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Do social media spell the end of journalism as a profession?

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Abstract

This article discusses the effect of social media on journalism and its status as a profession. I start with the critique of the ideological 'biases and inclinations' which may prevent journalists from seeing the real challenges and opportunities. I then explore seven current trends, in which the social media shape the profession of journalism. I argue that no single 'one size fits all' measure will protect journalism in the future. Various business and non-profit models as well as different forms of law should uniquely fit national 'mediascapes'. The paper concludes that it is possible that the act and content of journalism will survive its early form of collective self-preservation – its professional status.

Introduction

New media have altered the delivery of journalistic content – first print and online, and, only recently, mobile and tablets. What those 'disruptive innovations' (Christensen, 2003) do mean to the profession is a matter of constant, often heated, debate. So what is the future for journalism in the digital mediums? A recent study by *eMarketer* shows that in the US, for the period 2009-2012, newspapers have lost 31.5% of their share of the advertising market to online and mobile media (Newsosaur, 2012). Newest data from the *Pew Research Centre* confirms the decline of print newspaper readers in the US – from 41% in 2002 to 23% in 2012 (PEJ, 2012a). Observers have noted similar trends in Australia (Gluyas, 2012), in Germany, the biggest western European market, and even in Japan with its 94% subscription firewall (*The Economist*, 2011).

This discussion usually focuses on the business model of newspaper journalism. There are fears that partial or full digitalisation of newspapers is unavoidable. Yet, digitalisation, it is argued, does not compensate for a decline in print forms. Advertising money is abandoning not only print, but also original news production. In Australia, the *Media Alliance* estimated that about 700 journalists from the News Limited and Fairfax Media lost their jobs in 2012. One in seven working in the largest two newspapers became unemployed, representing specialisations across the industry – reporters, subeditors and photographers working in print and online plus the editorial and administrative staff who worked alongside them (Brook, 2012).

Some link the decline of print newspapers with the death of journalism as a profession. The biggest newspapers have traditionally been the flagships of 'quality journalism' – 'quality' meaning 'professional'. The 'dumbing down' of content has been linked to a decimated workforce of professional journalists, a less informed public and a devalued democracy (O'Donnell, McKnight, & Este, 2012). The aim of this paper is to critically interrogate the 'quality' and 'professionalism' arguments in the digitalisation debate. I regard such code words as 'ideologemes' – the smallest possibly units of the journalism professional ideology (Jameson, 1981).

Professions are post-feudal carriers that have historically transformed the remnants of the aristocracy into intelligentsia. Professional ideology usually guards the privileged status of those occupations, including journalism. It lacks awareness and self-doubt. It is needlessly egocentric and heroic. This could affect journalism in times of crisis when the old ideologemes are no longer successful, and new conventions are starting to form. This paper will debunk some ideological elements of the debate in several steps. First, I will briefly recap basic critical points from the literature on the professional ideology of journalism. Deconstructing ideology often includes taking apart what it wants us to see as one. I will separate 'professional' from 'quality' and put the reader between. In addition, I will decouple the act of journalism from its profession.

Second, I will outline four ways of thinking with respect to the alleged death of journalism. I will use material from the 2009 US Senate Hearing on the *Future of Journalism*. Depending on their position, interest and prospect in the industry, representatives express different, even opposite, opinions exposing the ideological frame of the problem. As such, there is no correct interpretation with every angle projecting particular values and agendas.

And, third, I will review seven current trends of digitalisation in the media industry that will decide the future of journalism as a profession. Then I will combine the results from all three parts and try to answer the following questions:

- Is the supposed death of print newspapers synonymous with the death of journalism?
- Will hybridisation lead to the death or rebound of the printed news?
- Can journalist content survive its professional form?
- How can we protect journalism?
- Will journalism remain a profession of the few, or become an act of the many?

Journalism as a profession

Journalism is an occupation and a profession. With an *occupation* we take part in the division of labour. We exchange our work for goods and services in the market. Subjectively, one should also feel devotion to their occupation. Objectively, one should give their main working time and receive their main income from this activity with their work matching their qualification (Becker & Carper, 1956).

While all professions are occupations, few occupations have become professions (Wilenski, 1964). Professions are historical clubs of exclusive occupations. To join a profession one has to go through certain selection by government and professional bodies. John Henningham has compared the journalist professions in Australia and the US. For him, major characteristics of a profession are "service, knowledge, autonomy, organisation and ethical codes" (1995:78).

Historically, the professions emerged from the break-up of the feudal society in late medieval Europe. They resulted from the privatisation of the religion (secularisation) and of the regal (public budget separated from the private expenses of the ruler). In response, parts of the nobility became *professionalised* within public authority (parliament, court), bureaucracy and military (Habermas, 1989).

The subsequent transformation from aristocracy into a new class of *intellectuals* ('men of letters') recycled old 'natural' privileges as new cultural advantages. Neither tradition (the first son of the king), nor money (the capitalist), nor voters (the politician in electoral democracies) legitimised the power of the 'secular priests' (Schelsky, 1975). *Certified knowledge* was justifying – but not giving – their position of power protected by the guild (Gouldner, 1979). Law, medicine, military and academia are some of the oldest ones (Freidson, 1970) while librarians (Goode, 1961) and most recently, (charted public) accountants (Neu, Cooper, & Everett, 2001), are among the newest professions.

Although referred to as the 'fourth estate', journalism has always been considered a 'weak' profession (Lloyd, 1985). Historically, journalists have come from the new trading class rather than the old noble estate (McNair, 1994). Journalism also defies some basic conditions for a profession. Many journalists do not have formal training and education. The social media have further increased their number (Wilson, Saunders, & Bruns, 2008). Some reject professional licensing as 'dirty backroom business' (Gillmor, 2004). Some treat any code of professional conduct with suspicion (Goldstein, 1985). And some avoid – more in the USA and Canada and fewer in Europe and Australia – membership in professional association (Robertson, 2005; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). Weaver and Wilhoit quipped, "[t]he modern journalist is of a profession but not in one. The institutional forms of professionalism likely will always elude the journalist" (1996: 145).

Some authors define journalism outside the profession altogether – for example, as 'interpretative communities' (Zelizer, 1993) or 'collaborative networks' (Beckett, 2008). The social media have further weakened journalism's exclusiveness and have made more obvious its professional 'flaws'.

Professional ideology

Two main characteristics are slowing down the decline of journalism as a profession. First, its trademark skills are still scarce. Second, it is holding its appeal – its ideological self-promotion. All professions have ideology, and journalism is no exception. What is more, it is an *ideological profession*. Broadsheets, tabloids and infotainment, for example, legitimise not only their own position, but also the positions (credibility, image, reputation) of all other professions (Deuze, 2005a).

Mark Deuze (2005b) analyses journalism as occupational ideology. He identifies five common *ideals* (public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics), which in the past defined the profession. The internet and social media are now challenging those values (p. 447). He argues that the:

“ ... shift from individualistic, ‘top-down’ mono-media journalism to team-based, participative multimedia journalism creates particular tensions in the industry and among journalists, and potentially challenges the idea-typical values in journalism ideology (Deuze, 2005b). ”

Critics of the journalism ideology deconstruct the way the profession sees itself. They consider it the first towards any discussion of the profession and its future (Deuze, 2005b; Soloski, 1990; Zelizer, 2004). How is journalism going to adjust to the new consumer generation and communication technologies? Is it reflective enough to recognise the old values that obstruct its vision of the future?

The old journalistic ideology confuses the *profession* with its *content*. Content and profession, however, are not the same. The profession, not the content, produces ideology. Overtly, ideological statements serve to protect content. Covertly, they first protect the profession. In the current debate, old, entrenched professional ideologemes may prevent the journalists from recognising new trends in content development. Such discoveries may well throw a lifeline to the profession. They need, however, critical awareness of the ideological limits of any profession-centred thinking.

Four discourses

I will break down the views on the ‘death of journalism’ into four main positions. Table 1 presents them as four possible answers to two combined questions: ‘Is the profession of journalism dying or not?’ and ‘Is that bad or good?’

Table 1: Discourses on the future of journalism

Discourse	Good	Bad
Dying	(1)...dying and that is good	(2)... dying and that is bad
Not dying	(3)...not dying and that is good	(4)... not dying and that is not good (enough)

I will briefly outline these positions in the next sections.

As a profession, journalism is dying ... and that is good

Clay Shirky contends that in the 21st century, the social media have spelt the end of journalism as a profession. In similar way, the printing press made the scribe obsolete in the 14th century (2008: 68). For Shirky, the rare resource that used to privilege journalism was *publicity*. Its profession used to thrive on restricted access to circulation and frequencies. As professionals, journalists are guided by service to the public. At the same time, they are also gatekeepers who provide *and* control the access to publicity.

The internet and new media have removed that access restriction. Posting on a website, blog or Facebook page – even writing an email – is a new form of publishing. Shirky insists social media are not only alternate sites of publishing, but also *alternatives to publishing*. They enable the *amateurisation* of communication.

“ Mass professionalisation is an oxymoron, since a professional class implies a specialized function, minimum tests for competence, and a minority of members (Shirky, 2008: 66). ”

To sum up the position: the *profession* of journalism becomes obsolete because the social media have democratised publishing. “If anyone can be a publisher, then anyone can be a journalist” (Shirky, 2008: 71). He is right to link scarcity with profession. Keeping the deficit to reproduce the privilege forms the professional worldview. This, however, may turn into disadvantage and prevent members from embracing change. Shirky makes the point that “as with librarians and television programmers, the professionals are often the last ones to see it when that scarcity goes away” (2008: 59).

As a profession, journalism is dying ... and that is bad

Many journalists see the waning of print newspapers the main cause of the decline of the profession of journalism. A 2009 US Senate hearing on the *Future of Journalism* mirrors this position. It responded to a growing concern. New media such as aggregate news sites were making big profits at the expense of the traditional ones. Google, for example, with \$US21.7 billion in advertising revenue in 2008 does not pay for the news it provides. It collects news from free news sources. The Craigslist, which posts free classified advertisements online, gets about a billion visits a month, costing newspapers billions of dollars a year (Murphy, 2009).

David Simon, former police reporter for the *Baltimore Sun*, and writer and creator of the TV series *The Wire*, testified to the same hearing:

“ High-end journalism is dying in America and unless an economic model is achieved, it will be not reborn on the web or anywhere else ...The internet is a marvellous tool ... but thus far it does not deliver much first-generation reporting. Instead, it leeches that reporting from mainstream news publications, whereupon aggregating websites and bloggers contribute little more than repetition, commentary and froth...In short, the parasite is slowly killing the host... Because high-end journalism...is a profession; it requires daily, full-time commitment by trained men and women who return the same beats day in and day out (Simon, 2009). ”

Unlike Shirky, Simon argues that neither the internet nor any other technological innovation is causing the end of professional journalism. An inadequate business model was closing newspapers before the social media had spread. Even a decade before Web 2.0, the *Baltimore Sun* was already cutting out its afternoon edition and trimming nearly 100 editors and reporters at a time the paper was achieving 37 percent profits.

The reason is economic and political. Capitalism imposed a business model on high-quality journalism that does not recognise the public character of newspapers. Newsrooms produce high value for the public. They earn, however, low returns for the owner. They still are profitable, but their margin is narrower. Capitalists, however, expect large profits, not just some profit.

Few journalists do seriously consider public funding of newspapers, as in the case of some community radios for example, as a solution. The toxic effects of a paper's dependency on the rules of a funding body would overwrite the advantages of that choice. Suggestions mainly aim to protect the *copyright* of original news sources from online news aggregators. Producers should charge for online content, shifting widely to a paid, online subscriber base.

Another idea is to grant non-profit status to newspapers that seek it. Those would most likely be small and local news outlets. Their signature readership has not abandoned them after introducing paid online subscription.

Introducing an online paywall (a limited number of free articles) and digital subscription is useful – if not too late – for some newspapers. A more communal answer might also include tax exemption for small and local newspapers. For big and well-known news outlets, a *The Guardian*-style foundation may be a buffer in uncertain times. In sum, quality journalism needs extra political and legislative protection.

As a profession, journalism is not dying ... and that is good

The editor of *The Huffington Post*, Adrianna Huffington, represents the new online entrepreneurs. Her view is the

opposite of Simon's. She reassures the Senate Hearing,

“ Journalism Will Not Only Survive, It Will Thrive ... We are in the midst of a Golden Age for news consumers [capital letters are hers]...The future of quality journalism is not dependent on the future of newspapers (Huffington, 2008). ”

It is a hybrid future where the news aggregating sites enlist summarised content with a hyperlink to the original source. Contracts between those sites and original news producers will guarantee that old and new media share the advertising revenue. According to Huffington, the old media:

“ ... embrace the ways of the new media (including transparency, interactivity, and immediacy), and new media companies adopt the best practices of old media (including fairness, accuracy, and high-impact investigative journalism) (Huffington, 2008). ”

Unlike Shirky and Simon, Huffington sees not the end, but a beginning for the profession of journalism. The new rare quality would be skills in multiplatform writing. The consumer becomes co-producer – a *produser* (Beckett, 2008). Users and producers form a network of freelancers. They undertake research, create data, write stories, and record videos. Her vision is not less ideological than the previous ones. It legitimises the social media entrepreneurs as the new professionals in journalism.

In the hearing, Huffington referred to Simon's example, “The idea that the *Baltimore Sun* could charge for content that would only be available to those paying for a subscription to the Baltimore Sun seems to me so antiquated.” Here, Senator John Kerry, chairing the session, cut in:

“ It's a product, it's created by somebody, it's intellectual property. Why is it antiquated for them to be paid for their product? (T. Rogers, 2009). ”

As a profession, journalism is not dying ... but that is not good (enough)

This perspective puts the *profiting* business model of newspaper production front and centre. Simon (2009) critiques the inadequate and unfettered free-market logic imposed on newspapers. Media owners, however, believe mixing print and digital to profit it is the only way. Like Shirky and Huffington, the pro-business argument rejects the presumption that ‘the journalists know better what the clients need’ as paternalistic and shortsighted. It aims to protect copyright, which ranges from paywalls and subscription to mutual and rather self-regulatory – arrangements within the industry.

Perhaps the most prominent speaker here is the chair of News Corporation, Rupert Murdoch. His well-publicised view is that the papers are not dead but have to change radically to meet the needs of the new media users (T. Rogers, 2008). His main argument is that the *core customer* has changed. A new generation of *digital natives* is replacing the old pre-internet generation who have become *digital immigrants*. The younger customers want their news on demand, when it works for them, and “certainly do not want news presented as a gospel” (Murdoch, 2005).

The user holds the key to profiting. Digitalisation is not ‘de-professionalisation’ (against Shirky). There is still future in the (news-) paper (against Huffington). The business model, however, has to get right the *hybrid* character of the next generation news delivery platforms. If it succeeds, digital will not kill, but complement – and also stabilise – paper. Murdoch believes the news media will evolve from ink and paper to *news brands*. Their delivery will include web sites, blogs, RSS feeds, customised content, and mobile phones.

A major obstacle, however, is the management. The digital immigrants – Murdoch admits he is one of them – are still at the helm of the media industry and struggle to free their minds of their “prejudices and predispositions” (T. Rogers, 2008). Only the fittest and best prepared will survive. Markets are merciless to the under-capitalised, non-aligned or just complacent.

In the next sections I will outline seven emerging trends in the industry and discuss their relevance to the future of the journalist profession. They are:

- Public attention
- Hyperlocal sites
- Content farms
- Hybrid media
- Shift from watchdog to guide dog
- Protection of the source and

- Journalism as professional communication

Public attention as scarce resource

Clay Shirky's theory of the death of journalism by unrestricted publicity is questionable. It is true the old media first filtered, then published. In the new media such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter, one first publishes and then the searching public filters the content. Some new media however such as blogs and online newspapers, are still filtering first. They do it the old way by editing or the new way by moderating. The purpose of the electronic media is important. Sharing and networking media are less preventive. Media that aim to lead and influence are more protective and selective.

I contend that for communicators, including journalists, the limited resource is *public attention*, not *publicity*. Attention is what all speakers compete for (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). Money is the primary equivalent in the market where exchange of goods and services takes place. Attention is the currency in the public sphere where speakers and listeners exchange information. Money is secondary there. Independent rating agencies measure attention and transform it into advertising revenue. Program ratings (audience reach and share, for example) and site metrics (such as exposure and engagement) make it possible as they help calculate the worth of the media for advertising money. As the social media have radically broadened the access to publishing, the clamor for publicity is louder and fiercer. This only makes public attention scarcer and more precious.

A growing *attention economy* capitalises on the increasing lack of this resource (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Goldhaber, 1997). A simple calculation leads to the current migration of advertising money from newspapers to news aggregating sites. The latter attract more attention for less money than the former. If skills and strategies for attracting *and* keeping public attention are increasingly rare, then this is good news for the journalist profession. In competition for the attention of increasingly distracted and choosy audiences, nothing could replace the ability to curate information and tell stories.

Hyperlocal sites

Hyperlocal news sites deliver news to and from their neighbourhood. Their owners are usually *social entrepreneurs* who often do not have formal education as journalists. They collect links to articles and blogs, encourage readers to write about what is happening around their place, and tap into data of local government. Sites like EveryBlock, Placeblogger and AOL's *Patch* in the USA and Fitzroyalty, Marickvillia and, again, franchises of *Patch* in Australia (Fitzroyalty, 2010) present some of the fastest growing media markets.

But, how do hyperlocal sites affect traditional, especially local and regional newspapers? They occupy the niche of *community reporting* allowing residents immediacy and involvement. They usually start as community 'insiders' and media 'outsiders'. They then 'invade' the marketplace of local journalism and 'intercept' its advertising revenue. Historically, they come from outside the profession. They deliver the news without the newspaper. At the same time, newspapers are adjusting to this challenge by contracting or buying hyperlocal sites from the same area (Mozkowitz, 2010). Through the takeover of such sites, big media may diversify and expand.

But are hyperlocal sites financially sustainable? Currently, most of them barely survive relying on charitable enthusiasm rather than selling advertisements. The sharper focus on neighbourhood the smaller the size of the audience. The incremental revenue from each view online is remarkably small. *Patch.com*, for example, charges \$US15 for every thousand viewers. There needs to be many thousands of viewers to make the hyperlocal site sustainable. *Patch.com*, however, shows a capacity to stitch those small incremental revenues together through bigger traffic, more advertisers, and selling the same commercial across its multiple sites (Rainey, 2011).

With the advance of online search techniques and smart phone applications, the hyperlocal sites are successfully replacing the *Yellow Pages*. Such sites have the advantage of managing the online advertisement inventory from a central platform. They use the leverage of a far-reaching network that can span sites from Google to MSN. In return, they provide expertise for optimising key search words that potential customers are using (Cunningham, 2007).

The hyperlocal sites are thus emerging markets in which social entrepreneurs position themselves strategically for the long run. They deliberately take chances and regard low profit and unpaid freelancing as an investment in the future. They hope they only *defer* the gratification from the profession. They work today. Recognition and satisfactory pay will come tomorrow.

Content farms

Content farms produce news by using networks of cheap or pro-bono freelancers. For example, Yahoo has bought such a farm, *Associated Content*, for about \$USD100 million. Demand Media uses freelancers to deliver

information for online sections of traditional media such as *USA Today* and *San Francisco Chronicle* (Ives, 2010c). *Examiner.com* has over 40,000 freelance workers. Its *BleacherReport* boasts more than 3,600 unpaid authors. And *The Huffington Post* uses the pro-bono services of 6,000 bloggers. In comparison, it employs around 53 staff who edit and produce original content (Lee, 2010).

The spread of content farms presents a challenge to the profession of journalism. For many journalists, they are forms of self-imposed freelance placements or internships. They defer but also promise professional status. As with the hyperlocal sites enthusiasts, most content farmers are not mere idealists who are happy to write and publish even if this does not earn them money. Rather, they consider their work a voluntary apprenticeship through which they build a portfolio and brand themselves.

Is this another case of confused individual and collective mobility? Ideology generalises from single cases. There always are examples of individual advancement despite a delayed entry into the profession. Psychology does not necessarily translate into sociology. Individual mobility – personal advancement *within* the profession – constantly takes place, even during stagnation. Collective mobility however, coincides with changes *within* the profession. It usually happens once in a generation; it makes the generation (Ellmers, Wilke, & Knippenberg, 1993). Individually, everyone hopes to gain professional status in a while. Collectively, however, ‘massovisation’ of unpaid journalism may undermine the profession as a whole.

Hybrid media

Few will disagree that the future of journalism hinges on the hybrid rebound of high-quality products, including newspapers. Print newspapers *must* add digital platforms, as they have to compete with diversified and digital-first newspapers. TV stations have also gone online; they have diversified, so to speak, digital with digital. For the first time, online news has put print and broadcast in direct competition. And in critical areas such as content design, video production and real time streaming broadcasters have a ‘natural’ advantage. Facing hybridisation, will the newspapers manage to keep their loyal readers? What will happen when they increase print circulation prices to rebalance their revenue (Ives, 2010a)?

On the one side, news aggregating sites still suck up digital advertisement revenue from the newspapers. In the USA, newspapers reach a third of the web users. Their share of digital advertising revenue however, is much smaller – about 11 percent in 2009 and heading for 8 percent in 2014. On the other side, advertisers trust newspapers more due to their higher authority and better-developed brands. Newspapers still command much higher internet rates than the news aggregating sites. In April 2010 they earned \$US7 for a thousand impressions against about \$US2.5 for the rest of the web (Ives, 2010b).

Most likely we are heading for a hybrid future, where hyperlocal sites, content farms and newspapers partner together because they need one another’s competitive advantage. Another USA example is the association of *The New York Times* with the *BayCitizen* for *The Times’ Bay Area* edition and the Chicago News Cooperative for its Chicago edition (Ives, 2010b). Yet such ventures may go awry, as the Australian case of bungled takeover of the largest internet service provider in the 1990s, *One.Tel*, shows. Murdoch’s *News Limited* and Kerry Parker’s *PBL* each took a 20 percent share of *One.Tel*. This was one of the first tries to “bring the News Limited in from the internet wilderness” only to witness *One.Tel* failing and being placed in public administration not long after (Butler, 1999; Lewis, 2004).

There are already some signs of hybrid rebound. In September 2010 *The Wall Street Journal* reported a 1.82 per cent increase in paid circulation on weekdays for the previous six months. The paper achieved that not through its paid print circulation, which had remained unchanged, but through its electronic editions such as *WSJ.com*, iPad and mobile subscriptions as well as e-reader circulation. These combined helped the journal to increase its circulation to 449,139, up 10.4 per cent from the period a year earlier (Ives, 2010a).

From watchdog to guide dog

The social media have also markedly altered the role of the journalist as *mediator* between content and user. Interactivity, immediacy and multitasking are key words for this technological change. But have they weakened that role?

Some argue the social networking strengthens the mediator role. The media agent guides the user through the variety of platforms giving the user orientation in content flow. This subtle help – call it managing or moderating – takes place through conversation, not monologue. *Crowd sourcing* (Howe, 2006) and *citizen journalism* (Gillmor, 2004) sites – where taping into latent talent has priority to in-house publishing – introduce new, complex and strict standards of *moderating* and *editing*.

Education is also part of the journalist’s role. Its form however, has changed and its content expanded. In the traditional media, journalists were educating through contributing to content. In the new media, they also

educate the contributors of content.

There is a shift from “collecting of information to directing the social flow of information and public debate” (Barodel, 1996: 283). The change does not make old journalistic skills redundant. Management, for example, does not supplant creativity – it rather supplements it. The new mix transforms into ‘*redaction*’ – constant editing of content from multiple sources (Hartley, 2000). Journalists are evolving as ‘*preditors*’ – new media employees (and self-employed small business entrepreneurs) who blend the works of producer and editor (Miller, 2007).

As a consequence of these multiple changes, a critical transformation in audiences and the way they use the media is taking place (Baym, 2003), notably the layering of readers depending on the intensity of their contributions as writers. The most innovative and committed – the ‘*pro-am*’ or ‘*semi-pro*’ (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004) – are learning by doing to meet the media needs and standards. According to this theory, journalism does not lose quality rather journalists ‘re-qualify’. The multiskilling of reporters goes hand in hand with the opening of the professions to outsiders (amateurs) and entrepreneurs (other professions).

Journalism, therefore, has evolved from *watchdog* to *guidedog* (Black, 1997). The features that characterise this change are hypertextuality, meta-information, networking and coaching of pro-am enthusiasts. The new role is not less exclusive; it is not less professional, it is just different.

Protection of the source

Digitalisation of the media has also expanded the grey area of unsolved ethical and legal issues. They are hard to control and easy to abuse. Self-control, however, needs extra expert and citizen skills and the demand for them is increasing. Usually professions are neither democratic nor undemocratic. But in this realm, a stronger profession chimes with a stronger democracy.

Watching, nurturing and moderating non-offensive content has become an around-the-clock job. Many journalists have become spokespersons for digital ethics. Electronic writing is not only a new style of writing, but also a new code of behaviour. It requires new social skills, including how to listen to a conversation, how to start and keep a new one, and how to intercept and defuse ‘flame wars’ (Heenan, 2010). Preventive editing and cultivation of tolerant contributors has been critical for treading the fine line between agitation and litigation.

Among the legal issues, *protection of the information source* is particularly relevant to the maintenance of faith in the professional status of journalism. In the USA and Canada, there is rising tension between state and federal *shield laws*. The latter are less protective and can overtrump the former, especially in high-profile cases. Such was ‘Scootergate’ in the USA, which saw Judy Miller, a *New York Times* journalist, and Josh Wolf, a video blogger, convicted. And in Canada in 2010, the Supreme Court upheld a 2008 ruling by the Ontario Court of Appeal that rejected a reporter’s privilege claim and ordered a newspaper to surrender a document to police. This reversed a decision by the Ontario Superior Court which had quashed the search warrant for the information involving a land deal by former Prime Minister Jean Chretien (Toplitt, 2010). In Australia, News Ltd journalists Gerard McManus and Michael Harvey were convicted and fined about \$US7, 000 each. Both had refused to reveal the source of a 2004 report outlining a federal government decision to reject an about \$US500 million increase in war veterans’ entitlements (Veness, 2010).

Protection of the anonymity of a source has been an important privilege of the journalistic profession. Under certain conditions, only journalists can remain silent on the source of their information, and this old legal privilege props up the profession. To protect the profession, one protects its sources.

But *who is a journalist* in the social media? Are you a journalist when you publish a photo taken with your mobile phone? Is ‘stock photography’ professional? Should blogging, tweeting and even emailing equally enjoy similar professional privilege? It turns out that ‘who is a journalist’, is not the right question. The debate is shifting from *who* should be protected, to *what* should be protected – from the *actor* to the *act* of journalism (Gillmor, 2010). Should legislators be able to codify the act rather than the status, they will strip from the profession an important ground for its existence.

This third generation of legislation however, is still not in sight. Currently, second generation laws strike a compromise and grant at least some social media some level of protection. In the USA, most states have achieved that. A similar federal shield law has also passed the Senate judiciary committee. In Australia, Tasmanian senator Andrew Wilkie tabled a bill in the Federal Parliament, known today as the Evidence Amendment (Journalists’ Privilege) Bill. It is based on one of the most progressive shield laws – that of New Zealand (Rogers, 2010). Before entering parliament, Wilkie became a whistleblower against the war in Iraq while working for the *Office of National Assessment* (ONA). A Senate amendment by the Australian Greens had extended its protection to anyone “engaged and active in the publication of news”, including online journalists, bloggers and tweeters (Media Spy, 2011). The House of Representatives passed it as legislation in 2011.

This development is significant for the future of the profession. The social media have diluted the professional counters of journalism. Empirically legal protection is less likely to be collective (of the formal status and role of the journalist), and more likely to be individual (of the informal act of producing content of public interest). This redefines journalism from a profession of a selected few to a specific act of many. Journalism moves from particular collective rights to universal individual rights. Professional privilege transforms into *citizen* competence.

Journalism as public communication

To understand the changes in journalism, one has to look at the broader picture – the changes in public communication. The social media have equally affected all communications professions. The contention that ‘social media has ruined marketing’, for example, has recently provoked not only a few publications, but also a whole international conference on e-marketing (Follow, 2011). The same problems are evident here also. Core audiences and advertising revenue – two sides of the same coin – are moving from traditional to online media. Marketing and public relations, for example, are hiring social media *strategists* and setting up new metrics to respond to this challenge (Collingwood, 2010).

Metrics are shifting from measuring *exposure* (such as impressions, page views and likes), to gouging *engagement* (such as posts to comments ratios, re-commenters and ‘people talking about’). Communicators are following the advertising industry lead by searching for social media which become network hubs. They survey and measure the extent to which the media involve their audiences, keep them talking, produce viral content and influence public opinion (Bush, 2009).

Journalistic ideology used to tolerate – and boast about – liaisons with *creative* disciplines – as with the *New Journalism* mix of fiction and nonfiction, for example (Wolfe & Johnson, 1990). At the same time, it used to deny collaborations with communications professions such as marketing and public relations. On the contrary, journalism used to promote itself as the opposite of professional *communications* in the plural. It saw itself as the public *communication* in the singular (Powell & Cowart, 2003). Common words such as ‘self’ and ‘other’ have been juxtaposed in the same way as ‘public’ versus ‘private’, ‘truth’ versus ‘spin’, and ‘independence’ versus ‘subservience’ (Hallin, 1994). In order to entrench its sense of superiority by differentiating from the other communication professions, journalism had to appear as more than a profession.

The internet and social media have empirically refuted those ideological oppositions. Today, it is more obvious that journalism is just one of the communication professions. It is no coincidence that, historically, former journalists have become the first generation of political consultants and public relations practitioners (Davis, 2007; Shoemaker, 1989; Turow, 1989).

“ Instead of having some kind of control over the flow of (meaningful, selected, fact-checked) information in the public sphere, journalists today are just some of the many voices in public communication, including but not limited to, professionals in public relations and marketing communications, advertisers, and citizens themselves through weblogs, podcasts, and using all kinds of other online publishing tools (Deuze, 2008; p. 12). ”

Conclusion ... where do we go from here?

While news of the death of journalism is exaggerated, it is likely that its public content will survive its professional form. Technological changes have challenged the notion of ‘professional journalism’, and especially its flagship of ‘quality’ newspapers. The internet and social media are only the most recent ‘disruptive innovations’. In recent history, there were two earlier technical revolutions that triggered similar worries – first the introduction of the radio (Lappin, 1995) and then, the advent of television (Postman, 1986). Both deeply changed the profession of journalism – however, they were not its death knell.

Does then social media present a more radical change? What does the digital era hold for journalism? There are several developments to watch.

Print

In Australia, the two newly founded online newspapers – *The Guardian Australia* and *The Global Mail* – are digital-firsts. It is well known that the number of print newspaper readers has been in steep decline in the USA for some time. It has also been in some decline in Germany, Italy and Japan. According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2013*, however, newspaper buyers in the last three countries have fallen slightly, but this fall is still within an overall margin of a high level of purchasing (Reuters Institute, 2013). In addition, new emerging markets such as India and China are showing no sign of a similar crisis, rapidly increasing the circulation of their print newspapers. The sheer size of those new markets support the view that globally newspaper, circulation and journalist numbers are on the increase (*The Economist*, 2011).

In a recent study, Neil Thurman looked at ‘quality reading’, the time spent on reading. He researched twelve of the UK’s biggest newspapers across their print and online channels. The surprising result was that a minimum of 96.7 percent of the time spent reading was in print, not online media (Thurman, 2013). Why? Thurman presumes that, while online reading is quicker and more frequent (such as during breaks at work), people read print less often, but for longer periods. This raises questions about the metrics of engagement as they are designed for the characteristics of new media use only. Is that correct? While social media can be said to engage through steady chat, print media engages too – through immersion in solitude. Which is deeper? Which has longer lasting effects (an important consideration for advertisers)?

Bundling

The strategy of the hybrid media is *bundling*. Print cannot survive without online platforms. Conversely, print provides digital platforms historically achieved weight and reputation. Print and digital together create the package – the brand.

According to the Pew Research Centre’s *State of the Media Report 2012*, news consumption is growing thanks to hybridisation and, most recently, the surge in mobile technology (PEJ, 2012b). In the US, about 100 papers were going to erect paywalls in 2012, joining another 150 who had already done so. *The New York Times*, with 454,000 paid digital subscribers in 2012, on 1 April cut its number of free articles from 20 to 10 a month. *The Australian*, owned by News Limited and the only national newspaper in that country, has already been protecting most of its online articles and offering a 28-day free subscription. In 2013 Fairfax’s *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* followed suit with 30 free articles a month before the paywall kicks in. The Fairfax paywall revenue however, is disappointing. Even when the bundled and digital-only subscriptions reaches its targets, the income will only increase to 3.3 percent of the company’s annual revenue, not enough to reverse the downward trend (Myillylathi, 2013).

Murdoch has successfully bundled *The Wall Street Journal* because it has been an established, high-end and opinion-leading newspaper with well-defined middle-class audiences loyal to their brand. Yet he has not been able to achieve the same with *The Australian*. News Limited, however, is large enough and sufficiently diversified to cope with the losses in the mid term. Unfortunately, the same is not true for Fairfax.

Recently, the Amazon’s founder Jeff Bezos bought *The Washington Post*. The ‘bundling king’ was already offering combined print and digital subscriptions for *Vogue*, *Wired* and *Vanity Fair* (Ingram, 2013). Bezos announced that he liked the print and would save it by offering ‘daily bundles’. He promised to ‘put the customer before the advertiser’ (Farhi, 2013). He is in the best position to do it because – similar to *News Corporation*’s global media empire and to *Patch.com* as the mother of all hyperlocal sites – *Amazon* has reach and prominence. The leverage of its wholesale channels is much stronger than the combined power of the newspaper and magazine distributors.

Bundling may work for large and expertise newspapers. But can it help the smaller, regional and community media? Bundling is the radical application of the business model in the hybridisation of newspapers. It will probably lead to further concentration of newspapers and shrinking of the number of paid staff.

Protection

The *Pew Report 2012* finds that from the growing appetite for news, tech companies which provided online platforms, benefited mostly from the advertisement sales. Only five such companies accounted for 68 per cent of the advertising revenue in 2011 (PEJ, 2012b). Would those tech companies follow the example of *Amazon.com* and give a boost to legacy media brands?

In summary, there is agreement in the industry about the link between protection of the journalistic content (and source) and preservation of the journalistic profession. The disagreement, however, is *what* exactly to protect, and *how* to do that.

(1) There is a *business* and a *nonprofit* model. Within both models, there are competing projects involving different *degrees of regulation*.

Table 2: Protection of content examples

Model	Low/No regulation	Higher regulation
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Nonprofit	(1) The Guardian	(2) Revitalisation Act
Business	(3) NewsRights	(4) German legislation

The Guardian is an example of *nonprofit low* – actually *no-regulation* solution. The Scott Trust, founded in 1936, secures the financial and editorial ‘independence’ as well as the ‘quality’ content and ‘liberal’ tradition of the newspaper. The foundation support has allowed its current editor, Alan Redbridge, to transform *The Guardian* into a global digital newspaper (with the Australian edition being the latest) without erecting any paywall. It is still losing money with no immediate prospect of getting out of the red. While its online edition is the third most popular English newspaper, its print circulation is half what it was in 2002. The prospect of publishing only the weekly in print is real. The trust formula however, allows Redbridge to feel comfortable with “minimisation of the losses” rather than “maximisation of the gains” as the new normal (Auleta, 2013). The uniqueness of this respected British newspaper, dating from 1821, makes its nonprofit model difficult to replicate. How many papers in the world could prosper on old money?

(2) The idea of *increased regulation* through granting *non-profit* status to newspapers, which want it, is also worth exploring. Precedents are already there. In 2009, a US Democratic senator, Benjamin Cardin, introduced such a bill, the *Newspaper Revitalisation Act*. If it finds enough co-sponsors, the *Act* would allow newspapers to run as non-profits for educational purposes under the US tax code, giving them a similar status to public broadcasting companies. Advertising and subscription revenue will be tax-exempt. Contributions to support news production will be tax-deductible. As non-profits, they will be free to report on political campaigns. In exchange, they will be banned from endorsing politicians (Ferraro, 2009). A few politicians and big private players in the newspaper market have successfully stalled the bill. Consistent with older arguments against public broadcasting, they suspect that they will be subject to unfair competition.

(3) Although big newspaper corporations have some of the best lawyers, they are reluctant to wade into copyright wars. Lawsuits require money, time and good faith. Apart from this, there are two major *collective* solutions, one being *low-regulation* and the other being *high-regulation*. *Low-regulation* would mostly mean *self-regulation* of the newspaper industry – nationally and perhaps globally. In the United States for example, an association of big media companies including *The New York Times Co.* has introduced *NewsRights* which tracks the unpaid use of their articles. It is too early to say if this initiative will evolve as an all-encompassing framework that will transform the news collecting sites into paying customers. Industry self-regulation has an advantage over government control. It spreads easily across national borders; it can become global. Government rulings are harder to globalise and there is yet no global government.

(4) The *high-regulation* solution includes that of *national regulation* by legislative intervention. Governments are biding their time; they prefer to see the industry regulating itself. There are warnings, however, that if this does not happen soon, they will recourse to legislating from above despite the potential ‘toxic’ side effects marked by ideologemes such as legislation having the impact of threatening ‘free speech’ and stalling the ‘digital economy’. The first one poised to take this recourse is the German governing coalition, led by Chancellor Angela Merkel. In March 2012 Merkel’s government announced legislation which would create copyright for publishers. The proposal is radical. News aggregating and search engine sites would have to pay the publishers not only for displaying whole texts or parts of their articles, but also for the smallest snippets shown in the search links. A collecting body, not unlike that which collects distribution royalties to authors in literature and music, will gather the fees. Content would be protected for one year (Pfanner, 2012).

If such measures of protecting the copyrights of publishers and journalists spread – through industrial self-regulation or government legislation – there will be winners and losers. Some news aggregating sites might prefer to shut down rather than to pay fees. But this has already happened to a few newspapers that could no longer afford to produce original content. To some extent – and if not too late – such measures might re-establish the equilibrium between origin and pay of content.

This is a mid-term goal. The outstanding, most difficult and long-term aim is to protect the act and content of journalism. Protecting the profession of journalism has mainly concerned its members, the journalists themselves. This may in part explain why the profession may possibly not last forever. The day journalism provides free content that can draw the attention of a high-profile readership and high-end advertising, just as expensive content does, it will lose one of the main justifications for being considered a profession. Protecting the journalistic content and the act of its creation, however, is critical for preserving the competent citizenry and

democratic public sphere. At stake is not only an early form of intellectual work, the profession, but also the 'oxygen' of the civil society – freedom of information.

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