

# Journalism Research

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# Editorial

## issue 2/2018

What do journalists have in common with conspiracy theorists? *Journalistik* co-publisher Tanjev Schultz has a contentious theory, which he presents in an essay for the second issue of *Journalistik*.

This issue's extensive empirical paper comes from Leipzig: Cornelia Wolf and Alexander Godulla have conducted an empirical study to investigate the hype (now slowly abating) about newsgames. Spoiler alert: The new format does not live up to expectations.

As you can see, *Journalistik* has chosen some seminal topics for its second issue. But this is just the beginning. In this issue, the publishers have decided to put spotlight on the future of journalism – a topic very close to their hearts.

Also in this issue on the future of journalism:

- A paper on journalist training (Link) by Ken Starck – who considers what we should tell our children or grandchildren if they tell us they want to become journalists
- A debate by Sebastian Köhler, who advocates journalistic communication on equal terms
- “Courage journalism”: a discussion piece by Peter Welchering on the question of why we shouldn't just let our profession be abolished
- Why journalism is not dying, but just getting started – Horst Pöttker gives reasons to be optimistic

If we have struck a chord and you would like to join the discussion, please contact the editors: [redaktion@journalistik.online](mailto:redaktion@journalistik.online). Topic proposals and manuscripts can also be sent to this address. Papers are selected independently by the publisher. We will be in touch.

***Translation: Sophie Costella***

# Newsgames in journalism

## Exploitation of potential and assessment by recipients

by Cornelia Wolf & Alexander Godulla

*Abstract:* The digital transformation is still presenting established media organizations with huge challenges. Younger generations socialized by multi-optional end devices such as smartphones and tablets have very different expectations of what the content and form of journalistic products should look like. It is therefore no wonder that media organizations are exploring one of the world's most lucrative markets, with many launching newsgames under their own brand in recent years. This hybrid form between journalism and gaming offers high selectivity and brings current or past events and the processes behind them to life. But journalism research is yet to pay much systematic attention to this new convergence field. This paper therefore starts by systematically limiting and defining the term 'newsgames', referring to literature from communication studies and computer game research. Based on a content analysis of 36 international newsgames, it then goes on to examine which aspects of form (game design) and content (topics, interactivity) newsgames display and which revenue models are integrated into them. Finally, 60 qualitative interviews enable the authors to determine how young users assess newsgames and whether consuming such games can generate greater awareness of and interest in established media brands and journalistic content. The investigation shows that media organizations are doing little to exploit the wide range of design options. The games receive a muted reception and show little in the way of positive effects for the media brand. Furthermore, newsgames do not generate any appreciable desire to find out more about the topic.

The establishment of stationary and mobile internet and the associated distribution of journalistic information via digital end devices have had a huge impact on journalism. This transformation is still presenting established media organizations with huge challenges.

The media consumption behavior of younger cohorts in particular is now strongly focused on online media. More than two thirds of 18 to 24-year-olds consume news via social networks (Newman, Fletcher, Levy, & Nielsen 2016: 87). According to the Digital News Report 2017, online media including social media was the most important source of news for 64 percent of 18-24-year-olds and 58 percent of 25-34-year-olds in all countries examined worldwide. The medium attributed the least relevance was the printed daily newspaper, consumed by just five percent in each of these cohorts (Newman et al. 2017: 10).

Furthermore, having been socialized with multi-optional end devices like smartphones and tablets, younger age groups have different expectations of how media products should be presented (cf. e.g. Wolf 2014; Godulla & Wolf 2017). This is leading to changed requirements for how the form and content of both current news and background reporting should look (Godulla & Wolf 2017; Sturm 2013).

Although successful brand transfer means that many digital products from established media organizations are in use (e.g. Bitkom 2016; van Eimeren & Koch 2016; Wolf & Schnauber 2015), international studies repeatedly show that the audience is rarely willing to pay for digital news. For several years, the Digital News Report has consistently shown that the percentage of people who say they have paid for online news in the last year remains in single or low double figures in countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and the USA. In Germany, just three percent have taken out a paid digital subscription (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017, p. 24).

It is therefore no wonder that media organizations are turning their attention to neighboring fields. While journalism is struggling with the digital transformation, the video games industry, for example, has developed into one of the world's most lucrative markets (Foxman 2015: 4). Sales saw rapid growth in 2016, ranging from a plus of four percent in North America to 20 percent in Latin America. In total, the worldwide games market generated sales of USD 99.6 billion (up 8.5%) (Newzoo Games 2016: 10). Digitalization, and especially the wide variety of internet-enabled and mobile end devices, has diversified the games market immensely. From an economic point of view, games consumed on a computer screen are especially important for generating sales (USD 31.9 billion) (Newzoo Games 2016: 12).

A few years ago, media organizations began to produce newsgames in order "to increase levels of readership and user engagement" (Conill & Karlsson 2016: 5). As well as tapping younger audiences through the use of new forms of storytelling, the opportunity for new revenue models is another aspect that makes the games market interesting for both media organizations and journalism research. This is giving rise to a growing field of indie games developers and publishers (Foxman 2015) who experiment with new ways to generate income. Put simply, "many hope that newsgames offer an innovative strategy in the fight for the scattered attention of online users" (Plewe & Fürsich 2017: 12).

Newsgames can thus be seen as a hybrid of journalism and gaming (Bogost, Ferrari, & Schweizer, 2010, p. 13). Many types offer their audience greater selectivity – they involve the audience in storytelling by offering predefined selection options (Aarseth 1997; Schrape 2012). "Given the popularity and cultural impact of computer games, it made sense that news also adapted this form of digital storytelling to convey information" (Plewe & Fürsich 2017).

Although the issue of convergence has attracted attention in various contexts in journalism research, little attention has so far been paid to the way journalism and digital games are converging (Vobič, Dvoršak, & Vtič 2014: 123f.). Of the few studies that do focus on newsgames, the majority pursue

the legitimate question of whether they can be considered a new form of journalism, and usually refer to case studies (e.g. Bogost et al. 2010, 2010; Meier 2017; Plewe & Fürsich 2017; Vobič et al. 2014). Newsgames are yet to be analyzed systematically from the perspective of form and content. In addition, there is the question of how young audiences assess newsgames and whether their use can generate attention and interest in established media brands and journalistic topics.

## 1 Question and method

In order to answer these questions, this paper first limits the term ‘newsgames’ and then uses references to literature from communication studies and computer games research to systematically develop dimensions that create a framework for the form and content of newsgames.

Finally, a quantitative content analysis is used to examine the form aspects of game design – game design, game mechanics, and gameplay (Bunchball 2010) – the content design of the games – themes, genres, interactivity, purpose and scope (Djaouti, Alvarez, Jessel, & Jean-Pierre 2011: 8) – and the integration of revenue models such as paid content and advertising (Foxman 2015). The sample comprised 36 newsgames from around the world, listed in the Serious Games Directory (D’Agostino 2016). Only games produced or published by established media organizations or journalistic editorial offices were included.

The second step examines the potential recipients of these games. A sample of 60 people aged 20 to 29 years – the group least likely to pay for news content – was given six prototype newsgames to play. They were then asked to take part in qualitative guided interviews to find out whether they remembered the topic, the core message, and who had published the game. We also wanted to find out whether the games made the participants want to learn more about the topic addressed.

The investigation shows that media organizations are far from using the full range of design options for the form and content of the games they produce. The results of the reception study indicate that the journalistic games tested have no positive influence on the media brand, with most participants failing to recognize or remember the organization’s brand. A quarter even thought that the games were published by the wrong company or a non-profit organization. Furthermore, consuming newsgames did not make the participants want to find out more about the topic addressed in the game.

## 2 Newsgames in digital journalism

Researchers’ lack of interest in the convergence between journalism and digital games is all the more astounding given that so many established media brands, including the New York Times, the Guardian and the Süddeutsche Zeitung, are already experimenting with newsgames (e.g. Bogost, Ferrari, & Schweizer 2010).

There is currently no definition that is applied consistently. As a general definition, newsgames are a hybrid of journalism and gaming (Bogost, Ferrari, & Schweizer, 2010, p. 13). They combine “real-world based sources with virtual interactive experience and procedural rhetoric, thus opening space for dynamic experimentation, stimulating further in-depth analysis and discussion” (Wiehl 2014). The range of topics they cover is broad, extending from shitstorms (Shitstorm Fighter, BR), war and migration (Darfur is Dying, MTVU) to tax evasion (Arte) and climate change (Climate Challenge, BBB). For the latter, the BBC explicitly states that “wherever possible, real research has been incorporated into the game” (BBC 2014).

Key characteristics of newsgames include competition, players proceeding according to strict rules, and efforts to achieve specific aims (Deterding et al. 2011). Climate Challenge, for example, presents a complex topic of current relevance to society in the form of a game. Playing the role of the President of European Nations, players have to take measures to reduce CO2 emissions while also managing to stay in office. This involves weighing up their strategies with the necessary resources and negotiating with other politicians. According to the BBC, the aim of the newsgame is to “give an understanding of some of the causes of climate change, particularly those related to carbon dioxide emissions; give players an awareness of some of the policy options available to governments; give a sense of the challenges facing international climate change negotiators” (BBC 2014).

## 2.1 Definition of newsgames

Some authors have established central features that define newsgames. Aspects that are relevant to the framework of newsgames applied here are systematized and summarized below:

**Reference to current events:** “Newsgames all refer to actual events, current or past, with most of these events standing in the context of bigger social, historical or political issues” (Plewe & Fürsich 2017: 3). The name ‘newsgames’ can thus refer to more than just the day’s news, making Sicart’s (2008: 27) definition insufficient in talking explicitly of “current news.” In fact, the potential of newsgames lies not in reporting current news, but in communicating the context and background surrounding this news (Burton 2005: 96) – thus taking up exactly the part of journalism that has been squeezed out by the internet’s increasing pressure to be up-to-date. Newsgames could therefore offer the same opportunity as the establishment of digital long forms: “The stronger focus on story-oriented journalism that sometimes exploits other internet-specific potential and whose content is based on substantiated research into relevant topics could be an opportunity (...) to create unique selling points” (Godulla & Wolf 2017: 23).

According to Meier (2017: 51), “the word ‘news’ should be taken to mean not only ‘today’s news’, but ‘journalism’ in general.”, thus ensuring that it is linked to events in terms of time. This subtly distinguishes newsgames from games whose purpose is education and the communication of knowledge (Meier 2017: 53). In addition, it means that newsgames are created to accompany specific events and are not necessarily intended to be played multiple times or to enter the collective

memory (Sicart 2008: 28).

**Communication of information:** Although games are a form of entertainment, only games whose core message contains “at least a little information value” are considered newsgames (Meier 2017: 52-53). This also means that the game or the processes depicted in it are based on facts and go beyond mere entertainment (Sicart 2008: 28) – although they may be enhanced with fictional elements or conceivable scenarios (Wiehl 2014: 2).

**Procedural rhetoric:** Just like digital games, their artificial rules give newsgames a “persuasive direction” (Plewe & Fürsich 2017) – they have an agenda that is presented not as the truth, but in the form of arguments (Sicart 2008: 29). Bogost, Ferrari and Schweizer (2010) describe this as procedural rhetoric, meaning that the rules, mechanics, and building blocks of the game are used to apply the specific perspective of the producers behind the game to the topic (Sicart 2008; Treanor & Mateas 2009):

“[D]igital games do have the potential to serve as a mode for exploring intricate interdependencies, to adequately present complex facts, to make qualified arguments and to stimulate critical thought. In our eyes, the emerging genre of newsgames can very well be used for expository, explanatory and persuasive matters as well as for making differentiated comment” (Wiehl, 2014).

The content is thus communicated less through a narrative than through the workings of the game. The key advantage of this compared to other formats is that it enables users to experience and manipulate the events presented in the game themselves during the reception process, using the system of rules provided in the game. As a result, mechanisms and reasons for certain developments can be presented from different perspectives (Plewe & Fürsich 2017; Wiehl 2014). Newsgames must therefore also be distinguished from ‘news quiz’ formats, which communicate information in a purely narrative form.

**Production by media organizations:** Meier (2017: 52) argues that the term ‘newsgames’ should be reserved for games whose producers play the role of outside observers in society and are thus distinguishable from communicators whose actions are guided by their own interests.

“Newsgames are therefore games that are part of independent journalistic reporting. This may include statements of opinion, as long as these are labelled as such and separated from news” (Meier 2017: 52).



**Ease of access:** Media organizations or editorial offices often provide the games simply via a web browser or as a downloadable app for mobile devices (Bogost, Ferrari, & Schweizer 2010; Sicart 2008). In order to reach the widest possible audience, newsgames usually make use of game mechanics that are already established, allowing fast and easy access to the game content (Bogost, et al. 2010; Plewe & Fürsich 2017; Treanor & Mateas 2009).

## 2.2 Specific features of the form and content of newsgames

In order to present their content and tell their stories, newsgames can use classic elements of game design (rules, mechanics, building blocks of games) and combine them with established features of the internet (selectivity, multimediality, interactivity, linking) both within or around the game (Wiehl 2014: 2).

The dimensions relevant to this are explained in more detail below, so that newsgames can be described and investigated more precisely. The games are not classified into different genres, as has been done before (e.g. Bogost et al. 2010; Wiehl 2014).

We assume that the full spectrum of genres of digital games is potentially available for newsgames. However, it is important to note that incorporating current events often results in significantly shorter production times than is usual for digital games in the entertainment sector:

“Newsgames [...] have to be produced and launched while the news are still relevant, not only to participate in the public debate, but also for the game to have any meaning. Newsgames have very focused designs that tend to afford narrow but deep interaction, playing with game design conventions and genres that allow for faster implementations” (Sicart, 2008, p. 30).

Newsgames are part of the ‘serious games’ category of computer games, which comprises games that are not solely for entertainment (Laamarti, Eid, & El Saddik 2014). Within this category, they fall under ‘persuasive games’:

“A relatively new field in games research, persuasive games, or games meant to change the attitude or behavior of the player through game play [...] have the potential to act as powerful vehicles for learning through persuasive mechanics” (Ruggiero 2015: 213).



One approach to classifying serious games incorporates three dimensions: the G/P/S model (Djaouti, Alvarez, & Jessel 2011: 125).

The first dimension is the “gameplay” on which the game is based. This can be based on a goal (game) or on playing for its own sake. Goal-oriented games contain clearly-defined tasks that may or may not be completed. In contrast, in a play-based game there is no winning or losing.

The rules of games can be broken down into individual game bricks, different combinations of which can also be found in newsgames. Djaouti, Alvarez, Jessel, Methel and Molinier (2008) define ten of these bricks, which can be divided into three explicit parts (avoiding, adapting/coordinating, destroying) and seven means and conditions that define how these goals are achieved (creating, managing, moving, selecting, shooting, writing, chance).

Secondly, “purpose” refers to the purpose of the game beyond mere entertainment. Newsgames are used to communicate information or a specific message in relation to a topic that is relevant to society (Djaouti, et al. 2011: 128; Deterding, et al. 2011). The fact that the core message is not hidden, but clearly visible, is a specific criterion of the game design of newsgames (Sicart, 2008: 31).

The form of presentation corresponds directly to those established in classic journalism (news/reporting; feature; opinion piece; interview) and the features on which they are based:

“[G]ames do have the potential to serve as a mode for exploring intricate interdependencies, to adequately present complex facts, to make qualified arguments and to stimulate critical thought. In our eyes, the emerging genre of newsgames can very well be used for expository, explanatory and persuasive matters as well as for making differentiated comment” (Wiehl 2014: 2).

To do this, persuasive games use mechanisms from advertising and marketing. One example is immersion (Ruggiero 2015: 214), which is created in games by placing the players in a simulated location that demands their full attention (Murray 1997; Ruggiero 2015).

Three dimensions are relevant here: diegesis, point of action and point of view (e.g. Neitzel 2013). The first term refers to the question of whether the game creates a world in which the action takes place. Secondly, the player can either conduct his/her actions from outside this game world or be located inside that world, and can conduct his/her actions from different positions (point of action) (Neitzel 2013: 16-18). This gives rise to two pairs of terms: decentral (i.e. from multiple positions) vs. central and direct (i.e. each command leads to an action) vs. indirect (e.g. by clicking on items, which an avatar then approaches). The third crucial dimension is the visual angle from which the game can be played (point of view), i.e. “a certain perspective on the fictional action of the game” (Neitzel 2013: 20). Three options are conceivable here: The perspective is objective if there is no specific point from which the game is viewed; it is semi-subjective if the game is organized around

an avatar that is visible from outside; and it is subjective if the game is seen directly from the point of view of an avatar (Neitzel 2013: 10-16).

The content on the topic in the game can be presented either additively as the game progresses, or surrounding the game in the form of further information provided in journalistic (multimedia) form. This might include links to primary sources, videos, photos or journalistic texts.

The third dimension of the G/P/S model is “scope” and refers to the sub-section of society for whom the game was produced. This category does not apply to newsgames, as their system of reference is always journalism. The sub-sections of society and the topics referred to in the game are therefore much more important.

In conclusion, it is clear that the visual and verbal design is not the only relevant aspect of computer games. Ideally, a player becomes immersed in the game through an attractive combination of goals, entry elements, and feedback, supplemented by social elements of a communication space and tools used for communication, which together generate “engagement” and ultimately a state of “flow” (Csikzentmihalyi 1990; Fu 2011). Numerous studies claim that greater involvement of the players also increases the level to which the topic is evaluated from the perspective presented (Ruggiero 2015).

This effect is achieved through the integration of specific game mechanics that correspond to human needs (Bunchball 2010): points (reward), level (status), tasks (performance), virtual commodities (self-expression), rankings (competition) and giving/charity (altruism).

In addition, games can be designed as a way to exchange data between the player and the organization responsible for the game. This might include direct registration, a link on Facebook, or interaction between players, be it in real time or with a time lag. Social networks and specially-created websites may also be integrated (Deterding 2010; Djaouti et al. 2011: 128). The options social media provide for related communication can thus be made use of and become part of the game: The option of sending a message from the game via email or in social networks is one example. The game could also be forwarded or shared via similar channels. Topics addressed in the context of the game can become the subject of interaction in a forum or chat, or inspire users to create their own multimedia content.

Internet features like this can also be used to produce ‘social games’ in which players can interact with one another either at the same time or, more commonly, with a delay. This can be achieved either via certain objects or by using digital friends as tokens, for example by incorporating the size of the friend network into the game (Deterding 2010: 7).

How easy games are to use depends largely on the entry mode, i.e. whether commands are given by gestures, by clicks or via external end devices such as gamepads. Another factor is the game’s graphics (2D or 3D), and whether it provides virtual reality, or works with augmented or mixed reality. Finally, whether the game is context-sensitive, can be played on mobile devices or online, and whether social components are involved (single or multiplayer modes) all also make a difference

(Laamarti et al. 2014). It is a good idea for newsgames to be based on established game mechanics that are easy to understand, as players are not usually willing to invest significant time in learning new commands etc. (Sicart 2008: 31).

Our work is based on the following definition:

Newsgames are published by media organizations and/or editorial offices working in journalism and made accessible online or on mobile devices for reception by a potentially broad public sphere. They use classic elements of game design (rules, mechanics, game bricks) to present information on current or past events of relevance to society procedurally. They can combine these elements with specific features of the internet (selectivity, multimediality, interactivity, linking) either in the game itself or in the context of the game. As he/she plays, the user actively experiences processes, backgrounds, reasons, and perspectives by taking selective decisions within the game.

### **3 Newsgames and their reception**

Some studies have already examined the production process, individual games, and their reception, usually using case studies (Plewe & Fürsich 2017; Sicart 2008; Vobič et al. 2014). In many of these, the authors focus on the question of whether newsgames can be seen as a new form of journalism (e.g. Bogost et al. 2010; Plewe & Fürsich 2017). Initial results indicate that their production is still relatively unprofessional, and that the games are developed without following strict rules. The different production logics also present challenges (Vobič et al. 2014).

Reception studies that look at the audience for newsgames are also rare. Initial results on the reception of journalistic internet production in general seem to show that the audience considers selective content useful, as it makes issues easier to understand and allows the audience to become more involved (Brook 2013; George-Palilonis & Spillman 2013; Godulla & Wolf 2017).

However, there is still little broad knowledge of the design of newsgames and the optics they cover. The question arises of how the content and form of these games is designed in order to produce a public sphere for relevant topics:

FF1: Which aspects of game design are used in newsgames?

FF2: Which internet-specific features do newsgames use?

FF3: Which topics and sub-sections of society are covered in newsgames?

When it comes to the reception, it will be especially interesting to see whether newsgames really can be a way to acquaint young adults with news and established media organizations:

FF4: Are the newsgames developed by journalistic organizations suitable for arousing the interest of

young adults in topics relevant to society and in the media organizations responsible?

One of the first investigations into how well-known newsgames are, their communication performance, and the criteria that make them a success was undertaken by Meier (2017). The results indicate that there is little awareness of the term newsgame, although half of those surveyed were able to remember the media organization as the source after the game and recognized the topic of the game. Less than half felt that the game had given them added information value. However, the investigation was not specifically tailored towards the young audience.

#### 4 Design of the study

The population for the content analysis is a list of games known as the Serious Games Directory (D'Agostino 2016). In order to be included in the study, a game had to meet the definition of a newsgame developed above. As such, the game had to be targeted at the general public and not, for example, designed as a teaching aid or for a specific location (e.g. a museum). In addition, the study only included applications and games that communicate information or a core message. The games also had to meet the journalistic criterion of relevance, i.e. refer to current or updated events and topics of importance to society. Finally, games that were no longer available at the time of the analysis were removed from the sample.

36 games were included in the investigation. All of them come from countries that are among the top ten in terms of games sales: Brazil, Germany, France, the UK, Canada, and the USA (Newzoo Games 2016: 15).

The following dimensions provided the framework for examining the newsgames:

Game technology (game genre, graphic design, dimensions, access, navigation, game duration, tutorial, music)

Game mechanics (diegesis, point of action, point of view, gameplay, motivation system, bricks)

Connected communication (interaction, participation, context, incorporation of facts, call to action, presence of the media brand)

Purpose (topic, range of topic, core message, reference system, setting, type of communication)

A sample of 60 people was recruited in order to answer research question four. All the participants were aged between 20 and 29 years, putting them in the group of users least likely to be willing to pay for news. All of them were given the opportunity to play one of five different prototype newsgames: Shitstorm Fighter (BR), Der Metadatensauger (ZDF), Darfur is Dying (mtvU), Sweatshop (Channel 4) and Zeitbombe Steuerflucht (ARTE). They were not given any instructions regarding the games. After playing, they were questioned on their knowledge of the source of the

game and on whether the games made them want to receive more information on the topic. There was also a focus on assessing individual aspects of the game design.

## 5 Results

The majority of the games investigated were produced in 2012 or later, with almost a quarter dating from 2014. A few media organizations that often attract attention with innovative digital projects are represented particularly often as game publishers, including the New York Times with four of the 36 games and the Guardian with three. Almost a third of the games (10) are published by television broadcasters. Given the small sample in the content analysis, the results are shown as absolute figures. Where not mentioned in the text, the figure is shown in brackets.

### 5.1 Game design

The vast majority of the games are accessed via a browser (34), with two requiring the game to be downloaded onto a PC/Mac. The option of offering games via social networks (2) or as a mobile app via an app store (3) is rarely used.

Social components are also very rarely integrated into the games. Just one game enables simultaneous interaction in the form of a multi-player mode. The option of asynchronous interaction in between players, such as through objects, is not provided.

The newsgames were classified based on the classic game genres. There is a clear preference for casual games (13) and simulation games (13), followed by strategy games (6). The most common form of presentation is illustration or graphical depiction (15); a quarter are presented with retro graphics; five display a form of editing very uncommon in computer games, namely using real photos, videos, and/or maps combined with text. Another four games are designed as cartoons/comics. The majority are in 2D. Music is used in 15 games, mostly in the form of electronic instrumental music (14). In one case, the lyrics of the music refer to the topic of the game.

The most common setting for a game is the real world in the present (26), followed by the real past (5).

Navigation is generally very simple. The three mobile versions do not integrate any mobile-specific hardware components, using neither the camera nor GPS nor the acceleration sensor. Only one of these three games permits navigation via gestures. Almost all the newsgames are navigated through clicks (35), with around a quarter requiring further commands via a keyboard. Navigation options that require more technology, such as gamepads (1) or virtual gamepads (1), are rarely integrated.

Most of the games (20) contain their own game world (diegesis); in most of them, the players'

actions occur directly (19), centered (20), and from this world (11). 31 newsgames have an objective point of view, with just three played from a subjective point of view.

Most of the newsgames are designed as goal-oriented games (28), although each of the explicit goals of avoiding (11), adapting/coordinating (11), and destroying (3) is only used in less than a third of the games. The vast majority of the games allow players to select something (32), most commonly the main person in the game. More rarely, players are asked to move things (10), manage something (9), or write (2). Chance plays a role in six games.

To motivate players, the newsgames examined use the incentive and reward systems typical of computer games, but with little variety: Players are able to generate points (20) and complete various tasks (8). Rarer forms of motivation include division into different levels (7), the allocation of virtual goods (6), awards (5), a ranking (4), rewards/prizes (3), and giving/charity (1).

Most of the journalistic games take little time to play, with more than half (58%) lasting less than an hour. Two thirds (67%) offer a tutorial that explains the most important features and mechanisms.

## 5.2 Use of internet-specific features

Further information on the topic is integrated directly into 24 games. It is usually presented in the form of text (24), followed by graphics/animation (10), links (10), photos (8), audio (4), and videos (3). The links provided most commonly lead to project websites or the websites of organizations (8), followed by the website of the media company (6) and other media reports (6). In addition, facts are presented in the context of the game in 29 cases. Again, this is mainly done in the form of text (26), links (23), and graphics/animation (10), followed by photos (9), videos (5), and audio (1). Links surrounding the game most commonly lead to the media organization's own website (19), other media reports (14), and specific project websites or websites of organizations (13). Links to the media organizations' pages on social media are rare, with Facebook (6) leading the way.

Only a minority of the media organizations offer interactive and participative opportunities in the form of a call to action. Users can create their own content in eight of the games; six offer the chance to discuss in a forum or chat; seven call on users to visit the media organization's website. In five games, the character or game can be personalized. It is much more common for users to be asked to share or forward the game (25), or for them to have the option of sending a message from the game (13). Only one game can be influenced by real behavior. In some cases, the media organization offers the option of subscribing to its newsletter (4) or adding it on Facebook (3). There were no demands to buy or subscribe to products from the media organization, although other products or merchandizing items are offered in two cases.

Nor do the media organizations use the newsgames to generate advertising revenue, with no advertising included before or during the game. Only three games include advertising in the context of the game. In addition, all the games are provided free of charge and do not require transactions

within them.

Not all the games can be clearly attributed to a specific media organization. The logo or name of the organization is shown at the start of 16 games and at the end of another five, while it is permanently on screen in eleven newsgames. Similarly, few of the games create a reference to the media organization, such as by connecting the character (5), individual objects in the game (8), or the game world (11) to the organization.

### 5.3 Segments of society addressed and presentation of content

The vast majority of the newsgames examined (33) refer to hard news. In 18 games, information is designed in the form of news or reporting, mostly placed in a particular scene (22) and personalized (24). Only around a third of the games communicate the information with comment (11) or contain comment elements (15). Data is only passed from the player to the publisher in three games.

The newsgames cover various segments of society, often addressing multiple segments within the same game. The most common subject is political topics, relating to the state and government (22) and political processes (23). Other topics covered less frequently include humanitarianism (11), economic processes (11), defense and the military (9), health (8), and journalism (8). Newsgames rarely show an interest in businesses (6), education (5), ecology/the environment (5), religion (3), sport (3), science and research (3), or art and culture (1).

In most of the games, the core message is clear (27). The topic is equally likely to relate to the individual (27) as to the national level (27). Global (18) and local (16) aspects are in the spotlight less often. The game usually focuses on individuals (28), groups (23), society (21), or the state (20), either individually or in combination. Specific organizations (13), a specific sector (10), or the publisher itself (4) are rarer as reference points.

### 5.4 Assessment by the audience

In the reception study, after playing the games, the participants took part in interviews in which they were asked to assess elements of the game design (graphics, music/sounds, ease of use) on a scale from 0 (not successful) to 3 (very successful). The games' ease of use ( $m = 2.0$ ;  $sd = 0.9$ ) and graphics ( $m = 1.9$ ;  $sd = 0.9$ ) are assessed as successful on average. The average values for the music and sounds in the games are slightly lower (where present;  $m = 1.4$ ;  $sd = 0.8$ ). The newsgames are considered not very suitable ( $m = 1.4$ ;  $sd = 0.9$ ) for the topics covered in the examples - data protection, tax evasion, child labor, refugees and migration - and are unlikely to make players want to find out more about the topic ( $m = 1.5$ ;  $sd = 0.9$ ). In total, the games receive an average score of  $m = 1.8$  ( $sd = 0.7$ ). A notably low proportion of those questioned said they would recommend the newsgame to friends, for example via social networks ( $m = 0.8$ ;  $sd = 0.9$ ).



As well as the personal assessment of individual aspects of the game and the willingness to recommend it to others, newsgame producers were especially interested in whether the games are attributed to the media organizations responsible for them. The vast majority of those questioned failed to remember the media organization as the publisher of the game, with 28 percent naming the incorrect organization and 40 percent failing to name any organization at all.

Two quotes demonstrate this particularly well. *Shitstorm Fighter*, which is published by Bayerische Rundfunk and demonstrates the time pressure and effects of various reactions when dealing with negative statements in social networks, was wrongly attributed to a non-profit organization: "That was an animal protection organization... it was PETA, wasn't it? I think it was the PETA animal protection organization. That's all I can remember." Channel 4's *Sweatshop*, which confronts the audience with numerous moral dilemmas in textile production, was attributed to a business: "I saw something about Primark... so I'd say Primark?"

Furthermore, most of the games clearly fail to communicate their core information or topic. The majority of those questioned were unable even to remember the title of the game, with just 13 of the 60 people giving the correct answer. During the interviews, the participants were also asked to summarize the topic. Their responses clearly show that many players do not recognize the idea of the game. The person who linked BR's *Shitstorm Fighter* with a non-profit organization would have done so in part because the topic of the game is often considered to be animal protection, even though the photograph of a cat used in it is only employed as the trigger for a shitstorm.

## 6. Conclusion

So what does the future hold for the newsgame market? Will it grow and flourish, as its big brother, the commercial computer game, is doing? Will it inspire an interest in journalism among the young audience that is increasingly shunning it? And finally, does it pay off for media organizations to use this form of communication, which remains so unusual in journalism?

The answers to all three of these core questions are sobering. Given their volume, newsgames are likely always to remain a small, marginal niche. One of the main reasons for this lies hidden in the defined properties of newsgames: Those who want to present information on current or historical events of relevance to society from a journalistic point of view in the form of a computer game are not exempt from the quality standards demanded of journalism. In journalism, no-one can afford to wait months or even years for a certain aspect of a topic to be prepared for a niche audience. It is even less likely that a project like this will enjoy a six-figure budget. But these two elements are fundamental to commercial computer games, which thus appear much more professional than the inevitably basic-looking newsgames.

However, it has been shown that established media organizations have so far done too little to build on the potential to create unique selling points when designing newsgames. Moving further away from the current production logic, which is essentially dominated by the "possibility of constantly

updating content” (Godulla & Wolf 2017: 27), would at least offer an opportunity in the case of complex topics of relevance to society to make more use of innovative storytelling techniques that go beyond merely reporting on news and thus provide recipients with orientation.

The young audience in particular is socialized by a games market that is shaped by huge budgets and constantly provides new attractions. The content analysis proves that newsgames have a lot of catching up to do here – not just financially, but clearly also in terms of the expertise of the producers. There is surely no other explanation as to why these games so often fail to formulate a clear core message and to communicate a clear association with a brand. As well as changing their understanding of topicality, editorial offices therefore also need to think about strong strategic communication and how innovative products can be marketed to specific audiences.

These deficiencies are reflected in the sobering results of the reception study. If young adults do not recognize the messages communicated, do not find them interesting, and do not want to pass them on, then newsgames bring no benefits for journalism or the information it provides. So it is a no to the third question, too? Not entirely. Newsgames could certainly have potential – just not *these* newsgames. Establishing digital games as a version of digital media will take more money, more time, and more planning.

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# The rumor mill

## On the relationship between journalism and conspiracy theories

By Tanjev Schultz

*Abstract:* The common consensus is that conspiracy theories have nothing in common with reputable media outlets. In an age of rumor, conspiracy theories, and fake news, professional journalists should and want to assume the role of paragons of credibility. Yet doing so also means having to reflect possible points of contact and parallels between journalistic accounts and conspiracy theories in a self-critical way. As this paper argues, journalists are undoubtedly susceptible to the same narrative patterns used by conspiracy theorists, albeit taken to extremes. These patterns fit in with a dualistic and intentionalist view of the world that leaves little space for gray areas, coincidence, or the complexity of social structures and systems.

No-one in their right mind would see themselves as a conspiracy theorist. Conspiracy theorists are always the others, telling stories that are untrue (Butter 2018: 44f.). That makes it easy to talk *about* them, but trickier to talk *to* them. What if – horror of horrors – you turn out to be one yourself? In their eagerness to uncover a story, journalists often take an approach that is not as far removed from that of conspiracy theorists as they would like to think. It is a fact that is difficult to admit. After all, the name alone de-legitimizes a position: this theory is useless. It leaves the solid ground of recognized ideas, evidence and arguments. A conspiracy theory is speculative and dubious, if not entirely crude and insane.

It is therefore no wonder that media and journalists who see themselves as reputable consider their own work “clean” – free from myths and legends. If they give any mention at all to wild stories going around, they claim, it is to provide critical commentary, to expose them, to warn against them or to laugh at them. There are plenty of examples of this kind of journalistic approach, from tongue-in-cheek reports on stars like Elvis or John Lennon being miraculously still alive, to concerned analyses of the fantastic fantasies of anti-Semites and other extremists. The 9/11 attacks were put on by the USA? Barack Obama is not a real American? Vapor trails in the sky are an attack by secret powers? The moon landings were faked? All popular stories, including in Germany (cf. Schultz et al. 2017: 255f.) – but ones that have no chance of being taken seriously by the established media who, in the view of many conspiracy theorists, are in cahoots with the evil powers. Journalists are faced with the question of how best to react to this kind of theory. Should it be ignored completely? Or should it be addressed and, if so, how?



**Don't journalists have to be conspiracy theorists in a way?**

Psychological research has shown that trying to take apart and disprove misconceptions rarely works. In fact, it can even make them more attractive. Despite this, there is a sense that rumors, fake news, and unsubstantiated theories need to be contradicted before they become firmly established, running the risk of even sensible people considering them acceptable or true. The 2016 presidential election in the United States was plagued by the infamous conspiracy theory that Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and her aides ran a child pornography ring from their headquarters at a certain pizzeria in Washington (cf. Pörksen 2018: 36ff). Believing the story, a man stormed the restaurant, shooting. As a result, even reputable media could no longer avoid reporting on the background to the crime and thus on the conspiracy theory itself.

Today, rumors, fake news, and conspiracy theories that expand rumors and fake news into a narrative, spread like wildfire on the internet. In such a climate, traditional media, populated by professional journalists with the appropriate ethos, are rightly considered credible sources. But does the world of conspiracy theories really have nothing at all in common with the world of good old journalism? On the contrary – is it not the case that good old journalism itself has invited conspiracy theorists, and continues to do so? There are two reasons behind this subtle connection. Firstly, journalists are constantly faced with real conspiracies, and might even be the first to discover them. Secondly, reporting by journalists makes use of content frames and narrative patterns that provide a useful basis for the rhetoric of conspiracy theorists.

I will address the first point first. Many negative situations that are uncovered by the media are the result of conspiracies or at least deception. Certain people keep their actions secret because they know, or fear, that publicity would harm them and their objectives. Managers and engineers manipulate exhaust values (diesel scandal). Dictators and their henchmen manipulate the results of elections (an everyday occurrence in many countries). Agents blow a hole in a prison wall (“Celle Hole”). Politicians and generals deceive the public about the situation in a war (Vietnam). Governments spy on the opposition (Watergate) or on politicians and citizens of “allied” states (NSA scandal). Former spies are poisoned in the street (Skripal case). The list is endless, and every item on it is another argument in favor of a free press that takes on the role of monitoring those in power, alongside its many other duties.

So, if journalists want to be the guardians of democracy, do they need to be conspiracy theorists themselves, in a sense? They certainly need to take the existence of genuine conspiracies into account and have the drive to uncover them. No institution or person deserves the unconditional trust of journalists. Without succumbing to paranoia, journalists need to cultivate doubt, skepticism and mistrust. They need to be able to imagine the apparently unimaginable and be open to unusual questions and hypotheses that contradict official reports and dominant opinions. Journalism that is too tame, sluggish, or naïve is not fit for purpose.

Conspiracy theories explain events and incidents by claiming that they are caused by a group of conspirators pursuing a secret plan with negative effects for the general public (cf. Uscinski & Parent 2014: 32f.; Butter 2018: 21ff.). Conspirators like this have popped up again and again throughout history – a fact that can, unfortunately, also be used by those who want to sell their crude stories as the truth.

### **Researchers as the heroes of the hour**

Conspiracy theories usually construct their version of events as an alternative to a “dominant”, “official” narrative. Uncontroversial and contentious facts are combined to form an alternative story and explanation, thus revealing a secret plot (cf. Renner & Schultz 2017). The same pattern works both for dubious, bizarre, and dogmatic conspiracy theories and for reputable, justified conspiracy hypotheses that pursue a methodical doubt. Of course, in each case, there are eager, even zealous, arguments about where exactly the line between dubious and reputable is and when a seemingly bold theory becomes a watertight theoretical construct.

Some theories can be quickly dismissed as baseless from a scientific and journalistic point of view (the Chancellor is an alien, the water fountains are poisoned etc.). For others, it is not as simple. Was the attacker who planted a bomb at Munich’s Oktoberfest in 1980 a lone wolf, as the investigators claimed, or were there co-conspirators, perhaps even including the state’s own informers? Did Oury Jalloh burn to death in his cell in a Dessau police station in 2005 as a result of a series of unfortunate events, or did the police who failed to prevent his death act negligently – or even set fire to him themselves? If the facts are not clear, journalists cannot simply accept the information and claims of the authorities. In some cases, even a court ruling is no reason to stop doubting and researching. Just like journalists, judges can be wrong. Only conspiracy theorists are never wrong – they know the truth.

Admittedly, journalists, too, run the constant risk of getting carried away and becoming too fixated on a specific version of the facts. Many conspiracy narratives have something rebellious and heroic about them and, as they get caught up in their investigations, researchers and reporters can sometimes be tempted to want to embody these properties; just like in books and films in which brave heroes face down evil conspirators.

To avoid this pitfall, journalists need to turn their doubts on themselves and their own assumptions and findings. When they are pursuing a lead because they think that something is not right about the official narrative, they need to constantly check this lead critically, too. Although this goes without saying as part of open, intensive research, these principles are often under threat in practice: by limited resources, pressure, competition, vanity, or blind spots – and by the conventions and temptations of journalistic storytelling.

Journalists should be able to differentiate between different levels and make clear the status of the statements they make or quote. What is undisputed or disputed fact? What is just conjecture? Which

different explanations and interpretations are there? The only problem is something that also affects the second reason for an (unwanted) link between journalism and conspiracy theories: The media, journalists included, like to tell stories.

### **Example: NSU complex**

There is no doubt that “factual storytelling” (cf. Renner & Schupp 2017) is very different from fictional storytelling, as it retains links to real events. But the narrative structures are often similar. In contrast to the legal profession, for example, the media are less fixated on proceedings and have less of a strict focus on collecting and checking facts systematically and ordering and weighting them analytically. Journalists like to tell exciting stories, like in a crime novel. This applies even, or indeed especially, when the story is potentially scandalous. They do not necessarily explain comprehensively and completely, but instead summarize, streamline and dramatize.

This is associated with the well-known journalistic propensity to personalize issues. People – and their intentions and actions – take center stage, while structures, systems, coincidences, and unintended consequences are lost from view. Just like conspiracy theorists, journalists look for someone to blame and a chain of causes – and are driven by the idea (or illusion) that the world can be planned and controlled (Butter 2018: 28). Journalists already begin to struggle if the staff and positions relevant to a topic are not clear. They react by reducing the issue to aspects that are (allegedly) typical, exemplary, or extreme.

Take the NSU complex. The search for Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt and Beate Zschäpe – a trio of neo-Nazis who had gone into hiding – and later the investigation into the serial murders, armed robberies, and bomb attacks, employed hundreds of police and dozens of government offices. Often, the left hand had no idea what the right was doing (cf. Schultz 2018). For the public, it was easy to believe that *the* intelligence service (which in Germany actually consists of 17 independent offices) had acted as a single entity and perhaps even the driving force behind the criminal activity. The inglorious role of the police is easily overlooked, including the fact that some police forces keep their own confidential informants, who are often no less dubious than the intelligence services.

There is no doubt that there are many questions in the NSU complex that have not been satisfactorily answered to this day, despite – or perhaps because of – the years-long court case, numerous investigation committees, and journalistic research. This is typical of complex cases, as not everything can be reconstructed and explained down to the very last detail. Yet it increases the danger that the gaps that remain are filled with speculation and suspicion, until public opinion issues a judgement that can be described as a mixture of substantiated facts and conspiracy theory clichés. Interested parties, not least those from the far-right scene, have been encouraging myths about the NSU as an alleged invention of the state for many years. Pseudo-documentaries like the three-part ARD drama television “Mitten in Deutschland: NSU” (2016) play into their hands by serving up the conspiracy theory as a thriller while claiming to be helping to resolve the issue

(Renner & Schultz, 2017).

### **X was in A on the same day as Y - coincidence...?**

Journalists are also very susceptible to fallacies that occur in fictional material and conspiracy theories. One example is the 'false dilemma' fallacy, in which the world is divided into two sides. Everything is either black or white, good or evil, A or B. But reality actually very often consists of shades of gray, and events can be explained not only by A or B, but also by C, D, E or even a mixture of all of them. Another example is the 'divine' fallacy – the idea that a situation is so incredible that it can only be explained by the presence of a higher power (taken to the extreme, God). Reputable journalists do not go so far as to blame the usual suspects to whom conspiracy fans apportion responsibility (extra-terrestrials, the CIA, Mossad or even the Jewish world conspiracy) – but it is enough for their stories to imply that there must be powerful men behind the scenes who are yet to be uncovered.

When reporting on scandals, and especially on the security and secret services, journalists like to raise questions to which they do not know the answers. A lot remains unclear. Details are unknown. Normally, one would expect journalists to provide their audience with answers, not trouble them with questions. But if explosive research hits a wall and cannot get any further, the journalist sometimes has no choice but to document this. In this case, raising questions is a method that enables the audience to take a peek over this wall. The direction in which they look can then be steered by the rest of the report, such as by the way experts react and speak as "opportune witnesses" (Hagen 1992).

'We are not claiming anything.' 'We are just asking questions.' But the questions are not neutral – they insinuate one thing or the other. They pave the way for assumptions and suspicions, and as such can be similar to the questions asked by conspiracy theorists. They, too, claim that they are merely asking. How can it be that...? Is it not strange if...? X was in A on the same day as Y – coincidence...?

Journalists from reputable media do not want anything to do with conspiracy theorists. But those who try to expose something using journalistic methods often end up treading the same path – albeit in a different position, at a different speed, and hopefully aware that they are able to leave this path and take another direction at any time. Journalists need to reflect on their own ideas and assumptions, in order to prevent themselves from drifting off on the wrong path. This is by no means the case only in investigative projects – it also applies to journalists' bread and butter: political reporting. Journalists have got into the habit of focusing strongly on the psychology behind politicians' actions, examining them for intentions and secret plans. This is not plucked out of thin air, as power games are undoubtedly part of politics. But they are not the only part. Other factors, and sometimes even boring old coincidence, can be more important than journalists think.

The situation is made even more complex by the fact that, driven by disappointment and scorn, some people make journalists themselves part of the conspiracy narrative. The rallying call of “lying press” and the suspicion that the media collaborate with those in power are just two examples (cf. Jakob, Quiring & Schemer 2017). According to a survey conducted in late 2017 by the author in cooperation with the Department of Communication in Mainz, around one in five Germans agree with the statement that “the media and politicians work hand in hand to manipulate the opinion of the population” (a year later, the figure was one in four; Schultz et al. 2017: 253).

Convincing these people otherwise will not be easy. It is true that the media need to maintain a critical distance from those in power and fulfil their role as a critical monitor. But it would be wrong to take this role to mean that journalists themselves should encourage conspiracy theories.

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**Translation: Sophie Costella**

# What do you tell your daughter who wants to be a journalist?

## On the future of journalism and journalism education in the United States

By Kenneth Starck

*“All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility.” –John Stuart Mill <sup>1</sup>*

*Abstract:* While still living at home, your daughter has completed all of her mandated schooling. She is now seriously thinking about life's next important step. Enroll at a university? Get a job? Marriage? Not surprisingly she decides to extend her learning by attending university. The next question follows: What to study? She reads a lot and writes well. Surprisingly, perhaps, she actually seeks advice from her father—me, a former journalist (newspapers), former journalism professor and, for more than twenty years, a journalism school administrator. Aware of the massive convulsions occurring in the field of mass communication and, most particularly, journalism, I am hard pressed to offer enthusiastic endorsement to enroll in university to study journalism. This essay is an attempt to formulate a thoughtful and realistic answer to your daughters' question: Should I study journalism?

First, I will try to make the case for journalism. It is a noble profession (or craft, if you like) that has made and can still make an important contribution to society. More importantly, journalism is vital to the functioning of a successful democracy. Then I will have to explore the advantages and, yes, the disadvantages of planning a career in journalism, a field which has nearly been drowned out by technology and the proliferation of careers that fall under those amorphous labels *mass communication* and *media*. Journalism has to be considered distinct from such career paths as public relations, advertising, marketing, digital specialist, spokesperson and the like. Such professional pathways are honorable. But they are not journalism, which, in a way, is similar to politics in that both journalism and politics serve—let us be clear here, *should serve*—the public interest.

The second part of this essay will address journalism education. Should your daughter concentrate her university studies on journalism? After all, since the early twentieth century, the United States has been the leader in establishing journalism education as part of higher education curriculum.



That curriculum, while evolving into a variety of different approaches, has become a near-universal model, though much of the rest of the world has not embraced the idea with quite as much enthusiasm.

### What is journalism for?

*“... the press and public opinion bring light to the modern world.” —Keane (1991:22)*

Many young people want to contribute to the advancement of society. So it was with your daughter. Seeking truth is among the noblest of endeavors. The challenge of searching for the truth is dramatically portrayed in Milton's apocryphal story in *Areopagitica*:

“Truth indeed once came into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glamorous to look on. But when he ascended, and his apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who (as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris) took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down, gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all.” (Bush 1949:190-191)

One scholar wrote a book titled *What Are Journalists For?* It was an attempt to explain a series of newspaper and broadcast projects carried out in the 1980s and 1990s that were called, variously, public journalism, civic journalism, community journalism. The idea was for news organizations to be proactive—as opposed to passive players—in fostering citizen participation in self-governance. The nebulous nature of the idea was reflected in a partial explanation by the author: “By becoming an argument, an experiment, a movement, a debater, and an adventure, public journalism emerged into what architects call ‘built form’.” (Rosen, p. 263) “Built form” seems to have meant filling out the idea with imagination.

At one time newspapers were the communication of the realm. In fact, newspapers came to be synonymous with journalism. De Tocqueville, in his insightful look at America, observed that the population was dispersed over a wide area and “Means must then be found to converse every day without seeing each other, and to take steps in common without having met. Thus, hardly any

democratic association can do without newspapers" (1956:203).

With the onslaught of new communication technology and its applications, the concept of journalism has taken on a muddled meaning. Journalism is not technology. Journalism is not "the media." And while journalism is fact-based, it is even more than that. Consider what the Merriam-Webster dictionary says journalism is ("Journalism" at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/journalism?src=search-dict-hed>):

1a: the collection and editing of news for presentation through the media

1b: the public press

1c: an academic study concerned with the collection and editing of news or the management of a news medium

2 a: writing designed for publication in a newspaper or magazine

2b: writing characterized by a direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation

2c: writing designed to appeal to current popular taste or public interest

The dictionary definition, as dictionary definitions are prone to do, is devoid of substance. It is sterile. It peripherally touches on the "public" nature of journalism but does not bring up its role in decision-making, least of all in a political sense. Historically, journalism has been the adhesive that has linked the public to the political sphere.

The American Press Institute, a national nonprofit educational organization affiliated with news organizations and dedicated to advancing the cause of journalism, answers the question: What is journalism? this way:

"Journalism can be distinguished from other activities and products by certain identifiable characteristics and practices. These elements not only separate journalism from other forms of communication, they are what make it *indispensable to democratic societies*. History reveals that *the more democratic a society, the more news and information it tends to have.*" (Italics added) (<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/>).

An astute observer of journalism, G. Stuart Adam (2008), points to the distinction between media and journalism. Media, he notes, ". . . pushes technology into the foreground and conceals the fact

that ‘journalism’ is one thing and ‘media’ is another.” Journalism, he continues, is a way of “. . . capturing and representing the world of events and ideas as they occur.” Further, it was newspapers that developed the journalistic method which emerged later in other media, such as broadcast, becoming “a distinctive form of expression on which modern democratic societies depend.”

In the form of twitter and Facebook and a myriad of other electronic applications, the Internet has blurred the distinction between journalism and whatever else pours out of the latest devices. Playwright Arthur Miller has stated what others have reiterated, namely, that “A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself.” Now the entire world seems to be talking to itself. Or given the differences in culture and purposes, it may be said that the whole world has become one of babblers, too often talking past one another. The question is whether that babbling has a journalistic component in order to promote and enhance the democratic conversation.

### **Freedom of the press as the precondition of journalism**

In the United States, freedom of speech and freedom of the press are enshrined in the First Amendment of its Constitution (1791): “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press . . .”

As Keane notes in *The Media and Democracy*, liberty of the press found its birthplace in Great Britain and spread to what was to become the United States and subsequently to Europe. Arguing for the need to have information flow throughout the citizenry, Keane writes, “To some degree, this requirement can be satisfied by intelligent, public-spirited forms of journalism, which have merged in recent years as a separate and specialized branch of the media” (Keane 1991:138).

In a democracy, there are presumed checks and balances on governing agencies—legislators, judges, executives. The press—the term denotes journalism—is another institution created by society to serve as a check on those who conduct the public’s business. In fact, the press came to be referred to as the Fourth Estate, or the fourth “agency.” The term seems to have disappeared from our lexicon of late. It is deliciously appealing to imagine the following scene as drawn from Scottish author Thomas Carlyle’s reference to the origin of the phrase “Fourth Estate”:

It is 1787. The place is London. Over there. Yes, over there. It is the old Irishman, Edmund Burke. One of those Renaissance persons. Author. Philosopher. Orator. He’s addressing his Parliamentary colleagues. He’s been here in Parliament for nearly two decades—a member of the House of Commons. He points out the obvious to his colleagues: “There are three ‘estates’ in Parliament—the king, the clergy and the commoners.” His gaze suddenly swings upward. He gestures toward the reporters’ gallery. “Yonder,” he exclaims, „there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.”

Admittedly, this retelling embellishes Carlyle's account. But it is worth noting that Carlyle accentuates the relevance and timelessness of Burke's comment by adding to his account of the episode this sentence: "It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact,—very momentous to us in these times" (Niemeyer 1966: 164).

Later, concerning the French Revolution, Carlyle used the phrase to emphasize the importance of the press in the growth of democracy. In 1842 he wrote: "A Fourth Estate, of Able Editors, springs up; increases and multiplies; irrepressible, incalculable" (Carlyle 1867).

It is instructive to consider how contemporaries address the question: What is journalism for? Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) ask the question in their compact book, *The Elements of Journalism*, and answer, "The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (p. 17). It doesn't get much more direct than that. In another chapter, headed "Who Journalists Work For," the authors acknowledge that news organizations answer to many constituencies (e.g., community institutions, local interest groups, shareholders, advertisers), but there is one allegiance that stands above all others: "Journalism's first loyalty is to citizens" (p. 51).

In 1947 a report in the United States stirred controversy among journalists. Though it preceded much of the tech era, the report presented a broad and plausible approach to the role of the press in a democracy. Titled *A Free and Responsible Press* (known also as the Hutchins Report, after its chairman, Robert M. Hutchins, then chancellor of the University of Chicago), the report was prompted by events leading up to and through the Second World War. The members of what was called the Commission on Freedom of the Press consisted of 17 influential individuals, mostly professors representing a variety of fields, from law to philosophy. The controversy arose over the fact that no journalistic representatives were part of the Commission; thus, the report was largely ignored by the press. Nonetheless, the report clearly articulated the role of the press, and it has carried currency over time. It argued that "the relative power of the press carries with it relatively great obligations" (Leigh 1947: vii). The most enduring part of the report came in the form of five requirements for a free society. These are: (1) a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning; (2) a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism; (3) the projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society; (4) the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society; and (5) full access to the day's intelligence (pp. 20-29).

## The digital Tsunami

Over the past two decades a technological tsunami has turned newspapers from an endangered into a disappearing species. Pew Research Center (2014) findings provide part of the epitaph. From 2004 to 2014 the number of daily newspapers in the United States declined from 1,457 to 1,331. In two decades of decline, newspapers have lost close to 40 percent of their daily circulation. In the

past decade advertising revenues have dropped 63 percent. And during the past decade, newsrooms have reduced the number of reporters and editors by 40 percent. According to one analysis of data, in 2005 there were 20 newspaper journalists for every digital-only journalist. Those numbers shifted significantly by 2015 when there were only four newspaper journalists for every digital-only journalist. And while the number of digital journalists has grown, indications are that these numbers have plateaued (Williams 2016).

The news is grim but not all bad. For some the digital component has thrived. For example, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, while sparring over scoops involving the Trump administration, have seen their subscription revenue grow to exceed money taken in by advertising. The *Times* itself reported that it has nearly 2.5 million digital-only subscribers and that it is becoming a business “no longer rooted in newsprint” (Embernov Nov. 1, 2017). These results have been achieved largely through a so-called soft approach to a paywall, that is, allowing limited access and then promoting online subscriptions (“How Leading . . .” 2017). On another front, news organizations appear to be making progress in dealing with social media (e.g., Facebook and Google) which have been making money by offering for free the journalistic output of the news organizations. Efforts include promoting the identity of the news source and restricting the frequency with which social media users can visit news sites free of charge (“Just the two...” 2017).

Regional and local newspapers in the United States have not fared as well. But several lessons seem to emerge: There are ways to sell subscriptions online. Plus, robust, penetrating, truth-seeking journalism told straightforwardly attracts readers and viewers. Hence, journalism is on the decline in our old-fashioned newspapers, but meaningful, that is, consequential, journalism delivered electronically has a future.

### **Special problems of quality journalism**

In a discussion of quality journalism, Jill Abramson, former *New York Times* editorial editor, suggests that quality newspapers—if we still want to call them “newspapers”—will forego paper altogether. Other platforms, such as tablets and devices still in the dream stage, will prevail. But, she argues, journalism will flourish. “My optimism,” she writes, “is based on the fact that there is a human craving for trustworthy information about the world we live in—information that is tested, investigated, sorted, checked again, analyzed, and presented in a cogent form” (Abramson 2010: 43).

Quality journalism, it seems, is always under threat. There’s governmental influence, from exploitation to censorship. There’s manipulation by nearly everyone in the journalistic process. There are legal suits. With the proliferation of social media, fake news has become the latest scourge. But the biggest threat to quality journalism—both from a production and consumption standpoint—is the rapidly changing technology. Technology can desensitize us to the idea that journalism is fundamentally an intellectual endeavor—not a technical one. Let me cite an example of

what I mean with a personal anecdote.

Nearly half a century ago—just as the computer age was dawning—a colleague and I organized a seminar at the University of Iowa on journalism professionalism. We invited prominent journalists and scholars to campus as visiting professionals. One journalist we invited was Jean Schwoebel, a reporter with the highly-respected French daily newspaper *Le Monde*. He was more than a reporter. He was an expert on international affairs, and his work was highly respected. During his visit to Iowa City, I took him to the Mississippi River, about 80 kilometers from our campus, to see what was then a cutting-edge computerized newsroom in Davenport, a city along the river. An editor enthusiastically demonstrated for Schwoebel the use of computers in the newsroom. The editor began, “A reporter types a story into this terminal.” He pointed to a keyboard and a box about the size of a large laundry basket. He continued, “The reporter then can send the story to an editor who can edit it and send it on to the composing room.” He made it sound otherworldly, and it was at that time. Jean Schwoebel listened intently. When the editor finished, Schwoebel said, “Very impressive.” He paused, then went on, “Yes, impressive, indeed. But you know what?” He paused again, “What takes place here”—and he tapped his forehead—“is more important than what takes place here”—and he tapped the computer terminal.

It was a light-bulb moment: Journalism, at its quintessential core, is an intellectual enterprise. This is something we know deep down but all too often forget.

Mitchell Stephens (2014), a longtime chronicler of the concept of news, underscores the intellectual nature of journalism in arguing the traditional idea of news should be transformed into “wisdom journalism.” Forget at least four of the five W’s (who, what, when, where—but not why) since all are readily available online. They should be replaced with the five I’s—informed, intelligent, interesting, insightful and interpretative (p. 166). The notion of “wisdom” might be an overreach for journalism, but the crux of the idea is compelling and lends force to the haunting comment by T. S. Eliot: “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”

To be sure, the press’ role in any society is determined in large part by economic, political and cultural factors. One of several postulates is that quality journalism depends upon its audience for financial support. It also depends on being seen as credible and reliable. Another postulate is that freedom and responsibility are inseparable and are often dueling concepts that highlight the most fundamental of human and social relationships, the relationship of the individual to society.

In the United States freedom and responsibility are core ideas over which the press—and other institutions, for that matter—has been struggling for many years. Obviously historical and cultural considerations are some of the factors at work. A persistent issue has been how to hold the press accountable. Based on self-regulation, the United States has tried several accountability devices, including codes of ethics, press councils, ombudsmen and expanded letters to the editor. No one approach, as one might suspect, is a panacea, yet together the approaches produce a system that is at least modestly successful. Perhaps the best approach is simply transparency—sharing with the audience what goes on behind the scenes in the reporting and editing process.

Back to your daughter's future. What are her prospects for a print newspaper job? Not good. But I want to suggest that there is hope to carry out serious journalism if she is willing to take on the challenge. Can a journalism education help meet that challenge? With a grasp now of the role journalism plays in our society, she also should understand how journalism education came about and how it has contributed to the mission of self-governance. I also want to share with her personal thoughts about how to think about the purpose of education itself.

### Why journalism education?

*„. . . the most important things that a university has to give a young journalist are outside the pattern of technical journalism.“* –Wilbur Schramm <sup>2</sup>

What, after all, is the mission of education? What is the role of a university? Too often we avoid such fundamental questions, emphasizing, instead, practical knowledge at the expense of failing to educate the whole person. A journalism education blended with a liberal arts curriculum should provide opportunities that prepare men and women for lifetimes of personal and professional growth. Practical is okay. But there should be more. My experience suggests that too often we have not thought through the fundamental assumptions inherent in our beliefs and values, which, in turn, form the basis of our actions. We tend to focus on short term objectives or become preoccupied with the crisis of the day.

John Henry Newman spoke to the core mission of education more than a century ago at the founding of the University of Dublin. He said, „If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society“ (Newman 1976:154). To particularize a core of knowledge that may be artificial in scope or only temporarily useful is to limit the possibilities of students and result in trained incapacity. It is a cliché but it is a valid claim: the greatest gift educators can give to students is that of learning how to learn.

A constant tension exists between those who prepare graduates and those who hire them. This may well apply to all professions. The discourse often highlights different assumptions about education, raising even more questions, such as: Whom does journalism education serve? Whom do journalism educators serve? Failure to come to grips with these questions leaves us carrying out our responsibilities in a vacuum.

To state what already may be obvious, educators serve students who enter the classroom. Students are at the center of the educational process. Educators also serve society. The professional sphere—the third component in this process—serves as the bridge linking the obligations and responsibilities carried out by students, faculty and all those involved. By focusing on the larger community, which in most cases provides the bulk of support for educational programs, we serve students and society and the profession in the most effective manner possible. To put this another



way, education advances civilization by fully developing the intellect and talents of individuals so they may contribute to the overall well-being of society (Starck 2000).

Throughout its history, journalism education has stirred mixed and sometimes hostile reactions among practitioners and those who profess to prepare practitioners. The issues range all the way from whether journalism instruction should be housed in the academy to differences between professors and professionals about curriculum. The fact that journalism education has existed in the United States for more than a century suggests something more than a fad. It suggests that there are certain knowledge and skills required of journalists that are important to a self-governing society and that universities can provide.

### **The US as a global model**

The United States, for better or worse, has provided the model for journalism education for most of the world. This has been due to several factors. One is simply the influential role the United States has played on the world stage. At the end of the Cold War and the emergence of democratic states, the United States aggressively established or reformed journalism and journalism education in many countries through private foundations and government initiatives. *The Media are American* was the title of a book published more than forty years ago by British scholar Jeremy Tunstall (1977). Several decades later Jim Richstad wrote that “journalism education is American” with most of the journalism programs around the world providing a curriculum patterned after those at American universities (Richstad 2000:283).

Despite having established a firm footing in higher education, journalism education in the United States has faced frequent criticism. The strain between practitioners and the academy were present from the beginning and persist to this day. As Jean Folkerts has written in her well-researched history of journalism education in the United States, “The tension between educating reporters and editors to improve the quality of journalism or contribute to a democracy, versus training them to function efficiently in a newspaper office—or any media environment—continues today” (Folkerts 2014:228)

From its beginning journalism education in the United States encountered resistance from practitioners as well as university officials. Here is what one United States editor wrote about teaching journalism before journalism was widely taught in universities:

“The truth is, that the mystery which the professors try to throw round what they call ‘journalism’ is intended simply to supply a decent disguise for the intellectual poverty and nakedness of too many of the young who enter the calling. They keep up their self-respect, or their conceit, in the absence of all other knowledge, by their knowledge of little office tricks, most of them mechanical” (“Schools . . .” 1890:197).

The editor was E. L. Godkin, chief editor of the *New York Evening Post*, and he was writing more than 100 years ago.

Meanwhile, university administrators, pressured by press organizations to create journalism programs, addressed the issue of offering journalism preparation from their own perspectives: it is not really an academic subject; it leans toward the vocational; student-run media might criticize and interfere with institutional messaging; it is expensive to maintain, especially with accelerating change in technology. On the positive side, there was keen interest not only from press groups but also from students. Some universities even found that growing enrollments in journalism programs could produce a net financial gain.

The debate over the value of journalism education has continued over the years. That has been constructive because it suggests that while some practices are worth preserving, re-evaluation and even reinvention are always to be considered. Indicative of change is the recent rebranding of academic programs, often, unfortunately, relegating journalism to a lesser overall role. There are many examples, including my own program at the University of Iowa. The Iowa program was established in 1924 as a School of Journalism. Colleagues in other disciplines occasionally scoffed that we were a “school of newspaper training.” In the 1980s, along with many other programs in the United States, we added “Mass Communication” to our name. That expanded our professional reach. We not only attracted more students, but, truth be known, it was a means of protecting academic territory.

New communication technology has accelerated name changes. Indiana’s well-known School of Journalism in 2013 was merged with telecommunications and communication and culture and became the Media School (<http://mediaschool.indiana.edu/>). Two years earlier Northwestern University, which boasted another highly-respected journalism program, expanded its name, confoundingly, to Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications (<http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/>). In 2015 the University of Colorado opened its College of Media, Communication and Information. The new college absorbed what had been known as the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, which had been closed in 2011. The Colorado dean explains the rationale for a new academic unit on its website. “It was created to match the times we live in—times of revolutionary change in the way people communicate, the tools they use to do it and the impact that change has on society” (<https://www.colorado.edu/cmci/>) .

The changes illustrate how universities are attempting to adapt to the seismic shift in the media landscape. The changes probably make economic sense. The danger is that journalism becomes a subsidiary of other communication interests. And the result could be a real obstacle to achieving quality journalism and to the health of society at large. A 2015 survey notes decreases over the past few years in the numbers of undergraduate and master’s levels students enrolled in journalism/communication programs. The trend, according to the authors, “is clearly concerning for the field of journalism and mass communication as a whole.” They add that the “findings are most

alarming for journalism, where there was a substantial drop in the number of undergraduate students enrolled in journalism sequences, including journalism (undifferentiated), news editorial/print journalism, and broadcast news/broadcast journalism” (Gotlieb, et al 2017). Whether the number of journalism students is declining due to less visibility within communication programs is at least an open question.

### **Brief history of academic journalism education**

A brief historical perspective on how journalism education entered the academy may help explain events as they have unfolded in the United States.

The culprit was a new technology—movable type. *The new system* of printing and typography ushered in rapid and economical publishing. Driven by commercial interests, publishing gave rise to task specialization ranging from generating messages to setting them in type and distributing the results to a mass audience. Work-related groups sprang up based on the variety of tasks to be performed. Among the first such occupational groups to strive for status were journalists. One goal of these groups was to elevate the work to the level deemed professional. In the United States, this is where education fits in. Education could confer status.

The nation’s particular socio-political-economic arrangement bestowed upon the press a special task in society and in relation to government. That task was to keep citizens informed and government officials honest. Thus, the press, though a privately-held entity, carried out an important public function. The result produced a joint public/private enterprise which in the final analysis was private yet not public despite a generally subscribed to public mission. It was a conundrum of sorts. Journalists took on the role of social custodian of the truth in much the same way physicians staked a claim to health and lawyers to justice.

Journalistic work in the United States in the late nineteenth century split into essentially three functions, the work of the printer, the reporter and the publisher (Sobel 1976). High-speed presses and the growth of urban centers began ushering in the era of the reporter. These reporters cum journalists left the print shop and managerial responsibilities to form a new entity. They produced something—news, information, stories, etc.—with their intellect. It was not long before journalists began invoking the notion of professionalism even though there existed no agreed-upon code of ethics or a recognized means of entry into the field or a journalistic philosophy. Professionalization, notes Folkerts, enabled journalists to “legitimize” their work and “to distinguish themselves from the public as experts in the news” (Folkerts 2014:228).

For social legitimization reporter-journalists eventually looked in the same direction that most occupational groups have looked: the university (Sobel 1976). After the Civil War (1861 – 1865) and early in the twentieth century, the university was becoming a major authority in society. As the generator and repository of knowledge, universities had the power to confer professional status.

Press associations and several prominent journalistic figures, notably Joseph Pulitzer, promoted the idea of journalism education. In the late 1800s several United States institutions offered journalism courses, and in 1908 the University of Missouri established the first journalism school (and incidentally has maintained its original designation, School of Journalism). Soon other programs began appearing. The initial thrust was career preparation. Before long efforts were being made to install journalism education as a discipline at research institutions. The first doctorate degree in journalism was awarded at the University of Wisconsin under the leadership of Willard G. Bleyer in 1929, and the first doctorate in mass communication was conceived by Wilbur Schramm and conferred by the University of Iowa in 1948 (Rogers 1994:21-26).

The approach to educating journalists differed markedly among institutions. Folkerts points toward the early development of three models of journalism instruction. The University of Missouri emphasized extensive hands-on instruction which came to be referred to the "Missouri Method." Columbia University concentrated on professional graduate studies (masters) and in its instruction capitalized on New York City's media-rich environment. The University of Wisconsin at Madison, meanwhile, stressed the academic side of the educational enterprise with an emphasis on the social sciences. Of courses, many changes have occurred over the past century, but these programs, Folkerts writes, "still represented distinct models." (Folkerts 278)

From the time of its inception, journalism education sparked a debate over curriculum. Never wholly resolved was the precise professional/academic nature of such curricula. Professionalism tended to prevail (Dingwall and Lewis 1983). Journalism took its lead from medicine and law, but operationally the pattern for educating (future) journalists came from news organizations.

In a provocative doctoral dissertation, Birkhead sharply criticized the role of journalism schools. He wrote, "The ideological captivity of professionalism extended in real terms to constitute a dependence of journalism schools on the industry they professed to regulate. Notwithstanding their motives, journalism educators helped to make professionalism an instrument of exploitation" (1982:280). He further insists that universities gave credence to the notion that the press functioned as a public utility. What is clear is that universities helped to legitimize journalism as a profession. In its early development and even continuing to the present, journalism education tended to assimilate the work procedures of the newsroom. Journalism education came to sanction the standards and values invoked by journalism practitioners, including, for example, objectivity and neutrality.

For most of its history, journalism education has been preoccupied by the question of how to balance the practical and the theoretical, which reverts to the old struggle of the academic vs. the professional. Should there be a balance between the conceptual and the application? If so, what should it be? Inevitably, the pros and the cons disagree. Personally I find the distinction between practical and theoretical artificial since, following the dictum that nothing is so practical as a good theory, they inevitably go together.

## Self-regulation of journalism education and accrediting bodies

The critical question is who controls professional education, that is, who or what body determines standards and sets acceptable norms. The United States follows the path of self-regulation. The educational establishment turns to accrediting bodies, independent agencies that set and evaluate standards of performance according to purpose and criteria and determine whether those criteria are met. For journalism and media education in the United States, that assessment has come to be carried out by a group of professionals and educators. Formed originally in 1945, the agency is known as the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). This is the organization that the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the U.S. Department of Education recognize as the accrediting body for journalism and mass communication in colleges and universities (the ACEJMC website is at <http://www.ukans.edu/~acejmc/>).

The current Council has 26 members representing professional and educational organizations. The Council can have up to three public members. According to the ACEJMC website, "Membership on the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications is open to all membership associations of educators or professionals (including foundations related to such associations) that are involved with the professional education of students for careers in journalism, mass communications, telecommunications and other media. Admission to the Council is subject to approval by a majority of the Accrediting Council."

ACEJMC now accredits 113 programs. In recent years the process has been taken to other countries and now includes eight international programs: three in the United Arab Emirates, two in Mexico and one each in Chile, New Zealand and Qatar. Some have questioned the appropriateness of evaluation of programs in places where the press is distinctly not free, but ACEJMC asserts that the process takes into account "Institutional Uniqueness."

Nine criteria are used to evaluate programs:

- (1) Mission, governance and administration;
- (2) Curriculum and instruction;
- (3) Diversity and inclusiveness;
- (4) Full-time and part-time faculty;
- (5) Scholarship: Research, creative and professional activity;
- (6) Student services;
- (7) Resources, facilities and equipment;
- (8) Professional and public service; and

## (9) Assessment of learning outcomes.

The accreditation, which is strictly voluntary, has been relatively successful, although a number of institutions, including Northwestern, The Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin at Madison, have opted out of the process claiming that it stifles innovation or that the program wants to concentrate on graduate students. Still, accreditation has at least two important positive features. One is that the organization has both professional and academic representatives. Together they define and interpret accreditation standards. The second is that while not measuring or ranking performance the agency's assessments do assure minimum standards are being met.

Attesting to the vitality of media education—not just journalism—is the growth of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (<http://www.aejmc.org/>). Tracing its founding to 1912, the organization promotes higher professional standards and academic scholarship. It has nearly 4,000 members from all over the world. Educators make up the bulk of members which also include students and professionals.

At Iowa, my approach to journalism education was partly formed by pollster and scholar George H. Gallup. He had majored in journalism at Iowa, served as editor of the student newspaper and later taught at Iowa. In 1926 at a meeting of journalism educators in Ohio, he said the teaching of journalism “must place less emphasis upon technique and practice and more and more upon theory. It must deal with the reasons which underlie the practices and less with the practices as such” (1927:17).

In fact, from its founding the Iowa program, first accredited in 1945, has endorsed a strong liberal arts orientation. Perhaps underscoring the point was the appointment of its first director, Charles H. Weller, a professor of Greek and archaeology. He outlined three fundamental objectives of the School that have withstood the test of time amazingly well: (1) journalists should have broad backgrounds; (2) journalists should possess sound knowledge of the theory and technique of the profession, including its history and problems; and (3) student journalists should have ample opportunity to put into practice in a laboratory principles learned in the classroom (Starck no date).

Journalism education goes beyond preparing young people for meaningful careers. It helps to educate young people who do not plan to become journalists on the role of journalism. Such informed future readers and viewers will demand high standards, and news media will have to respond. Journalism education's institutional presence also helps educate the public about the importance of journalism in a democracy. In addition, many journalism programs offer continuing education for working journalists, such as the Shorenstein Center (<https://shorensteincenter.org/>) and Nieman journalism program (<http://nieman.harvard.edu/>), both at Harvard, and Knight-Bagehot Fellowship in Economics and Business Journalism at Columbia (<https://journalism.columbia.edu/kb>), as well as dozens of others in institutions across the country.



Foundations also have played a role in the development of journalism education. Among the earlier supporters of journalism education were the Gannett Foundation and the Freedom Forum. Occasionally such support has been problematic because of efforts to influence academic content. Among the dozens of active supporters of journalism are the Knight Foundation (<https://knightfoundation.org/>), the Scripps Howard Foundation (<http://www.scripps.com/foundation/>), the Alicia Patterson Foundation (<http://aliciapatterson.org/>) and the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation (<http://inasmuchfoundation.org/journalism-foundation/>).

Knight has been especially active in journalism education supporting the work of the World Journalism Education Council (<https://wjec.net/home/>) and other educational organizations in taking a global approach to journalism. The Knight Center at the University of Texas at Austin recently published *Global Journalism Education in the 21st Century: Challenges and Innovations*, an outgrowth of four international conferences. The publication, which is free on line, explores journalism education on a global scale. The editors dedicate the publication “To educators and trainers worldwide who teach journalism according to the highest professional standards possible and to the students who carry their torches.” (Goodman and Steyn).

In all probability, journalism will continue to look to universities for a trained, comparatively inexpensive labor supply. But while being sensitive to professional interests, educators also must keep in mind the larger mission of serving society and providing opportunities for the maximum development of individual intellect and talent. Objectives of educators and professionals overlap, but they have different missions and roles. While recognizing their common goals, professionals and educators have to respect these different roles.

## Conclusions

Your daughter is becoming impatient. What’s your answer? she persists. What’s your advice about studying journalism in university? Perhaps she’s expecting a yes-or-no response. Unfortunately it is more complicated. Here is what I tell her:

If you continue to be interested in writing and committed to contribute to whatever community you are a part of, then by all means take advantage of what a good journalism program has to offer. There are some caveats.

- Be sure the curriculum offers a blend of theoretical and practical courses with emphasis on the theoretical.
- Pursue courses supplementing your journalism studies—sociology, economics, politics, psychology, philosophy, history and at least one language other than English. You may want to major in one of these disciplines and regard the journalism courses as secondary. Majoring in more than one discipline also makes sense.
- Live or study for a semester or year in another culture.



- Seek experience in working in several media platforms, e.g., online, video, print, etc.
- Remember that technology is a tool, the means not the end.
- Stimulate your entrepreneurial instincts by being innovative and learn how to capitalize on a good idea.
- Learn inside and outside the classroom and commit yourself to continue learning the rest of your life.

Finally, dear daughter, your future will be different from my past, but it promises to be just as exhilarating.

### About the author

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Mill, John Stuart (1978; originally published 1859). *On Liberty*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Starck, Kenneth (no date). History/Traditions (of the University School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Unpublished paper. Schramm made the comment in 1943.

# Contribute more, broadcast less

## On the role of feedback and articulation in a model of “elevated journalism”

*By Sebastian Köhler*

**Abstract:** The paper discusses the extent to which journalism needs to take its function of articulation more seriously and fulfil it more effectively as part of the profession’s public role. To do this, the paper develops aspects of a model of “elevated journalism” – an approach that also includes dialectic criticism of key tendencies in established journalism. Working with feedback from users, be it actual or anticipated, is expected to gain importance in future if journalism is still to maintain a place in societies that are constantly modernizing in so many ways.

### 1 An elevation?

An important distinction to start: As an achievement of modern civilization, journalism should be elevated rather than out of touch (cf. Jarren 2015: 114ff.). Elevated in what sense? To decide, we need to assume that continuity and discontinuity in social developments are interdependent (cf. Fuchs 2017: 262f.). A new phase of social development would elevate previous phases in such a way that existing features could be 1.) retained, 2.) eliminated or 3.) supplemented with new qualities to a certain extent. The degree to which this occurs can be determined by coincidence and necessity; by structures and actions; by crises and social conflict. One example is the debate in Switzerland and Germany in spring 2018 about the future of public broadcasting. In line with the proposals outlined here, one solution would be to elevate it: An open, public debate would be held and decisions made on which areas should be retained, shut down or raised to a new level, and to what extent.

### 2 Who is in which “filter bubble”?

One key aspect, not least of the debates about the future of SRF, ARD, ZDF etc. seems to be the fact that, for a while now, many people have criticized modern journalism in the Western world as an elitist project – from both a practical and, increasingly, a theoretical point of view. It is indeed hard to deny that journalism was and is shaped by an elite (Jarren 2015:113ff., cf. Steindl 2017: 403). This is the result of its links to economic elites (formerly the upwardly-mobile property-owning

bourgeoisie as owners), political elites (the emerging capitalist states and today those who profit from globalization, for example) and cultural elites (not least the once social-liberal and now “green” educated middle class that produces more than its fair share of young journalists in Germany (ibid.[1])).

I therefore hope that my thoughts will contribute to models of journalism and journalism studies that help to foster successful communication in society (cf. Dath: 2012: 427). That is the logic behind my proposals for reflection and practical application: more varied and open contributions, rather than one-sided broadcasts.

After all, journalism can be understood as a social field in which society’s knowledge is (re)constructed based on relevant contributions. In this sense, the word ‘contribution’ is used normatively to mean something made on an equal footing between those involved, and as such different from more one-sided broadcasts with a certain sense of mission. Journalistic contributions can thus be determined as interactive communication between producers and the public that is ideally informative for everyone involved (cf. Köhler 2009: 10ff.).

### 3 Elevated in terms of information?

So how can we define information more closely in this direction? According to Dietmar Dath and Barbara Kirchner, information is not a property of physical objects, but a relationship between such properties and our options for interacting with these objects. Both need to exist – we can never know objects other than in the form of the relationships we have with them (Dath 2012: 806). Material and its transformations can be systematized at body level between structures and materials, and at field level between energies and information (Schlegel 1996: 105ff.).

If we look at the tribal history of humans, a four-tiered historic sequence of change can be seen.

In a layered model like this, the older formation in each case is elevated by the subsequent formations. ‘Structure transformation’ (Stone Age/ancient civilization) and ‘material transformation’ (Metal Ages to Middle Ages) thus complement one another at the ‘body’ level, while the same can be said for ‘energy transformation’ ((pre-/post-)modern industrial age) and ‘information transformation’ (historically open) at the ‘field’ level.

We can therefore pinpoint two key roles for such elevated journalism:

1. Journalismus as a relatively self-sufficient factor in societal communication (“engine”) in its co-focus of attention that is open to criticism (both in the form of journalism that is accelerating all the time and in the deliberately slower form);
2. Journalism as a special medium (“mouthpiece”) in its feedback-rich co-moderation of debates in society (cf. Meier 2013: 63).

Especially in its uses, with its practical value for the individual, the community and society, journalism could gain a new type of social relevance, not least given the blurring of boundaries that is currently underway (hybridization e.g. towards citizens' journalism and data journalism). In their not only passive, but also in terms of possibilities diversely participative appropriations, journalistic services as contributions might become "building blocks of societal self-understanding" (Lüneborg 2012: 453) – elements of social and public self-criticism, self-limitation and self-regulation.

Suggestions from Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology allow journalism to be defined as "doing journalism" that is open to involvement, and as public, communicative forms of intercourse in the broader sense of social practice between expert and layperson cultures that could lose all distinction here (Wiedemann 2014: 83ff.; Lüneborg 2012: 454f.). Journalism studies as a laboratory of change in journalism should therefore both describe and analyze the production of journalistic processes of interpretation and develop changed communicative practices experimentally. When it comes to questions of journalism, democracy and participation, forms of participative communication in and between changing societal and communal public (sub-)spheres are of interest, with a view to established and newer power structures in the social and journalistic field (Lüneborg 2012: 456).

The journalism studies laboratory focuses less on providing training in established journalistic forms and more on experimentally designing, testing and evaluating – i.e. also 'elevating' new types of contribution in more participative forms than previously, with corresponding feedback. Diversity in editorial offices should increase in many respects, for example through the employment of more migrants in the field of journalism (cf. Pöttker 2016: 11ff.). There might then be justification to hope for the development of experimental content and forms that appeal more and better to classes and groups that have been underprivileged in terms of journalism up to now, in order to open up discussion with them on an equal footing. These groups include women and girls, the unemployed, people with experience or fear of losing social status, those with little formal education, young people from low-income backgrounds, people with a background of migration, and people with certain sexual or gender orientations.

After all, it appears that the articulative role of journalistic media is still underestimated as an important part of its public function (see German state press laws). In a study (Steindl 2017: 420), just 46.9 percent of the journalists in Germany questioned stated that they found it extremely or very important to "give people the opportunity to articulate their views." 48.9 percent of women questioned gave this response, while the figure for freelance journalists was just 37.5 percent. This indicates that editorial offices certainly tend to need more resources for a style of working that is open to feedback. Those working in newsrooms today have the chance to hear more than ever before, with feedback (including negative and critical feedback) an integral part of the ever more dynamic editorial routine. However, there is clearly a need for change if we are to prevent mainstream journalism from becoming potentially the most powerful of all filter bubbles (as described by Norbert Bolz, among others, see Klöckner 2017). It is therefore vital that forums and comment functions are not closed – even though their maintenance is sometimes hard work and may not increase the output per se. However, the at least cultural and technical opportunities for

participatory communication (cf. Köhler 2015:13ff.) beyond traditional and new elites could become a central moment for renewing and developing journalism as a resource for successful communication within society and thus for social self-design.

Despite the risks for its traditional practices, journalism would thus gain important opportunities for fundamental renewal, as long as it did not remain a primary means for other purposes – for example to create an audience for consumption of advertising messages or to shape loyal citizens. Much more than in the past, it can become a purpose in itself (cf. Kiefer 2011 & 2011a): towards global, intergenerational, social and environmental democratization. Journalists should therefore shift their attention away from contributions that determine facts to more open contributions: away from complaining about what journalism has lost, such as range, credibility and status, and towards processes of emergence, change and passing in which journalism itself plays a role, i.e. processes of ‘elevation’ of participatory public spheres.

#### **4 Journalism as interaction - indications and links in media economics**

Today, it is almost impossible to maintain a strict distinction between communicators and recipients (Kiefer 2017: 682ff.). As a result, many media economists are trying to model journalism as more of a service and less of a typical property. They argue that “collaborative value creation” (Kiefer 2017: 688) should play a greater role and that recipients are therefore strengthened. Kiefer argues that, just like a university professor who acts as a producer of information when conducting research and a service provider when teaching, journalists today are both information producers and functional service providers for the users of their contributions at the same time. These services should “expand, change or improve” users’ knowledge of the researched topic “in interaction” with the users and factors they contribute (ibid.: 688). According to Kiefer, the focus is no longer merely on the mere “transfer of services from the journalist to the recipient” (ibid.: 689), but on interaction between the players in a spirit of informational sociality, with the co-productive aspects of cognition, communication and cooperation (cf. Fuchs 2017a). This means that, without collaboration from the users, journalists can neither provide their service nor create any other individual or social value (Kiefer 2017: 689) – they are simply reliant on collaboration from the users. Only by working together do the two sides have the resources needed to produce journalistic services. The logical consequence of this is that, ultimately, the final decision on the benefits of this in terms of the exchange and utility value lies with the users.

This could be regretted as a restriction on the (myth of) journalistic autonomy, but it can also be interpreted as a potential gain in terms of participation and democratization. If the users are taken more seriously than in many previous models – not least from a media economics point of view – this also means that the kind of cooperation needed for communication within society could often be rife with conflict or even doomed to fail (see ibid.) due to the structural asymmetries between the players in journalism. However, this model appears to offer a more useful explanation, both practically and theoretically, than naïve claims of the ‘independence’ of journalists. From a dialectic



point of view, the restrictions of production and usage processes mean that everyone involved shares responsibility for public information and the formation of opinions (Kiefer 2017: 690). Journalists should base their work on the needs and problems of those who use it – which is not the same as populistically giving the audience what they want to hear (Kiefer 2017: 696). It is important to pay attention to their interests and especially to feedback – in the context of social forms of interaction in individual, shared and societal communication (cf. Köhler 2001).

According to Kiefer, the discipline of cultural studies is particularly likely to employ service theory models of users as co-producers, as long as their studies describe interactive connections between media production, media text and reception behavior on the part of the audience (Kiefer 2017: 690). This is an effective starting point for a model of elevated journalism, as long as this specific economic perspective also engenders a move towards journalism and journalism studies that are “humbler” (Kiefer 2017: 693) and more self-critical. Journalism could therefore be modelled in a new way, as a public and especially expectation-oriented service provider. The specific public value it provides is the production of public spheres that enable and develop freedom of information and speech for all citizens of democratic societies. And, where journalism is understood in this way, its structure is based on “collaboration” (Kiefer 2017: 695f.). Journalists should therefore look for and promote collaboration from users in a very different way and more than before (Kiefer 2017: 696). Not least, it is about communicating and dialectically ‘elevating’ mutual expectations (Kiefer 2017: 697). According to Marie Luise Kiefer, this kind of perspective also enables “potential disruption” to be identified more easily, while the amalgamation of journalists’ roles as information producers (researchers) and service providers (communicators) can also be interpreted and criticized as another ambivalent aspect of convergence in the field of journalism (Kiefer 2017: 698f.)

## 5 Fake news and feedback

“Fake news” was named Word of the Year 2017 by the Collins English Dictionary, while “alternative facts” became Germany’s “ugliest word of the year” (cf. Fuchs 2018). It is not a new phenomenon, but the internet has inexorably increased its spread. But dealing with fake news should not be left to states and laws, nor to companies and algorithms. Instead, in order to promote social and environmental democratization, it should be addressed permanently by tiered public spheres with active users at every level. This would mean intermediaries like Google and Facebook doing their own part to help the formation of these kinds of more varied public spheres. One approach would be for them to pay people appropriately for curating this professional content and moderating the resultant debates on the large platforms. Christian Fuchs rightly highlights the fact that, as they are focused on economic concerns, intermediary corporations prioritize automation and big data over human practitioners. In contrast, he argues, as many people as possible should be involved much more to prevent the establishment of (even more) “profit over democracy.” According to Fuchs (2018), this interplay between journalists and users could create something totally new here: Laws should force media corporations around the world to employ journalists as fact checkers, for an appropriate salary. This would mean that, if enough or sufficiently qualified users triggered a certain

interaction, it would be much easier to help decide what was and was not appropriate democratically (not based on profit or power). Public or public service internet platforms appear a sensible alternative to intermediaries here. They should be free from advertising and slowed down as much as possible, in order to enable political debate and democratization in a new way.

## 6 Moving towards societies with more feedback

According to this approach, the focus would be on brokering the human exchange of information (both with other people and with nature) and the human exchange of energy (also with others and with nature). "Information relations and energy relations are the abstract (...) template for that which Marx calls the "means of production" and "productive forces" (Dath 2012-807). Back then, industrialization (productive forces) and capitalism (means of production) formed the historical frame of reference. But looking back, in terms of dialectics, it was also about "pedigree collapse relations between energy and information attributes," which Dath and Kirchner use to determine "the mutual emergence from one another of the different moments of the become, the becoming and the possible" (ibid.).

The normative point of reference in terms of enlightenment here is a political program that moves towards a "just self-production and self-regulation [of the species society] that are responsible in terms of energy and information". In economic terms, achieving this would mean that both distribution and production were socialized in such a way that people were not and could not be blackmailed, but could play a part in shaping society (Dath 2012-808). The common channels of public participation do not appear suitable for making politics "feedback richer" and thus more democratic (Dath 2012-427). Dath and Kirchner argue that, when protests and conflicts of societal relevance occur – be it for example surrounding the Castor transports in Germany, in the US town of Ferguson, Missouri in summer 2014 following the shooting of the black teenager Michael Brown by the police, or in connection with the G20 summit in Hamburg in 2017 – it is clear that "destruction and uncoordinated protest are very telegenic, sexy on the one hand and demoralizing on the other." Situations in which justified anger gets violently out of hand are the ideal place for the common mass media to demonstrate the two central aspects that make up their being. The authors describe these two "souls" as marketable sensationalism and the system-supporting propaganda function of many mass media. According to Dath and Kirchner, this sensationalism is less a product of the fact that information is a commodity in capitalism and more because news of natural disasters or large technical accidents serves to intensify existing fears of a loss of competitive advantage, unemployment and homelessness – in short, to update latent threats that the community constantly holds ready for the individual.

Those who are not as fearful about their position among people are more flexible in discussion and not as quick to panic or be mobilized in a mob (Dath 2012-809f.).

As a result, people can develop into creatures and creators of their own energy and information

possibilities (Dath 2012-808). Progress could then be redefined in terms of information, with the yardstick of the speed of development being the extent to which one no longer learns how things are or were, but instead learns how to learn how things are not yet and how this can be extracted from the way things are or were (Dath 2012-809).

A traditional “public sphere” would need to be reformulated and elevated in this direction, including as “production public spheres” (in the sense of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge), i.e. to be pluralized and improved. It would also be vital to establish and protect the access of as many people who are not and cannot be blackmailed to machines that can produce, save, transmit, encrypt or explicate energy and information, and that can calibrate, determine and change the proportions of transformation, implicature and explication between energy and information (Dath 2012-811f.). Elevated journalism should find and play its (proven and new) roles there. Cuts in social services, the destruction of the environment, violence and similar general signs of crisis and the increasingly authoritarian tendencies on display in such contexts show that, if these problems are not to be seized upon for authoritarian or fascist purposes, journalists still have a lot of work to do in terms of the cultural role of public media in the modern democratization of societies (Krüger 1992-220).

Bertolt Brecht made two clever suggestions. One was the proposal – much quoted and more topical today than ever – to transform broadcasting from an apparatus of distribution to one of communication, i.e. with a diverse range of changing perspectives and feedback at a whole new level. The less well-known of Brecht’s two ideas is to see popular sovereignty as sovereignty of arguments. In my view, this means modelling democracy as a form of intercourse for society as a whole, enlightened by information, whose cognitions, communications and cooperations reach an argumentative level, i.e. one that is convincing with as little force as possible.

## About the Author

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## Footnote

[1] See also the study by Siegfried Weischenberg et al. "Journalismus in Deutschland 2005", overview published in Media Perspektiven, issue 7/2006, p. 346-361; see <https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/sowi/journalistik/kvvarchiv/KvvArchiv/jouridmp.pdf>, accessed on 24.9.2017, 19.33)

***Translation: Sophie Costella***

# Courage journalism

## Why we should not just let our profession be abolished

*By Peter Welchering*

*Abstract:* Does the profession we call journalism have a future? It is time that journalists finally went back to the guardian function they are tasked with. Critical journalism challenges power structures. This paper demands journalism that takes responsibility and is committed to the values of enlightenment.

The future of journalism is a topic of frequent discussion, often involving effusive demands for the profession's reinvention. But one thing is often forgotten: The crisis of journalism is first and foremost a crisis of journalistic personalities – and there are a lot of sides to that.

Journalistic personalities are an endangered species. Instead, we increasingly see a far-reaching lack of thought and failure to take a stance. Simply broadcasting with taking a stance, or filling pages with any old content, does not display any journalistic intention – and those who do not pursue a journalistic intention will fail to inspire or challenge their readers, listeners, or viewers.

### **Journalism needs journalists to take a stance and back it up**

By failing to pursue a journalistic intention, journalists avoid antagonizing. No politician, ministry official, holder of public office, lobbyist, businessperson or stakeholder will take action against journalists whose content is entirely neutral – but they certainly will against authors who present their journalistic intentions, perhaps forcefully.

The manager of a television broadcaster recently argued that the problem with critical journalism is that it is a lot of work, both during and afterwards. Cease-and-desist proceedings, investigations into betrayal of secrecy and requests for justification, presented due to political pressure, undoubtedly take up resources. Media houses, publishing houses, and broadcasters are currently not willing to accept these inconvenient consequences of serious journalistic work.

As a result, we increasingly see ‚journalism presenters,‘ who either mercilessly read straight from the autocue or are at least able to sprinkle the ten most important buzzwords from media bingo into every program and discussion.

Many colleagues see writing and broadcasting in every direction not as failure to take a stance, but simply as their job. They do not account to themselves for what they do. As a result, we need to return to more reflection on professional ethics, rather than just soap-box oratory about it – and to journalistic training that pursues goals, not just purposes. Above all, we need journalistic personalities – people who antagonize. Without that, journalism will not find its way out of this crisis.

Journalists need to rediscover their passion for thinking thoroughly. After all, our industry is guilty not only of not thinking enough, but especially of not thinking systematically enough, and often of not thinking fairly or honestly.

Thinkers are often unpopular. And if they start reflecting on professional ethics – and this reflection is undertaken by the reader, listener or viewer – they often meet resistance. We can keep a few moral observations – superficial, if you don't mind – for the soap box.

Ethical consideration has disappeared from everyday journalism. "Thinking is generally overrated," said one Senior Editor recently, and he was not joking. This attitude gives rise to the failure to take a stance that now plagues the profession. We journalists find ourselves in a crisis of our own making.

Journalists do not account to themselves for what they do. Senseless writing is the result. There is a lack of people with a stance, of journalistic personalities. Even at the Federation of Journalists, when I talk about journalistic training that pursues goals, not just purposes, people look at me incredulously.

The profession is in a serious crisis – one with identifiable reasons and one that we journalists have helped to cause. Scrutinizing these causes is the only way to overcome them. We have to stop preaching, meet our readers, listeners, and viewers, and discuss with them on an equal footing. We have to address the deficits in our methods and expertise. There is a lot to do.

Many journalists no longer conduct research, as they find it too difficult. Others refuse to learn forensic methods of research. Reflection on professional ethics is lacking across the board.

Most journalists reject the idea that the crisis in journalism is in part a personal failure. They have carved a comfortable position for themselves in the journalistic mainstream and go to great lengths to avoid antagonism. Instead, they simply want to get through the working day without too much exertion and enjoy some success with the mainstream. Of course, I need to be very careful in my criticism of this situation if I want to change it.

Communication is the way forward here. We do not want to frighten the horses. In my experience, journalists are especially easy to frighten. We need to reach an understanding on the state of journalism in the age of its worthlessness. Many people no longer see journalism as valuable, as it has lost its values. Too many journalist presenters and media agents have moved away from the duty of truthfulness as the fundamental value on which this profession is built.

Economic factors are often listed as the causes of this crisis in journalism. Although the economic



consequences of the structural changes in communication in society do of course magnify the symptoms of the crisis in journalism, this explanation alone is too simplistic.

### **The link between credibility and the search for truth**

In my many discussions with listeners and viewers, I am constantly confronted with the huge need for cleanly-researched, well-told stories. But our readers, listeners, and viewers also have an increasing desire to know how a story comes about, which source material the journalist had access to, and what the individual steps in the research were. We need to work more transparently here – needless to say without violating the requirements that data protection places on journalistic work.

There can be no question that enlightened, responsible media users remain a guiding principle. But the proportion of responsible readers, listeners, and viewers is by no means as small as we like to think. This minority may often be silent, but it is growing.

These media users demand that journalists pursue their profession based on values and communicate this set of values clearly. Journalists must be prepared to take responsibility for their value orientation. To do this, however, they need a value orientation in the first place – something that many colleagues lack. Furthermore, this dialog with media consumers requires a form of journalism that is both enlightened and enlightening. Only then can journalists communicate with media consumers on an equal footing.

However, this way of viewing journalism as a service for the citizens of a free and democratic constitutional state has simply gone out of fashion. Instead, we see content marketing as a journalistic service, journalistic products being replaced by purely entertainment formats, and the senseless repetition of prescribed stereotypes of power narratives in politics and society.

This has plunged our profession into a very serious crisis of credibility. But instead of reflecting on how credibility is linked to the duty of truthfulness and the duty to inform, we journalists resort to excuses for why we no longer take our work seriously or why we cannot or do not want to do so. As a result, we lose even more credibility.

One truth is undeniable: No-one needs or wants journalism without values. Journalism that fulfils its duty to the ever-present values of enlightenment takes effort. But it is worth it.

After all, the segment of journalism that is in the deepest crisis is the mainstream – conducted by colleagues who work to serve politics disguised as journalism or who are primarily focused on self-marketing. Both cases are special forms of advocacy journalism, which in itself produces an attitude of self-presentation in which the journalist himself completely overshadows the story. Journalists become journalist presenters.

## **Hot air is becoming a journalistic virtue**

One of these neo-German demands is for the journalist to become a brand. Journalistic personalities cannot be sold, as they are a thing of the past. But self-marketing has to be the main role of journalists. Of course there have always been show-offs who produce a lot of hot air and blow it into the media world. Now they are officially sanctified. Hot air is becoming a new journalistic virtue, washing away the duty of truth, research skills, and stylistic ability.

New journalism, I am assured, does not need any of these hopelessly outdated values. I have now stopped attending conferences on the topic of journalistic training altogether, as I can no longer bear the bullshit bingo that goes on there.

All too often, journalism is no longer about the truth – clueless self-presentation is all that counts. In doing this, we journalists are making ourselves surplus to requirements, as we are no longer fulfilling our role in society. The open celebration of cluelessness as a new journalistic virtue is simply appalling.

We need good, systematic training in journalism skills at all levels. It must be based on the rules of professional ethics, forms of presentation, research techniques, and presentation forms that have developed, and it must develop them further. All this sort-of training that produces sort-of journalists (drone journalism, social media journalism, data journalism, investigative journalism, breaking news journalism, lifestyle journalism, and goodness knows what else) is no use – it teaches no journalistic principles, just the froth on top. Anyone who goes into a live situation with just this froth is doomed to fail.

Of course, I have nothing against an advanced seminar in data journalism, for example. But anyone who thinks that this can replace fundamental journalistic knowledge is mistaken.

Ridiculously, many of these sort-of training courses do not even teach the principles required for a discipline that is intended to supplement journalism. When a colleague returns from a seminar on data journalism unable to apply graph technology to an extensive research project and with no idea what normal distribution is, he has wasted both his own time and that of the editorial office – even if he can now supply any round of bullshit bingo with the relevant hashtags.

## **Forms of sort-of journalism devalue the profession**

A seminar that teaches the supremacy of social media in breaking news situations only helps if its participants have clear knowledge of classic news factors, cross-searching, and clean presentation from a professional ethics point of view – however retro the innovative new media zeitgeist might find this.

On the other hand, this is exactly the quarter that laments the potential extinction of our trade. They

are then quick to demand that journalism be recognized as a charitable activity, including for tax purposes. Some even want to lead journalism into a magnificent, cross-media age, without stating exactly what they think this means.

This lamentation is nothing new, but that does not make it bearable. New funding models, new ways to limit access to what was once the freest of all professions... and there are murmurings of new forms of journalism that will replace the dusty old profession of the age of print and broadcast.

Depending on your point of view, the future of journalism lies in drone journalism, data journalism, or robot journalism. New degree programs are springing up, claiming to secure the future of journalism, but in fact merely applying 1980s segmentation theory to journalistic training – in the same way that back then Music Studies became a specialism in medieval flute playing.

People discuss whether Storytelling or Corporate Publishing with a focus on Native Advertising provide a better promise of employment in the future, or whether Content Delivery will actually be the main form in which the industry practices.

All these discussions completely neglect the fact that journalism only has a future at all if we journalists ply our trade properly. We cannot afford to forget our key role: that of guardians!

This role has many facets, presents significant challenges, and demands a great deal of methodological expertise and enormous passion for the truth, for the system of checks and balances on which a constitutional state is based, and for this democratically-organized society.

This is certainly not as pleasant as seeking salvation in the new forms of sort-of journalism – in the same vein as medieval flute playing. After all, it involves a lot of hostility, a huge amount of hard work, and wrestling for the right words. Put simply, the future of journalism lies in journalists who finally take up the role of guardians that has been assigned to them. It is as simple as that!

### **Investigative journalism as a sign of crisis**

We need to see the fashionable term “investigative journalism” as a sign of crisis. Its very existence is a clear indication that research as a journalistic method is having a hard time German journalism. The term “investigative research” has been invented here to ennoble the way in which data, information and findings are searched for and verified in a systematic and methods-guided way in the journalistic trade.

Many local newspapers have long since done away with journalists who conduct research. Today, undercover research is often considered a shady trade, and working together with informants from authorities, companies, and organizations almost criminal. On the other hand, some colleagues (women are much more restrained than men here) celebrate even the simplest of research activities, such as asking a second source, as an incredible investigative achievement – thus contributing

significantly to the public's skewed view of journalists' research activities. When even simply checking the facts is presented as "incredible investigative journalism" like a high-drama thriller, many readers, listeners, and viewers can only shake their heads in despair.

Even some public state broadcasters have cut research resources drastically in recent years. In some cases, specialist editorial offices have simply been closed down, either for cost reasons or as part of a professed yet totally misunderstood cross-media approach. Research was no longer really practiced. As a result of huge complaints from freelance science journalists in particular, this embarrassing situation became the subject of increasing public discussion a while ago. Even broadcast hierarchies that had little to do with journalism found it increasingly difficult to ignore this unpleasant development. As a result, some media houses set up so-called "investigative departments" as alibis.

There is money to be made from affirmative communication and reporting that helps to reinforce prevailing structures. Critical journalism challenges power structures.

However, since critical journalism can only be maintained in the long term if critical journalists are able to make a living from it and have the financial resources to conduct their time-consuming research, the grand coalition's plan for affirmative communication appears to be working. If the foundation of its business and its business model are abolished, critical journalism with a duty to tell the truth will soon be a thing of the past.

The process is not going unchallenged, however. This kind of critical journalism, with its duty of enlightenment, has become established in blogs and podcasts, on Twitter and on news portals. However, the journalists working there do not make a living from these activities - and that is the real problem.

With a few exceptions, journalism 1.0 is currently having the foundation of its business undermined by the grand coalition of affirmative communication. This is driving its transformation into journalism 2.0 - which has as yet been unable to develop a foundation for its business.

These are exciting, but dangerous, times. If critical, enlightening journalism wants to survive, it needs to develop a business model for journalism 2.0. If it fails, the grand coalition of affirmative communication will have won. Critical journalism, democracy, and this Republic all need viable business models for journalism. It is time to start developing and operating such models for the long term.

Media convergence fundamentally changes the working conditions of us journalists. This offers opportunities, but also hazards, if total buy out contracts mean that creative minds no longer have air to breathe or an economic foundation for their work. Online journalism is seeing the beginnings of a two-tier society between high-class writing and those who simply churn out content. This needs to be stopped.

**Cross-media is not an end in itself**

The still-patchy protection for informants and the great dream of some security policymakers to monitor journalists using their hoped-for data retention powers are doing the rest. Wage agreement policy, media policy, and social policy all come together in the question of whether professional journalism has a future.

It only does if we go on the offensive to protect it.

Instead of developing cross-media concepts, they stagger from one hectic online activity to the next social media bubble. When that bursts, they pay enormous sums to self-proclaimed consultants who push them into the next media management cloud. In the heat of the battle, they fail to see that what readers, listeners, and viewers really want is not a hodge-podge of social media morsels and instant fragments of information, but well-researched journalistic products.

It is time for all those involved in media to face up to a fundamental fact: Cross-media is dramatically changing the way we work, but not the guardian role of journalism itself.

**The journalistic trade is becoming industrialized**

We need to take a stand. We will be faced with new editorial and production systems. If we allow publishers and the hierarchies of broadcasters to prescribe these systems to us, we will be allowing them to dictate working conditions that none of us want. In doing so, we will be permitting a form of discount journalism that will undoubtedly eradicate the profession's future.

Our sector is in the middle of an extremely exciting process of industrialization. It is no good harking back to the good old days – we need to get active in shaping this process. By refusing to accept the development, we exclude ourselves from it.

I am always amazed to hear about how rights of use and fundamental changes to copyright law are suddenly causing arguments in collective bargaining processes. In my view, our strategies in professional policy have clearly missed the paradigm shift in journalism.

If we do not wake up and implement intellectual property law that is acceptable to authors, or fail to secure and efficiently protect copyright in the long term, we allow ourselves to be dispossessed as publishers and authors. We have seen industrialization processes like this before. Do we journalists have to repeat all the mistakes of history, just because we are so important that we do not need to learn from the past?

Behind the scenes of this development, many journalists are plagued by deep uncertainty. Many no longer have the courage to base their stories in everyday life, as they are unable to access the philosophical principles of narration.

The first is to amaze. But amazing also unsettles people. Too many journalists want to avoid this. It is also difficult to segue from amazement to a successful dramatic composition. Journalists simply do not want to tackle the challenge, instead preferring to stick to the easy-to-digest, zeitgeisty, largely undefined “storytelling”. It is such a shame!

We really are in a brutalized trade, in which humanity and human sympathy are being pushed out by the idea of news about suffering as a commodity. This superficiality and this suppression of what is truly important in life is worse in journalism than in any other discipline. After a few years in the trade, many journalists become inured to the pointed elbows they need to employ simply to get through the day.

### **The crisis is caused by self-indulgence**

We need to change the situation. But we can only do so if we are clear that inconsiderate journalism has no place in good journalism. The best stories I achieved during my time as a reporter were those in which I got really close to the people. Let me give you an example from 30 years ago.

In Armenia, I reported on war and destruction from the town of Leninakan, as it was called then. An old Armenian woman came up to me and my cameraman as we returned to the foreigners’ camp. She spoke a little German, as her son had fled to Germany before the war – she had learned the language so that she could understand where he lived and what was happening around him.

The old woman said to me, “You are here because you are not indifferent to our plight.” You can tell by the way a journalist works whether the people he reports on are important to him, or whether they are just a means to an end.

We talked for around half an hour about why the people I report on are important to me and about why I truly grieve for everyone who dies in a war. There we stood, the old woman and I. We spoke casually. There is a sense of wanting to find out more that comes from caring for others, far beyond the usual professional curiosity.

The crisis in journalism is linked to the crisis in European culture – a crisis of orientation, stances, and values. This crisis has been caused by self-indulgence. It is the same self-indulgence that wants to make the neoliberal goal of unlimited growth as the internal driving force into the highest value in society. This self-indulgence is inhumane, as the interpersonal values of humans are left behind.

That is why we journalists need to return to the principles of journalistic work based on values. With the concept of moral dignity as its starting point, value-based journalism establishes the conditions for a liberal system that allows each individual to develop by taking responsibility. It sees its key role as examining developments in politics and society for these conditions. This is the fundamental guardian role of journalism.

All journalistic ethics, regardless of the specific political or ideological ideas that shape them, need to be bold in counteracting the reactionary escape from responsibility and the neglect of the ethical dimension of political, societal, and thus journalistic, actions. Value-based journalism demands that the idea of freedom of speech is implemented at all times, in all areas of our society.

### **Human dignity and responsible journalism**

Current arguments are too dominated by utilitarian considerations. In debates on media ethics, we journalists have even permitted the discussion to be shaped much too strongly by utilitarian considerations from policymakers. We need to put the utilitarian considerations back where they belong: as nothing more than tactical considerations.

Those who want to practice journalism with tactical considerations are doomed to fail. Readers, listeners, and viewers have a right to expect journalists to act on an ethical foundation – something that people are now demanding. But we journalists have been much too quick to refuse to accept accountability for our actions.

Instead, we have retreated to simple utilitarian considerations. The causes of this are deeply rooted in society and economics. We accept insufficiency as an economic principle and derive utilitarian considerations from it.

This causes a break in thinking, however – one that we need to overcome in order to maintain a key foundation of our profession, based in media philosophy. This foundation can best be described as responsible journalism, guided by the principle of ethical human dignity. This kind of responsible, reflected journalism forms the basis of a journalistic profession and professionalism that deserves the name and fulfils its role as a guardian. But it takes courage.

### **About the author**

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***Translation: Sophie Costella***



# Quo vadis, Journalism?

## The Future of an Old Media Profession in the Digital Era

By Horst Pöttker

*Abstract:* Rising costs, outsourcing, mass layoffs, diminished circulation, rapidly sinking revenue from advertising: there is a general consensus that the print media are going through a crisis and that the underlying causes for this are to be found in the revolution of digital media. There is also a widespread concern among journalism researchers, and more recently also among democratically oriented politicians, that this crisis could lead to a decline in the journalist profession.

Which prospects does journalism have in the light of these challenges? How must it adapt to overcome the crisis, and what must be maintained to still be able to speak of a journalist profession? I see journalism as a profession that is dedicated to the task of establishing an optimum *public sphere*, allowing for as much transparency with reference to societal developments and relations as possible by imparting accurate and important information to the greatest possible number of people (Pöttker 2010).

The argument is composed of the following six steps:

### 1 Is journalism coming to an end?

“The century of journalism is past,” as Siegfried Weischenberg claims (Weischenberg 2010). The reference is to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the beginning of which the concept of journalism as “self-observation of society through observation from an other”. This concept involved professional elements such as the self-image of an impartial observer, the focus on the function of spreading news, or advertising revenue as the primary source of financing, and a relative autonomy towards party politics.

It can hardly be doubted that the period of *this* type of journalism is, indeed, coming to an end. Nevertheless, there is enough reason that journalism as a *profession dedicated to the creation of publicness as a public good* will go on. Could it be that we are not experiencing the end of journalism, but that now after 100 years the difficulties confronting all institutions have begun to impact this profession, too: that fossilized standards are losing their significance since at another

level socio-cultural developments have progressed further? Optimism in this regard relies on two arguments:

The first is a theoretical, sociological one. Journalism will survive the crisis of the press because its existence stems from a fundamental societal need for a public sphere which no development in the media could cause to disappear. Modern societies without a journalism with a concern for its own autonomy are not sustainable, as e.g. the collapse of the socialist societies in Eastern Europe has demonstrated.

The main reason behind the emergence of the journalist profession is the extreme complexity of modern societies whose human subjects require accurate and salient information beyond the scope of their immediate experience in order to participate in their culture. Without an optimum on unrestricted social communication, complex social formations are not able to become aware of their problems and to regulate themselves. What guarantees them this resource of self-regulation is journalism.

My second argument is an historical one. Journalism in the sense of a profession dedicated to the public was already around before at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century it took on the form that many now consider to be journalism per se. If we take into account the etymology of the word “profession” (from Latin *profiteri* = confess), then it seems to be constitutive of the journalist profession to acknowledge one’s dedication to the public sphere, even in order to make it clear to society that journalists contribute something that is worth monetary compensation. This became observable for the first time at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century among literary publicists such as Daniel Defoe. Not coincidentally, that was in England, at the time the most advanced country in terms of the emergence of civil capitalist society (Pöttker 2011a). But as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Central and Eastern Europe there were also writers like Lessing, Heine (Pöttker 2016), or Pushkin (Pöttker 2006), who worked for contemporary publications and were consciously focused on producing publicness and a public sphere. They influenced journalistic genres of presentation such as the reportage (Pöttker 2000) long before the heyday of the electrical telegraph, the rotary press, or the self-image of the impartial observer.

In the digital media era, journalism might just regain some of those features which were characteristic of it in the period of “literary journalism” (Baumert 2013).

## 2 From spreading the news to providing orientation

Journalism’s function of transmitting *news* to its audience is on the decline in the digital media era, as quickly absorbable information on current affairs is no longer primarily supplied by journalist mass media, but, instead, engulfs the public from all sides. Even while waiting for the subway, it is practically impossible to avoid being confronted with the latest catastrophes, politicians’ proclamations, or football scores. The tie between journalism and disseminating news is also

loosening because non-journalist communicators (or communications organizations) that can participate in society's communication networks with the help of digital media technologies, but without proportionately increasing investment costs, can profitably make use of presentation techniques developed by news reporting.

It is apparent that in this situation journalism must be on the lookout for other functions it can fulfill. One such function that has been a secondary one up to now is to help its public achieve a deeper understanding of the increasingly complex societal state of affairs (Stephens 2014). This function can be called *providing orientation*. While spreading news is dependent on events and on short presentation forms that rank them according to their significance, providing orientation is more closely linked to concepts of process or interconnection. Especially suitable here are more comprehensive forms of presentation (Bespalova et al. 2010) which require thorough research and more engaged forms of appropriation on the part of the audience.

Journalists are not educationalists, as they are expected to consider their audience to be fully mature. Journalism, then, can only provide orientation by making complex relationships transparent and in this way helping its audience to develop their own understanding of the world.

As far as understanding what is already there in the world is concerned, it is necessary to be familiar with the laws governing nature. Good scientific journalism attempts to vividly impart the fundamental laws of nature and to make their interconnections with the life-world of the audience transparent.

But things are different with respect to the *cultural* part of our environment, which consists of material (e.g., buildings or clothing) and immaterial (e.g., norms or language) products of human activity. Since they are man-made, cultural phenomena vary between societies and are subject to constant transformation. They have become what they are and, thus, have a history. Cultural phenomena cannot be understood if it is not clear how they have come into being. This provides journalism with an opportunity to help its audience attain a deeper understanding of the present by making transparent the events of the past.

Since historical journalism needs to be up to date, its own form of professional quality control leads to a motivation for observing the past from the perspective of the present and for establishing connections between past and present. Nietzsche distinguished three ideal types of such connections between the present and a historical narrative—a distinction still in use today with somewhat different terminology: the *antiquarian* (genetic) one, the *monumental* (exemplary or analogous) one, and the *critical* one (Nietzsche 1874; Rüsen 1990; Pöttker 2011b).

Scientific and historical journalism are just two branches for which can be outlined what could be meant by considering journalism's function of providing orientation, which Mitchell Stephens is calling "wisdom journalism". The possibilities for imagining the concrete forms of the paradigm shift from spreading news to providing orientation are limitless. In court reports, for example, the shift could mean turning one's attention to civil trials, probing into which would involve a number of

orientation guides for the audience's everyday life.

A shift from spreading news to providing orientation will certainly undermine the news value factors of journalism which have been the subject of much research in communications theory since the 1960s. Research on news values examines the criteria according to which journalists select *news* for publication. If in future, journalism proves to be less about spreading news and more about providing orientation, then *research* on the news value will also lose some of its relevance to the practice of journalism.

### 3 From detached observer to independent actor

Which self-image does the digital media era requires of journalists? Since we cannot understand the present without being familiar with the past it comes from, an historical approach is recommended here also.

Regardless of when we consider journalism to have begun in its own right (Kiesewetter & Pöttker 2011): in the mass media era, when the traditional professional self-image surfaced, the only technological and organizational instrument of public communication was the *press*. For printed newspapers that are actually physically transported somewhere, there is inevitably a time lapse between the event reported and the audience's reading the report. This promoted the self-image of the *detached observer* who is not part of the event on which is being reported and is not allowed to be part of it, either. Within this framework, *independence* and *impartiality* is equated with *non-involvement*, and the professional commitment to truth is interpreted as an obligation towards disinterestedness and detachment.

In the meantime, media culture has taken on a completely different appearance. In contrast to the press, electronic and digital media share two qualities. First, there is not necessarily a time lapse between event, report, and reception. Second, the audio-visual impact plays a much greater role. Both of these factors lead to a greater immediacy of media content, which entices journalists to want to have an effect on the reality they should be reporting on. This situation, then, provides plausible illustrative examples to support the idea that journalist professionalism is on the decline.

Yet, it seems that we also need to take a close, self-critical look at the traditional journalist self-image of the detached observer from which a spontaneous skepticism emanates. This requires a more comprehensive view of the cultural transformation brought about by the media revolution at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The concept "media culture" has been used to characterize the social formation so strongly influenced by the new media era. What is meant is the ideal type of a culture in which the production of public perception and plans of action oriented to such perception have become hegemonic factors that override the specific logic of other spheres of action (Imhof et al. 2004). For example, political parties nominate their most telegenic members as candidates, not their most competent ones. Or, professors prefer being interviewed by media to dealing with their students.

Journalism in the new media era must, above all, confront itself with the fact that it, like it or not, can become the cause of events and conditions that it only intended to report on simply *because* it reports on them. This begins at a very basic level, for instance, if at the topping-out ceremony at a construction site, the wreath is pulled up not only once, but three times because the cameraman was dissatisfied with the first two photos. And it ends with terrible events like someone running amok, 9/11, or decapitations in Iraq, which were, not least, terrorist actions staged for the media and, in the lack of globalized, live television reporting would perhaps not have taken place in this way.

The traditional self-conception of journalists is in need of revision in a society in which media have become major factors in constituting reality. The point is that journalism, like it or not, must be understood as a factor that from the outset is always involved in the events reported on. Up to this point, there has been little reflection on what this might mean in a concrete way. Criteria for such considerations are missing in the ethics codes for journalist behavior. The most important insight to be gained here is that the desirable *independence* and *impartiality* of journalists cannot (that is, can no longer) be equated with their *non-involvement* (Pöttker 2017).

It might be useful to take a look at the self-conception of journalists who consciously engaged in this profession *before* the self-image of the detached observer materialized during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his work as a correspondent for the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, Heine constantly wrote in the first person since he saw himself as part of the event he was reporting on. At the same time, there was no one who would have asserted his own independence as a journalist more adamantly than he (Pöttker 2016).

#### 4 From advertising revenues to economic and editorial independence

The strongest threat confronting journalism in the digital media era is the rapid loss of advertising revenues for the press, as advertising is increasingly focusing on online media which no longer need to attract their audience's attention with editorial material because they are more precisely aligned with their target group. The resulting crisis for the print media is often understood as a process of assimilation in which journalism now forfeits its hard-won (partial) autonomy from politics for a too strongly advanced integration into the economic system.

It is true that with sinking advertising revenues, the pressure exerted by the remaining advertising customers on journalism increases, which may appear to be a form of colonization of journalism's life-world through the economic system. But advertising revenue is not the only source of financing for journalism. There are also sales proceeds, with which a professional publication service is paid for directly.

With advertisements disappearing from journalist media, these media increasingly need to be financed by their sales revenues. Whether they will survive on the market for journalism products is becoming ever more dependent on their trustworthiness and comprehensibility, that is, on their most fundamental journalist qualities, and on nothing else. But where journalism submits to the

increasing pressure of advertising customers, it will cease to differ from other types of communication within the economic system and, in that sense, will cease to exist *as journalism*.

So, what we are talking about here is *not* a process of assimilation, but instead a classical case of progressive functional differentiation which is certainly purposeful in that it provides greater effectiveness by concentrating on a single function. A major advantage for businesses then is that formerly inevitable losses resulting from unfocused investment now become avoidable. For journalists, the major advantage is that they no longer need to be concerned with expectations placed on their work by advertising customers (Pöttker 2013).

Whether professional journalism will actually become more expensive as a result of this division is questionable. Customers will certainly have to pay more for media that are being financed less and less indirectly by way of advertising revenues. But the public had already paid the full bill for indirectly financed journalism by paying for the advertised goods (Geiger 1988). In any case, it will become *more transparent* to the audience whether and how much it is prepared to pay for journalism.

But there is reason for concern that the product of journalism, in its entirety, will actually become substantially smaller, at least at the beginning. That cannot be understood as consolidation or “streamlining”, since serving publicness and the public sphere requires providing a public that is as large as possible with as much information as possible. For this reason, it is necessary to think about how this slimming down process can be counterbalanced.

Two aspects should be mentioned here:

In modern societies characterized by migration such as Germany, media companies can attempt to ease the economic pressure arising from the crisis by widening their appeal to new customers for their products in the *multiethnic segment* of society. This would require making the traditional criterion of professionalism in journalism, a grammatically and stylistically perfect command of the language, less rigid (Pöttker et al. 2016).

This does not mean that journalists should not write and master the German language well. It rather means that they should not turn their subjective style peculiarities into a standard; that they consider themselves as transmitters of information and not as language cultivators, meaning language as a means of communication and not as a symbol of culture affiliation; that they make use of the possibility of collective editing in teams; and that next to the command of language they recognize and acknowledge still other characteristics of journalistic qualification such as interculturality or special research competence as equally important.

The second remark has to do with the concept of *quality journalism*. Ever since the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture took shape in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, criteria of professionalism such as principles of separating ads from reporting sections, documentary from fiction, or facts from opinions have become so exaggerated and ideologized in elitist media that they have become social communication barriers (Pöttker 1999). Making the elitist conceptualization of



professionalism more flexible can counteract the slimming down process for journalism's product in its entirety. If journalists make a conscious effort to broaden their conception of politics and take a closer look at everyday life, then there is a chance that more women, more youths, more elderly people, and more of the unemployed will be provided with important and accurate information.

To sum up, then: professionalism in journalism does not mean making general principles from standards that have developed historically under specific conditions, such as a perfect command of the language, but, rather, a *consistent orientation to serving the public sphere* under culturally and historically variable conditions. From this perspective, fossilized and ideologized concepts of professionalism are even among the structural conditions of the perceived crisis of professional journalism.

## 5 From editorial to digital journalism

In addition to the news function, the self definition as an independent observer and the financing by advertisements there is a fourth characteristic of the variant of journalism to which we have become so intensively accustomed over the course of one century that we generally think of it as journalism. This characteristic has also not yet totally vanished but it clearly loses significance with regard to the question of how the journalistic profession can be practiced and how from the specialization on the public task the continuous chance of earning one's living and support can be drawn which according to Max Weber (Weber 1972: 80) represent the constitutive elements of a profession.

Dieter Paul Baumert has considered in his still often quoted socio-historical analysis from 1928 which describes the origin and development of the journalistic profession (Baumert 2013), this characteristic as so decisive, that he has named after it the entire period which commenced in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which lasted until the digital media upheaval.

Baumert spoke of the phase of "editorial journalism" thereby wishing to characterize the enormous importance which initially the big publishing houses, then also the radio stations and TV broadcasting companies have had and which today cross medial concerns partly have in their relation to journalists: Large organizations, systems respectively, in which the professional roles of journalism are collaboratively or hierarchically differentiated and where coordinating organization belongs to the most important achievements of especially the responsible personnel at the top.

The enormous importance of editorial and logistic organization for the journalistic production and distribution has in communication studies promoted the system-theory approach (Rühl 1969) which in conjunction with the constructivist paradigm dominates today in Germany research and teaching. System-theory on the other hand has moved questions of organization into the center of investigation of journalism, and has led – especially in view of the conditions which are developing today – to their overemphasis at the expense of an action-theoretical guided investigation of journalistic ways of thinking and work technique. Many young journalists can still imagine their future in this profession only in terms of an employment with a media corporation or carrying out for



such an enterprise a freelance job based on a formulated contract.

The chance for a permanent employment in the newsroom of a media company or a radio station turns increasingly to an illusion because of the previously outlined economic problems of a more or less severe pressure to reduce costs and personnel. This in turn leads to a barren or even contraproductive competitive behavior among journalists where cooperation and solidarity would today be more than ever necessary.

In this connection it should not be forgotten that the changes brought about by the digital revolution in the structures of the media world have actually produced also chances for the journalistic profession which can more and more rid itself of the economical and organizational shackles of its editorial phase and can concentrate on the really journalistic qualities. In the World Wide Web it is possible to publish without incurring those high investment costs which were previously necessary for the printing on paper, the physical distribution of newspapers and magazines or an expensive recording and broadcast technology. Within the Web also individuals or smaller groups are in a position to act as journalists, and if they do that in a creative and professional manner, fully aware that they are acting in the interest of the public, their job can in the long run also be connected with good financial prospects. That some bloggers and specialists of digital publishing can advance to profitable journalistic marks shows that the period of editorial journalism is gradually coming to an end. This is also an aspect which should be considered when the future of journalism is contemplated.

## 6 The future of journalism has already begun

There are some indications that the future of journalism, as outlined above, has already begun. While daily newspapers must cope with considerable drops in circulation, weeklies, which are based on more in-depth research, background information, analyses, and to some extent literary forms of presentation, have been exhibiting constant growth.

In closing, I would like to mention one of the most puzzling and yet, at the same time, illuminating examples in Germany at the moment: a magazine project that reveals which trends under which factors of the communicative process can provide support for journalism in the future. The magazine *Landlust* has been published every two months since 2005. This rather lengthy magazine with a carefully planned pagination layout and color photos printed on matt paper includes sections on "Garden", "Cooking/Recipes", "Rural Living", "Country Life", and "Nature", but also deals with topics appealing to readers with other interests, such as processing wood for making string instruments. The editor-in-chief is married to a farmer. The small editorial staff consists primarily of female members, and three fourths of the readership are also women, of whom twice as many live in places with fewer than 100,000 residents than is the case for the total population. Within six years, the magazine has managed to reach a circulation of more than one million copies, with annual increases of 20 to 40 percent. *Landlust* is considered to be some sort of success miracle in the crisis-

shaken German media business and has had a number of imitators. But in contrast to these copiers, the success of the original is solely dependent upon its popularity with its public and not on some marketing strategy of advertising customers.

Many observers, and I number myself among them, consider *Landlust* to be a lifestyle magazine that promotes a cozy atmosphere. But if we were to simply dismiss it for that reason, we would neglect an opportunity to learn something from this example about success factors in the future of journalism that can be transferred to other topics and other target groups. Such factors include: turning away from the attention-grabbing conceptualization of news value and towards an orienting permeation of realities experienced in everyday life; turning away from the large editorial staff with its extreme division of labor and towards the informed participation in dealing with subject matter on the part of small groups of communicators; and turning away from externally controlled definitions of target groups in accordance with certain marketing requirements and towards an autonomous journalist focus on a large and widely diverse segment of the public neglected by journalism to date. Are women of every age and social class who do not live in large metropolitan areas the only large heterogeneous target group whose everyday life is still to be discovered by journalism? Migrants f. e. are such a target group too.

This last point has to do with a feature of journalism that is especially at risk in the light of the digital media era: its *universality*. If truly journalist in nature, the function of providing orientation is fulfilled by information not sought by the audience and, in this sense, capable of broadening his or her horizon. But this simply indicates a direction that future deliberations might take.

### About the author

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**Translation: Thomas La Presti und Johannes Rabe**

# Martina Thiele: Medien und Stereotype [Media and stereotypes]

reviewed by Wolfgang R. Langenbucher



A reviewer wanting to do justice to this postdoctoral thesis should start reading not with the thanks and introduction at the beginning, but with the bibliography from page 397. The table of contents does not show that this annex goes on to page 501 – more than a hundred pages. In providing such an exhaustive list, the Salzburg-based author Martina Thiele gives a magnificent account of herself: impressive knowledge of the literature, a consistent interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach, patient research and an almost limitless curiosity about the decades-long process of learning about and documenting publications of all kinds. That is the second, most astounding merit of this work, and one that is almost unparalleled: A long academic continuity has produced research findings on stereotypes in general and their functions in the media that demand syntheses, meta-analyses and

the systematic identification of remaining gaps in research. There is no doubt that we have gender research in communication studies – a field to which the author has contributed a great deal – to thank for crucial threads of these findings. It is refreshing that she also recognizes a tendency to self-reference in this, which results in significant gaps in research.

Having completed her doctorate in Göttingen in 2000 and worked in the Department of Communication Studies at Salzburg University since 2003, Martina Thiele submitted this text as her postdoctoral thesis. It cements her position as part of a generation – now finally established in the field – that was genuinely socialized in the field and has made a career of it. Reading this book, which is also exemplary from a design point of view, demonstrates how essential this is for an independent discipline. It is the only way to keep sight of the traditions of the field. Right at the beginning of the book, for example, there is a motto from the influential book by the American journalist Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) from 1922 (*Public Opinion*, dt. 1964) that was fundamental to stereotype research in communication studies. Colleagues like Gerhard Maletzke (\*1922) and Franz Dröge (1937-2002) are also honored as pioneers. The earliest of these memories comes from Franz Adam Löffler (1808-1880), who was using the term *stereotypiret*, still so relevant today, as far back as 1837. This sensitivity to the history of the field is tangible throughout the work and shapes the well-considered assembly of knowledge, in which numerous illustrations provide additional clarity. Using this approach, Thiele masterfully develops her own understanding of a discipline that has grown up over time. The way she deals with academics that were once influential but have now been forgotten, such as Peter R. Hofstätter (1913-1994), is another fascinating aspect.

In order to organize the wealth of material available, the author chose three large blocks: *Terms and theories* (p. 23-98), *Science and history* (p. 99-154) and *Meta-analyses and results* (p. 155-374). The latter is the most extensive, with each based on two analyses. The first meta-analysis is concerned with the journals *Publizistik* and *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* (renamed *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft*) between 1953 and 2011; the second is dedicated to selected publications from a range of disciplines in the German-speaking world. This openness gives rise to the 'kernel of truth' debate, for example, which concerns the question of "whether stereotypes do not perhaps contain a 'kernel of truth', otherwise they would not be so durable and widely accepted" (p. 56). This must be followed by the question of what this means for journalistic reporting, which relies on stereotypes. So much food for thought is provided on this practical problem that its inclusion in journalistic codes for prevention purposes appears an obvious course of action. There is one significant example of where this kind of scientific knowledge has been successfully transferred into journalism: the program for the advanced training of local journalists led by Dieter Golombek of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, then still based in Bonn. This initiative has widened its remit over the decades, including setting up the German Prize for Local Journalists, sponsored by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. For the last ten years, the results of this competition have been published in an annual entitled *Rezepte für die Redaktion* [Recipes for the editor]. Using the instruments developed by Martina Thiele to analyze this specific, politically-important example would undoubtedly be worthwhile, in order to find out whether this kind of kernel of truth has to exist and how able journalism is to learn. However, the greatest achievement of these two meta-analyses is that the broadest conceivable research returns are amalgamated through generalization. The specific stereotypes examined are *nations and ethnicities*, *religions* (with all the terrible consequences such as anti-Semitism), *genders*, *ages* and *professions*. The author weaves these individual analyses into a rich network. What is missing is longitudinal analyses, which do not exist in this field.

Having read this work all the way through, a question that is frowned upon by empiricists is unavoidable: Surely a stereotype – and its relations prejudice, cliché and, widely seen in academic circles, frame – is a universal of human behavior, i.e. an element of a universal grammar of human communication? Human ethology, for example by Irenäus Eibel-Eibesfeldt, does not shy away from looking for such perspectives. Those who are social scientists by trade see these biological ways of thinking and conducting research as separate worlds. Are they right? It can only be hoped that Martina Thiele's work finds readers who are inspired to address this field of research. It has a great tradition that is worth maintaining, and guarantees that the terrain here is a social and political minefield.

*This review first appeared in rkm:journal.*

**About the reviewer:**

Wolfgang R. Langenbucher, Professor emeritus, worked at the University of Vienna's Department of Communication from 1984 to 2006. Since then he has mainly produced papers on journalistic topics outside the mainstream, such as on a *journalism canon*, autobiographies of journalists, or journalism as a cultural contribution. He writes periodically for the journal *Message* and has written the column *Top Ten Buchjournalismus* for *Der österreichische Journalist* since 2015. Focuses of work: journalism research, theory of public broadcasting, communication policy.

**About the book:**

Martina Thiele (2015): *Medien und Stereotype. Konturen eines Forschungsfeldes*. Bielefeld [transcript] 2015, 501 pages, EUR 44.99.

**Translation: Sophie Costella**



# Barbara Thomass (ed.): Migration und Vielfalt im öffentlichen Rundfunk [Migration and Diversity in Public Broadcasting]

reviewed by Petra Herczeg



Barbara Thomass' book started life as a student project on diversity in the media and diversity management at Ruhr-Universität Bochum, as the Professor for Media Systems describes in the foreword. The students wrote the texts on the topic of 'caught fire' and for their final dissertations on diversity. Now published in an anthology, the articles examine the overarching question of how media in six European public broadcasters can contribute to promoting cultural diversity.

Thomass emphasizes how important it was for this project that the authors chose different theoretical and methodological approaches in order to examine example programs and analyze how the broadcasters view their role and conduct their staffing. The editor argues that the role of public broadcasters is to ensure plurality in their programming and to promote diversity mainstreaming at every level of the company (cf. p. 20). On behalf of all the authors, Thomass uses the introduction to define the term 'diversity' theoretically, providing both normative and pragmatic interpretations. She also examines the extent to which difference can be understood as a workable concept in itself, as well as the factors that must be associated with it, such as diversity as normality. But this introduction is as far as the discussion goes. To get the criticism out of the way early: Barely a single article addresses theoretical approaches, uses or quotes literature, or mentions the current status of research, and many take a very casual approach to formulating research questions or forming hypotheses. Despite this, it is an interesting compendium that provides important research insights.

In her paper *"Entdecke die Vielfalt"?! - Migranten im Westdeutschen Rundfunk* ["Discover diversity"?! - Migrants in West German broadcasting], Anika Keil examines the question of whether WDR can be considered a "pioneer and paradigm in dealing with this topic" (p. 36). The content analysis contains no reflection on the categories and features used to "identify" migrants (p. 40). Instead, the author merely writes that "most players with a migration background [were classified] based on visual, i.e. physiognomic features such as skin color" (p. 40). She could at least have

addressed the problem that this method throws up, namely that migrants are reduced to certain characteristics that, in turn, are perceived as criteria for differentiating between 'us' and 'the others'. In her analysis, Keil is consistently positive about WDR, concluding that, despite some deficits, WDR "is rightly seen as a model among public broadcasters" (p. 52).

Irini Kapouniaridou builds on this investigation by looking at *Diversity-value im ZDF – Zwischen assimilierender Whiteness und der Integration kultureller Vielfalt* [Diversity value at ZDF – Between assimilatory whiteness and the integration of cultural diversity] (p. 56-78). The author evaluates the data available in this field, before analyzing the format of the former Saturday evening show *Wetten, dass..?*. This analysis is conducted at a very descriptive level, without any closer investigation of the model or intercultural integration touched on before, nor of the whiteness concept. As a result, the study reads more like an essay than an academic paper, with an explorative, referential style. No reasons are given for the specific "*Wetten, dass..?*" episodes chosen; Kapouniaridou merely states that multiple shows were used in order to enable "units that recur regularly across episodes and that provide meaning to be found" (p. 69). Ten episodes from 2012 to 2014 are used as examples. Although the author does identify some cultural, hegemonic attributions in the sense of the whiteness concept, her approach is rather devoid of ideas.

Francina Herder's paper looks at cultural diversity in British public broadcasting. Some of her remarks at the beginning are somewhat redundant, for example her two references to the foundation of the BBC (cf. p. 81; p. 84). No research questions or hypotheses are set up for the content analysis, the author instead choosing to describe the depiction of ethnic minorities on the BBC using the popular soap *EastEnders* as an example. The BBC's staff quota system is judged a positive example of how to deal with cultural diversity (cf. p. 97).

Bearing the somewhat brief title *Niederlande* [Netherlands], Thomas Gruppe's paper is an abridged version of the author's master's dissertation. It could have used a proof-reader, with various grammatical errors evident in the text (cf. p. 105). A description of the Dutch broadcasting system is preceded by a brief historic survey of migration, migrants and migration policy. The broadcaster NOS, whose portfolio includes various formats from current affairs to sport, is selected for the content analysis. The results show that migrants are not given a voice and are often judged negatively. In addition, there is a hierarchy to the way countries of origin are assessed, with a difference between Eastern Europeans and Africans, for example. A clearer distinction of precisely which African countries were named in the programs analyzed is needed here. Furthermore, the discussion of results does not refer back to any research literature – the author merely mentions that he has based his work on the study by Heinz Bonfadelli et al. on "Migration, Medien und Integration" [Migration, media and integration] (2008).

Kathrin Langen's paper bears the detailed title *Vielfältig beitragen – Migranten im öffentlichen Rundfunk der Schweiz: Analyse der Personalpolitik und der Nachrichtenberichterstattung am Beispiel der Formate Tagesschau und 10vor10* [Contributing diversely – Migrants in public broadcasting in Switzerland: Analysis of staff policy and news reporting using Tagesschau and 10vor10 as examples]. This paper (p. 128-151) is also based on Bonfadelli's content analysis and

examines how reporting on migration has developed over time. Here, too, the results are presented with no more detailed reference to further studies. On the one hand, they clearly show that reporting focuses on policy on foreigners and criminality. On the other, they demonstrate that, despite a certain sensitivity to the issue of migration at a staff policy level, no strategic measures are anchored in corporate policy.

Ricarda Lalla's article bears the succinct and descriptive title *Migration und Vielfalt im ORF* [*Migration and diversity at ORF*]. Her analysis focuses on the representation of migrants in Austrian television's fictional detective show *Tatort* (p. 152-182). Beginning with a quantitative content analysis of "seven *Tatort* episodes relevant to the issue" (p. 167), she goes on to take stock of the roles of migrants in the criminal cases, whether they appear as victims or perpetrators, and their socio-economic status. The author then uses this as a basis on which to compare the social reality with data from the Migration and Integration Report 2013. This approach appears a little peculiar – after all, fictional formats are subject to different aesthetic and dramaturgical considerations whose very nature means that they do not necessarily attempt to represent reality. Unfortunately, there is no reference to further academic sources that might have provided some context for the research work. Nor is the fundamental significance of television entertainment and integration discussed, even though this would have provided a theoretical framework to underpin the paper.

Sabela Losada Barro's paper *Repräsentation und Darstellung ethnokultureller Vielfalt im spanischen öffentlichen Fernsehen. Inhaltsanalyse einer Programmwoche der Sendern* [sic!] „La 1“ und „La 2“ [*Representation and depiction of ethno-cultural diversity in Spanish public television. Content analysis of a week's schedule on channels "La 1" and "La 2"*] is in need of careful editing to avoid the errors evident even in the title. It examines the weekly schedule of two Spanish public full programs in order to investigate the question of how "ethno-cultural diversity is generated through in-house productions by TVE" (p. 183; TVE stands for the business division *Televisión Española*). After introducing public broadcasting in Spain, the author goes on to analyze two Spanish public channels and to address the question of how media professionals with particular ethno-cultural backgrounds are presented in the programming (cf. p. 189). There is absolutely no critical reflection on the selection criteria used to name the affiliation of media professionals and migrant players, even though these criteria could also be considered discriminatory, including as they do surname, appearance, accent or "explicit mention of their ethnic affiliation" (p. 190).

The very casual approach to statements such as "Most media professionals were identified as members of ethno-cultural diversity based on their surnames and speak without accents" (p. 195) is a cause for concern. This is clearly an evaluation that could be seen as prejudice – why should members of ethno-cultural groups not speak without an accent? There is absolutely no attempt to address the issue of frames, which play a considerable role in this context. Different group relationships are largely written about at a descriptive level, with no theoretical contextualization.

To sum up, the key weakness of all the critically evaluated papers lies in the fact that most lack theoretical discourse and a presentation of research findings, nor do they employ the academic practice of backing up statements with sources. Although the individual texts are interesting in

themselves, they do not live up to the publication's title. The country reports are enthusiastic descriptions, but provide no more detailed examination. The introduction by editor Barbara Thomass is the only section to deliver a refreshing, sophisticated view of the topic.

Comparative perspectives are important, indeed essential – a fact that Thomass refers to in her closing comments on each article. Although the case studies used are wide-ranging, however, only limited comparisons can be made and are documented in this publication.

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### **About the reviewer**

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### **About the book**

Barbara Thomass (Ed.) (2016): *Migration und Vielfalt im öffentlichen Rundfunk. Analysen aus sechs europäischen Ländern*. Bochum [Westdeutscher Universitätsverlag] 234 pages, EUR 19.90.

***Translation: Sophie Costella***

# Franziska Kuschel: Schwarzseher, Schwarz Hörer und heimliche Leser [Secret viewers, secret listeners and secret readers]

reviewed by Hans-Jörg Stiehler



The government of the GDR saw the media not as a means of public communication but – overestimating its effectiveness – primarily as an instrument for controlling the masses. The fact that media from the Federal Republic remained relatively freely accessible in the GDR and that a “pan-German communication space” (p. 9) continued to exist gave the state a two-fold problem: The Eastern block experienced the almost unique situation of competition from alternative sources of information and entertainment (in the same language) both stealing its audience and providing them with competing interpretations of the world and leisure activities. Because this competition was also accused of being very potent and intending to ‘disrupt’ the GDR, additional measures to weaken the influence of West German media were considered essential.

A dissertation written at the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung in Potsdam, Franziska Kuschel’s publication therefore asks “which strategies the state tried in order to control, prevent or at least curb media consumption and, on the other hand, with which strategies the media consumers counteracted the state pressure and tried to assert their own interests” (p. 10). In line with this objective, the work outlines a broad panorama of the (media-related) interdependence of the state and the individual. The author argues that the stubbornness of media consumers played a central role. They contradicted and undermined the state strategies in their everyday lives all the way into the 1980s, when the use of media from the Federal Republic had become a common feature of life and media consumers had found new ways to take action.

This investigation, published as part of Wallstein Verlag’s series *Medien und Gesellschaftswandel im 20. Jahrhundert* [Media and social change in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century], has two aims. Firstly, it attempts to cover the entire period in which the GDR was in existence and thus go beyond the remit of works that merely examine individual periods or regions, e.g. the areas around Dresden, which could not receive West German television for so long. This means that the work is divided into three sections: the periods 1949-1961 (*The battle for minds*), 1961-1971 (*The battle against those who had mentally emigrated*) and 1971-1989 (*Resignation and capitulation*). Context is provided in each case by the historic constellations and specific media situations. Secondly, Kuschel attempts to examine and document the entire spectrum and diversity of the strategies used by both sides. In the case of the

state, these include technical measures (jamming transmitters), administrative acts (such as the short-lived obligation to seek permission for satellite dishes), legal repression (especially in the 1950s and 1960s), attempts at media education, and border controls (especially for printed products). A wide range of activities by citizens (including home-made antennas, smuggling, and exchanging books and magazines) is also described to illustrate their role. In conducting these activities, people circumvented the measures taken by the state, resulting in the state's tacit consent and lack of further attempts at control.

In order to achieve these two aims, the author has analyzed an enormous quantity of documents. The sources examined range from files from the party leadership, government and relevant ministries to regional records. There is no doubt that this work fulfils its ambitions in formidable fashion. Carefully-chosen focuses in the three periods under examination and broad-based, well-considered analysis of the material produces an impressively vivid portrait of "negotiation processes...in which the fact that they achieved numerous successes was not lost on media consumers" (p. 307).

In contrast, the publication only partially succeeds in its ambition to make a contribution to the "larger issue of the effects of medialization processes" (p. 11). The range of terms and methods this would demand is not fully developed here, and the problem that is examined appears too limited. Although consumption of West German media is a central moment in the media history of the GDR, its effects can only be understood in connection with the (non-)communication practiced between the East German state and its population. But this is only a small niggle on this otherwise excellent work. The book makes a significant contribution to the communication and media history of the GDR, largely thanks to its sophisticated approach and the wealth of issues and material covered.

*This review first appeared in rkm:journal.*

### **About the reviewer:**

Dr. Hans-Jörg Stiehler has been Professor of Empirical Communication and Media Research at Leipzig University since 1993. He studied Social Psychology in Jena and was a research assistant in culture and media research at the Central Institute for Youth Research (Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung) Leipzig from 1975 to 1990. His research focuses on media in the former GDR, media and sport, subjective media theories, and media and attribution research.

### **About the book:**

Franziska Kuschel (2016): *Schwarzseher, Schwarzhörer und heimliche Leser. Die DDR und die*

*Westmedien*. Göttingen [Wallstein] 2016, 336 pages, EUR 34.90.

***Translation: Sophie Costella***



# Frank J. Robertz, Robert Kahr (eds.): Die mediale Inszenierung von Amok und Terrorismus [Media presentation of killing sprees and terrorism]

reviewed by Guido Keel



School shootings, terrorism and suicides are all phenomena that center around fatal violence – and in which the media play a crucial role. The question of how the mass media can deal responsibly with this kind of event is therefore of interest from the point of view of both journalism and society as a whole.

Both editors of this interdisciplinary anthology (2016) come from extremely relevant professional backgrounds: Frank J. Robertz heads the Institute for Violence Prevention and Applied Criminology (IGaK) in Berlin, while Robert Kahr is a communication studies expert who teaches operations management for serious criminality at the German Police University. They have put together papers by international authors in order to collate findings that will enable the media to report acts of violence like this in such a way as to minimize suffering, especially of those directly affected.

The editors begin with a chapter on principles, entitled *In the beginning was the word*. In it, they describe why professional routines make violence an unavoidable topic of journalistic reporting (p. 13-28). Psychological findings are presented on the topics of imitation and self-presentation (p. 29-57) – aspects that are relevant in all three forms of violence.

Three further papers from Germany, Finland and the USA (p. 61-108) describe how journalists deal with school shootings based on three different case studies. This international comparison highlights parallels and fundamental patterns, although their description appears somewhat redundant.

The same goes for the separate observations of Jens Hoffmann (p. 109-118), Alice Ruddigkeit (p. 137-150) and Michael Kunczik (p. 151-172). Their work on responsible journalism ultimately leads

them to similar conclusions: the key aim is to use appropriate reporting to prevent copycat incidents – by not describing the perpetrator, his motives, his approach or the attack in too much detail and by not publishing the name or a picture of the perpetrator, so as not to give him posthumous fame. When it comes to this “immortality through the label of terrorism” (p. 109), Jens Hoffmann sees a link between shootings, terrorist attacks (such as on the French satire magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and the London underground) and suicides. He argues that it is also important not to demonize the perpetrators in the media, as this also increases their status. Alice Ruddigkeit’s explanations build on this by highlighting the fact that responsible journalism concentrates much more on the victims – including the friends and relatives in some cases (cf. p. 148).

Related to this, Michael Kunczik targets ‘secondary victimization’ (p. 151-172). This term describes how the victim of a violent act – or the victim’s relatives in the case of suicide – can be made to suffer a second time through improper reporting. As the media increasingly take on the perspective of the victim, this view becomes more visible – although this does require great sensitivity on the part of the journalists, as Kunczik emphasizes (p. 166). Although the parallels between the phenomena of shootings, terrorism and suicide are undoubtedly interesting, the anthology does display a certain redundancy here, making it harder to enjoy. As is often the case with works compiled from papers by multiple authors on a single topic, the reader finds himself wishing both that the topics of the various contributions were more clearly distinguishable and that similarities were highlighted more obviously.

The final section of the anthology looks at what professional ethics can take from these findings and, specifically, the question of the role media should take in reporting violent crimes. Firstly, Hans Mathias Kepplinger (p. 173-184) describes how journalists have to weigh up the professional norm of communicating with the public against the social norm of avoiding the negative consequences of reporting. According to him, they usually tend towards the professional norm. Kepplinger talks of the “dominant orientation on the principle of publication” (p. 176), which he claims is due to the fact that, according to a survey he conducted (Kepplinger 2011: 164), journalists often do not believe that their negative reports have unintended negative side-effects (p. 182). This preference for the professional norm is reinforced by journalists’ increasing co-orientation. The next paper is by Frank Nipkau, Managing Editor of the Waiblingen newspaper publisher, which also publishes the *Winnender Zeitung*. He scrutinizes the principle of publication based on his experience of how the media dealt with the school shooting in Winnenden in 2009 and, in doing so, puts together a set of rules for reporting on such catastrophic events (p. 185-192).

In a concluding chapter (p. 193-203), the editors combine the recommendations once more to produce a twelve-point list. Some of these can be seen as general journalistic guidelines (“Pay attention to choice of words”, “Check sources carefully”, “Do not allow oneself to be instrumentalized”), but gain particular significance in the context of violent crime. They also supplement the other guidelines that are so carefully formed in the book, creating a useful manual for practitioners on how to deal with violent crime.

Journalists always have to balance the interests of different influencing factors: the objects of their reporting (in this case perpetrator and victim), the audience and its justified interests, the sources, society. These all form the basis of professional ethical standards that might contradict economic and social aims. Through its mix of theoretical knowledge and practical experience, this book helps to provide arguments for navigating through the minefield of these intentions.

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### **About the reviewer:**

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### **About the book:**

Frank J. Robertz, Robert Kahr (eds.) (2016): *Die mediale Inszenierung von Amok und Terrorismus. Zur medienpsychologischen Wirkung des Journalismus bei exzessiver Gewalt*. Wiesbaden [Springer Fachmedien], 203 pages, EUR 29.99.

**Translation: Sophie Costella**

# Lutz Hachmeister, Till Wäscher: Wer beherrscht die Medien? [Who rules the media?]

Reviewed by Lars Rinsdorf



A meta-trend in TIME markets, convergence has now made it into the title of this standard reference work on media structures. While previous editions of Lutz Hachmeister's compendium still carried the title *Die 50 größten Medienkonzerne der Welt* [The 50 largest media corporations in the world], he has now shifted his focus to media and knowledge corporations. This may sound like an awkward addition to the title, but it is in fact an almost inevitable admission of an increasingly digitalised economy, in which the boundaries between telecommunications, IT, media, and entertainment are becoming ever more blurred.

The obligatory sales ranking presented by Hachmeister and his new co-author Till Wäscher clearly shows the big losers in this development – the content-driven European media corporations who have lost their dominant position as middlemen between content and audiences. The *Bertelsmann* Group, for example, was second in the global rankings in 1995; twenty years later, it just manages to edge in at 11<sup>th</sup>, miles behind the new leader *Alphabet*. Other German corporations such as *ProSiebenSat.1* and *Axel Springer* do not even make it into the top 50.

The ranking remains at the heart of this third edition, and myriad other features also remain the same, for example the introductory text, well-researched company portraits, and a journalistic style that makes the facts easy to understand even for non-academic readers. The basic structure of the company portraits is also unchanged, with a summary text followed by economic data and an overview of relevant stakeholders in management. Later there are detailed sections on the company's history and profile, the management, and the various fields in which the company does business. Each portrait ends with an outlook on the latest developments.

This structure gives readers many points of access to the book. Those who are still unaware of the key players in globalized media markets (such as those just beginning their studies) can work through the book from front to back in order to gain an overview of all the trends and players in the global media sector. Advanced readers can still use the book as a reference text, looking up further

detail on individual players who are of particular significance in the current business or academic context. Experts will look first at the ranking, searching for patterns in the overall picture formed by the sales trends.

The company portraits reflect the diversity of the media and knowledge industry. Needless to say, the success story of *Alphabet* alias *Google* is included. Chinese corporations such as *Tencent* (a new entry at number 15) and India's *Essel Group* (entering the ranking for the first time at number 26) are among those posting remarkable rises. There are even tragicomic stories like that of the geriatric *Viacom* patron Sumner Redstone (down to seventh from third in 2005), whose daughter is fighting a bitter battle with her father's much-younger ex-girlfriend over inheritance – a total contrast to the cool efficiency of specialist information corporations like *Wolters Kluwer* from Amsterdam (a new entry at number 45). All the portraits are written in great detail and with distance and critical perspective, inviting the reader to find out more about the company – or simply move on to the next one in the list.

In the introductory texts, light and shade lie but a hair's breadth apart. On the one hand, there is a classification of developments in media policy against the background of Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election, which was very topical at the time of the book's publication in January 2017. This provides an outstanding framework in which to reflect on structural changes in the media and knowledge industry. However, this short-term advantage comes at a price: it is based on a political development that has a life of its own. Events that have taken place in the few months of the Trump administration since the book's publication make it appear already almost out-of-date in places. However, given the refreshingly unorthodox journalistic approach, this is not an inappropriate risk to take in the introduction. After all, the ranking and portraits are no less useful simply because the introduction necessarily remains inextricably linked to a specific time frame in the political dynamics of the United States.

The same cannot be said of the decision to reprint the chapter *Die Kulturen der Medienkonzerne* from the 2005 edition. Admittedly, this paper does contain passages that are still interesting to read in 2017, such as reflections on film history and the extent to which the American entertainment industry is capable of self-reflection (p. 45). But passages related to specific corporate strategies, such as the way Thomas Middelhoff managed the *Bertelsmann* Group (p. 51f.) and the phenomenon of the new economy (p. 53), have not stood the test of time. Given the deep-rooted transformation of the media landscape as a result of digitalisation, it would have been better to revise the arguments more fundamentally and to go into more detail on contemporary phenomena such as the sharing economy, big data or the growing significance of social networks.

Leaving aside the question of how the research findings should be evaluated, comparing the two editions from 1995 to today shows what a valuable approach it can be to observe an object over two decades using an identical instrument. The stories of the winners and losers are particularly useful in demonstrating the opportunities and risks of a market whose social and economic significance cannot be underestimated. It would have been fascinating to see more figures from 2005 and 1995 for the companies that already existed then, perhaps in an annex – although this would have added

further work to that already involved in the simple-looking tables. Readers can look forward to seeing what has changed by the time the 2025 ranking comes out, when the authors and their researchers will hopefully publish a fourth edition.

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**About the book:**

Lutz Hachmeister, Till Wäscher (2017): *Wer beherrscht die Medien? Die 50 größten Medien- und Wissenskonzerne der Welt*. Cologne [Herbert von Halem Verlag], 559 pages, EUR 23.

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