they know about how public issues can be dealt with in social networks, they might be better able to shape their own news reporting accordingly.

Imaginative instructional approaches to process competence could also combine training in that competence with training in practical skills. Doing so would help bridge the long-standing rift in many programs between the journalism faculty and the communication research faculty. In the past, there has often been a lack of communication (and often appreciation) between the two camps. Such divisions may be diminishing. It is likely that the divide is not as large as in the past, due to the continuing maturation of communication research and a new generation of practitioner faculty that has a larger understanding and appreciation of scholarly research and theory. Also, students' interest and learning are enhanced when the course is taught in the context of practical journalism exercises that require the student to take process into account when creating news products. However, today, in many journalism programs worldwide scientific knowledge about the news process is not a substantial part of the curriculum, despite the fact that the necessary competence is in principle available to all journalism programs which include communication as a discipline.

Journalistic skills

Journalistic skills are what most journalists around the world will already be bringing to the job, although with different emphasis. Few of these skills are taught, however, based on scientific evidence. With the technological changes brought about by digitalization, journalists must also learn to work across different media platforms to convey their messages to the audience. However, if the goal is simply to provide skills training in the latest technology, the training may ultimately fail, because media technology is constantly changing. The instructional goal should be the strengthening of students' adaptive capacity – coursework that will enable them to respond effectively to changes in technique, platform, and perspective. Medical school training is an instructive example. Although medical students are properly taught the latest techniques, their training centers on the acquisition of knowledge that will enable them to adjust to whatever changes occur in medical technology and practice.

Professional values

The fifth area of competence relates to the general societal role of journalists and to the norms that guide their behavior on the job. As lawyers are made aware of their role within the judicial system during their academic training, journalists must be made aware of the role they play for the democratic process. This includes knowledge about where the journalists' loyalties are (e.g. to the audience and not the advertiser or the owner) and what their rights are towards seniors and proprietors. But, at the same time, they must be aware of the limitations of their rights in the rights of others such as their sources or objects of their coverage, be it people or institutions, and their audience with its right to make up its own mind on all issues. Research has shown that education in this field is indeed associated with ethical ideologies and the perceived importance of ethical codes (Detenber et al., 2012).

Considerable work is yet to be done in making determinations about the efficacy and best practices of ethics instruction. There is also a collective ethical issue that stems from

journalism's dual nature as both a private pursuit and a public duty. What obligations do journalism schools have in speaking out against news organizations and practices that clearly undermine the journalism profession? Journalism schools are not as accustomed as are medical and law schools to setting their profession's standards or acting as its guardian. But if they do not assertively do so, can they reasonably expect their students to internalize their ethics training?

De facto professionalization

If we accept these general functions of journalism and the competences derived from them, the discussion about professionalization must be re-opened. Usually, occupations operating in areas that are essential for the functioning of a society and that relate to important values get 'professionalized'. Medicine and law are prototypes of such professionalization processes. Professionals enjoy both a high degree of autonomy and a high reputation in society. Their education entails the teaching of ethical standards, admission to the profession is highly selective in the job, there are systems of checks and sanctions in cases of malpractice.

The concept of professionalization of journalism was almost totally neglected shortly after it was proposed by McLeod and Hawley (1964). 'Not possible' and 'not wanted' was the reaction of most scholars and critics. Journalists' tasks on the job were considered much too versatile to define and to teach them in a way doctors and lawyers get prepared for their professions. Furthermore, it was argued that journalists would never be able to accept responsibility for the consequences of their professional behaviors – another prerequisite for professionalization. The 'not wanted' argument pointed primarily to the nature of journalism as an occupation that has grown out of the individual's right to communicate freely with others. Any restrictions, and be it for the sake of better media content, would immediately be challenged by constitutional considerations. The latter has not changed, but the former has (Donsbach, 2010).

By 'professional journalism' I mean a social role that acts on – at least ideally – a certain level of competence, uses methods that are accepted within the professional community and by society, and where the role-takers hold a more or less joint understanding of the societal function of their profession (see competences earlier). However, because of the constitutional boundaries, rather than aiming at a full and 'legal' professionalization, the goal should be a 'de facto professionalization'. By 'de facto professionalization' I mean the development of an educational and behavioral standard in the profession, without these standards being imposed and controlled by the authorities. If the main task of journalists is to 'separate evidence from gossip' (Barnhurst and Owens, 2008), or, as described above, the detection and validation (or better: falsification) of assumptions and the connection of facts, events, and processes, this would make journalists the new 'knowledge profession' of our societies and affect the definition of their professional competences and the content of the curricula. Such a professionalization process would also make journalists more independent from commercial influences and help rebuild the firewall between the newsroom and the advertisement department.

Professionalization of journalism is, however, not a cure-all for problems around public communication. The history of professions shows that the public service orientation

of occupations fell behind more and more in favor of competences indicating efficiency and commercial success. Business administration, accounting, or marketing are cases in point. For journalism, as for the classic professions of medicine and law, the public service tradition is an indispensable element of its identity – besides the economic and the subjective tradition (Donsbach, 2010). Unfortunately, we have observed in all modern democracies that the latter traditions – and here particularly the economic tradition – have come to dominate the public service one. Neither is monopolizing public opinion nor exploiting mass taste compatible with a responsible professional journalism. Re-opening the discussion on journalists' professionalization thus cannot go without re-adjusting the weight of these different dimensions in practice.

Today, even practitioners themselves seem to be rethinking this issue. Time Inc. editor-in-chief Norman Pearlstine wondered:

... whether licensing is the opposite of everything journalism believes, or whether the idea of national standards or even a certification of some kind is worth considering ... Medical licenses help give people faith in doctors ... and although that's anathema to all of us in terms of our own training, there might be some kind of middle ground. (quoted in Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2006b: 19)

And this necessitates a response by journalism education and by the professional community.

Such a redefinition of journalism would create this new role of the 'knowledge profession' and would make journalism distinct again from other forms of communication – for the sake of the quality of the public discourse. The argument for calling for a distinct profession of journalism is not a nostalgic preservation of an occupation for which intellectuals might have a natural affection. It is the specific function that this social role fulfills and that is necessary for society as a whole. I believe that the new communication ecology, with the Internet as its dominant feature, calls for a redefinition of journalists' social role more than ever before. Equipped with the skills for the five competences as mentioned earlier, these professionals would stand out from any other communicative activities that themselves contribute to social communication – though in a different way and with different aims.

The framework for the new journalism

Most curricula today fall short of this vision of intellectual resources for journalism as a knowledge profession. A recent survey of 134 journalism program directors in the USA shows that of the above professional competences only 'media ethics and law' belong to the core of journalism education for a majority. 'Mass communication research' is mentioned by only 30 percent, 'critical thinking' by 29 and 'media sociology of news' by one percent (Blom and Davenport, 2012). The authors see the schools as caught between a rock and a hard place in accommodating the new technologies. It seems that those skills enter the programs more and more and at the expense of general intellectual and professional content.

Even ten years ago, this situation was the reason two major foundations in the USA (Carnegie and Knight) spent considerable amounts of money on rethinking journalism

education. The participating major journalism schools have been asked to develop a vision of journalism education for the future and to put this vision to the test in pilot courses of their own design. This, according to Carnegie Corporation's president Vartan Gregorian, is a critical experiment: 'Refining and reinvigorating the curriculum to better educate journalists, who will be at the forefront of diffusing knowledge to the next generations, is key to strengthening our future as a democracy' (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2006a). For (American) democracy to fully succeed:

... we need the help of journalists who are superbly trained, intellectually rigorous, steeped in knowledge about the subjects they report on, steadfast about their ethical standards and courageous in their pursuit of truth. I am convinced that our American journalism schools are the key to enabling individuals to become the kind of journalists who will strive to achieve those standards – indeed, who will require nothing less of themselves. (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2006b: vi)

The participating schools have, in the meantime, developed innovative ideas of how to reframe journalism education. As Jones (2011: 5) writes: 'At each of the schools, the effect of the Carnegie-Knight curriculum reform effort encouraged – and in some cases prompted – an atmosphere of change that went well beyond the specific area of enrichment.' All schools thought about their mission and not only developed ideas for how to cope with the new technology but also 'opened the door to new thinking about every aspect of the school's sense of what it wanted to teach and how to teach it' (2011: 5).

But the best education and training for journalists is useless if those professionals are not hired or listened to. Wenger and Owens (2012) conducted a content analysis of all employment opportunities posted by the top ten American newspaper and broadcast journalism companies over three-month periods in 2008 and 2009. The researchers coded more than 1400 postings to determine the most desirable skills and attributes for job candidates. While they observed changes over time, particularly concerning an increasing emphasis on web and multimedia and social media skills, those skills that relate to one of the above-mentioned professional competences play almost no role when journalists are recruited by the media institutions. Almost all skills refer to technical or practical abilities and experiences (2012: 17). The authors draw the conclusion that 'educators would do well to get ahead of the industry need by preparing students who are ready to step into leadership roles in the area of social media and mobile delivery' (2012: 23). While it is certainly true that these skills are useful for newsgathering and dissemination, they have very little to do with a professional identity that sees journalism as a knowledge profession and a very distinct endeavor from other activities in the Net.

But it is not only the industry itself that is driven by technology rather than societal function: The focus on non-professional sources in information-seeking seems to be already created in school (McDevitt and Sindorf, 2012). A study based on a survey of 1262 middle- and high-school instructors in the USA who teach courses that have traditionally used news content in the classroom reveals 'that teachers are gravitating toward the use of Internet-based information and away from the use of newspaper and television news content in the classroom' (Patterson, 2007b). The author sees that the efforts to

foster interest in news among adolescents is seriously declining. The increasing use of citizen journalism sites at the local level is a direct indicator of this (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2012).

Thus, the products of professional journalism need an audience. The demand side of public communication needs as much attention as the supply side with which this article has been mainly concerned. The public's interest in quality news is not only defined by the quality and societal relevance of this news, but also by the public's motivation to turn to it. If, as briefly mentioned earlier, modern societies are undergoing silent value changes that lead to a retreat from the public sphere then all efforts to redefine the journalistic role are of no purpose. The solutions to this are far beyond the control of professional communicators and their educators and need to be addressed by general education.

As a consequence, sufficient economic fundamentals for a professional journalism become slimmer. Non-commercial endeavors like ProPublica, Kaiser Health News, Global Post or the Shorenstein Center's research offers for journalists try to make up for at least some of the losses of professional news on the national level. However, the money spent on these efforts (roughly \$140 million) amounts to only ten percent of the losses in the newspaper resources (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2012).

Publicly funded news organizations might not be a solution for free market societies, at least not as exclusive alternatives. Therefore, the terms of employment and the criteria for job performance in the industry also need attention and need to be redefined under the conditions of the new communication environment. Given the driving power of economics, this is probably the hardest sell. However, professional journalism, whose primary stakeholder is the audience, and its interest must not run counter to the objectives of businesses. Several studies have proven that, in the long run, investment in the newsroom pays off (Meyer, 2004c; Rosenstiel and Mitchell, 1999) and cuts lead to losses (Mantrala et al., 2007). Mantrala and colleagues continue: '... investments in news quality affect not only subscription sales directly but also advertising revenues through subscriptions indirectly ... Consequently, our answer to the question "Is good news quality good business?" is a resounding yes' (2007: 42). If this kind of evidence is conveyed to, and adapted by, decision-makers in the media businesses this would create a new environment in which journalists could act according to their primary professional function.

Conclusions

The new communication environment brought to us by the Internet offers a plethora of chances. Possibilities for journalists to do research and for people to have a voice – even in non-democratic systems – have never been better. The web and social media also offer new forms of a public sphere and for switching between personal and public communication with a mouse-click. The biggest mistake of all those who are interested in preserving or creating a professional journalism would be to mourn the old times.

But I think that this new situation makes professional journalism more important than ever. All citizen journalists' activities, bloggers, activists, or social media fans forwarding links to news sites cannot replace the two core functions that professional journalism brings to society; that is (1) sorting out the relevant parts of reality, checking assertions about

these, and relating them to other parts of reality in the present and past; and (2) building a commonly accepted platform for social discourse credited with trust by society.

These functions require a different understanding of the role journalists play and different skills than those currently taught in journalism education. Additionally, they need to be adopted by journalists and their institutions in the first place. This conviction is not shared by everybody. For instance, Clay Shirky of New York University has suggested that the loss of news people is a 'creative destruction' and that only 'the old stuff gets broken faster than the new stuff is put in its place' (cited in Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2012). Citizen journalists and other most welcome activities will not be able to fill the gap that professional media would leave. Existing content analyses already give proof of this today (Donsbach et al., 2012; Kaufhold et al., 2010; Maier, 2010).

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Notes

1. The theoretical approach of this study and the basic methodological design were modeled after a study by the Shorenstein Center for the Press, Politics, and Public Policy; see Patterson, 2007a. For normative definitions of news see also Gans, 2011.
2. Parts adapted from Donsbach, 2010.
3. Parts adapted from Donsbach and Fiedler, 2008.

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