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# Journalism: A Profession Under Pressure?

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**ABSTRACT** This article explores how the changing nature of journalistic work and organization are affecting the profession, the way it is perceived by personnel, the roles played by journalists, and autonomy of journalists. It finds that the technical and economic changes are disrupting the established professional status, roles, and practices of journalists, removing professional control that previously existed.

**KEY WORDS:** professions, professional identity, roles, skills, autonomy

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New media technologies are said to change news journalism. For better or for worse, they are said to change the nature of news and the way in which it is produced. Some feel that the world of news will be turned on its head as “new technologies re-engineer the relationship between how views and information are exchanged, judged and assigned significance, and how public opinion is formed” (Lloyd & Seaton, 2006: 1). The notion of evolving consensus over the qualities and skills belonging to the world of journalism would change as “technologies of news relay broaden the field of who might be considered a journalist and what might be considered journalism” (Zelizer, 2004: 23). Some suggest that the three major constituencies in the world of news journalists, newsmakers, and the audience will blur into each other, with audiences becoming part of the process of journalism (Gillmor, 2004: xxiv-xxv). Others suggest that the professional culture of journalism is becoming more diverse, open and dynamic when journalists turn to be identified as “media workers” with a “portfolio worklife” based on flexibility and multi-skilling (Deuze, 2007).

However, it is also argued that even though the “intertextual merging of journalism with other formats and discourses is maybe its

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most pressing present challenge”, not everything can simply converge. Rather, if journalism is to survive, it has to “assert a specific location within this media sphere, demonstrate that it can deliver a particular form of service to the public, however fragmented and commoditized that public might become” (Conboy, 2004: 224).

Many of these claims about the way in which new media technologies change the nature of the news production process and the way journalists respond to these changes have yet to be empirically examined. In this article, we propose to do just that and we ask: how has the profession of news journalism changed given the recent changes in the mediascape? We seek to shed light on the questions 1) whether and if so how the technological changes have reconfigured the job of the journalist and the production of news in terms of inquiry, observation, research, editing and writing; and 2) how journalists respond to these changes. From extensive qualitative and quantitative research done in Sweden and England, we will argue that there is at once a fading of the professional values due to changes in the journalistic practices and at the same time a return to professional values by journalists themselves, which they deem sets them apart from other news providers in the current broadened mediascape.

There has been quite a bit of criticism on the profession of journalism lately, exemplified by a book written by journalist Nick Davies: *Flat Earth News* (2008), which is partly based on research conducted by Cardiff University (Lewis, Williams, Franklin, Thomas, & Mosdell, 2008). This research says journalists “now produce three times as much copy as they did twenty years ago” (ibid: 3). With regard to the role of PR, the researchers find that “60% of press articles (quality broadsheet) and 34% of broadcast stories come wholly or mainly from one of the pre-packaged sources” (ibid). An administrative news culture is dominating newsrooms—with journalists sitting behind their desks recycling or regurgitating PR and wire material (also dubbed “churnalism”)—rather than the investigative news culture. Davies’ book and this research do not stand alone: there has been more criticism about the state of journalism and the demise of its professional values (in the US see, for example, Kovach & Rosenstiehl, 2001).

In this article we examine the different changes in journalism and the consequences for the profession. The article starts with a theoretical discussion of the professionalization of journalism. This is followed by the introduction of the two research projects and their results: how have journalistic practices changed, how does this affect their professional status, and how do journalists respond to these changes? In the conclusions we bring together the two trends suggested by the empirical research of de-professionalization on the one hand and a resurgence of professional values on the other.

## JOURNALISM: A PROFESSION OR “SEMI-PROFESSION”?

Modern journalism developed with industrialism. The early newspaper was often run by the printer or the owner of the printing house. But with the development of the penny press, a division of labor developed both between the owner and those employed for producing the content and between journalists and technical personnel. As in other parts of the industry, division of labor was an important part in organizing newspapers with a strict hierarchical organization. The division of labor was clear between journalists and typographers/printers—a separation of “thinking” from “doing”. This was paired with a division of labor between different kinds of journalists—reporters, subeditors, editors, photographers, designers, proofreaders etc. (see also Raviola & Hartmann in this issue).

### *Journalism as Profession*

There has been an ongoing debate about whether journalism is a *craft* or can be considered a *profession* like the traditional professions in medicine and law (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005), with a profession seen as more than an occupation. According to sociological research, the professional logic is a way of controlling the work by rules and standards defined by the professionals themselves. Other logics in the control of the work are the bureaucratic logic with rules defined by the state or by organizations, and the market-logic with all power in the hands of the consumers. These three logics are ideal typical models, and most work is controlled through a combination of these three logics (Freidson, 2001).

To constitute a profession, the members of an occupation have to be able to control their own work, to have autonomy in their everyday practice. Sociologists have distinguished a number of means, which allow professionals to exercise this control (Selander, 1989; Freidson, 2001):

- A knowledge-monopoly: No one outside the profession has the knowledge and the ability to do the work of the profession;
- A clear division of labor, and the power to keep others outside the profession;
- Strong professional education and research;
- Strong professional organizations with ethical rules and standards;
- An ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain and to quality rather than economic efficiency of work.

Journalism cannot be fully regarded as a profession; it would be against the freedom of expression to demand some kind of legitimization from those expressing themselves in media. Media scholars have thus considered journalism as a semi-profession, mostly because of this reason of not being able to exclude non-professionals from the field of

journalism. There will always be many routes into journalism (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; McQuail, 2000), making it difficult to identify an exclusive professional track.

However, having said this, a process of ongoing professionalization has been observed by media scholars for the last 30-40 years. An important factor in this process has been the development of a professional ideology (which includes the attention given to notions such as objectivity, integrity and public service), the growth of professional institutions, and codes of practice (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005). Moreover, comparative studies have shown that the journalistic values as to the role of journalists, the ethical standards and what is important in the job are very much the same in different parts of the world, even though the interpretation of these values may differ. The differences are considered to be a result of the cultural background and history more than a difference between media systems (Weaver, 2005).

### ***Profession as Identity and Social Control***

There are different traditions in the research on professions. In the 1960s the emphasis was (in the Anglo-American tradition) to analyze the specific traits that constitute a profession, such as mechanisms to exclude the outsiders. The last 20 years the emphasis has shifted to the dynamic processes by which occupations gain professional status. Now the important questions are not if a profession fulfils all the conditions of an ideal typical profession, but about how professionalism is used to change and control an occupation. Research in this approach also considers the influences of specific cultural and historical traditions in different countries (Evetts, 2003; Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005).

The British sociologist Julia Evetts explicates two different perspectives taken on professions (Evetts, 2003):

- a normative value system created and upheld by the profession itself giving the profession a collective identity—a positive interpretation;
- an ideology used as a mechanism for social order and discipline among the professionals—a more negative interpretation.

The question is how the notion of professionalization is used in an occupation. Professionalization can come from *within* when the professionals themselves can exert the control and form the values and norms for the profession. But it can also be used by groups *outside* (owners, state and organizations) to change an occupation and to use it as a system of control and discipline. The latter interpretation of professionalization can replace bureaucratic control, and can be used by external forces to promote change in the profession (Evetts, 2003). In an analysis of the concept of professionalism in journalism, Evetts and Aldridge (2003) conclude that the discourse “professionalism” is used as a

tool to separate the producers from the product and change is legitimized by referring to the “professional” nature of it. At the same time, this professionalism gives journalists their identity.

Journalism can be analyzed as an ongoing negotiation between these two sides of professionalism: between the *organizational* demands with standards, routines and goals for the media company and the *occupational* professionalism—values, norms and identity developing among journalists themselves (Örnebring, 2008). The question is how the current trends in the journalistic profession and in journalistic work influence the balance between the two kinds of professionalism.

Different perspectives can be identified in the discussion on the current trends among professions in general. Some Anglo-American sociologists talk of a de-professionalization occurring due to factors such as: 1) the profession suffering from a loss in public trust and confidence; 2) the profession coming under harder financial pressure putting the professional ideology in the second place; and 3) the labor division becoming more unclear and the profession getting increasingly heterogeneous (Freidson, 2001; Evett, 2003). In all discussions about professionalism the key concept is the autonomy for the profession.

In this article we empirically examine the way in which both the organizational notions of the profession may be changing and the way in which those occupying the profession—the journalists—view the profession in the current changing mediascape.

## THE JOURNALISTIC PROFESSION AND MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

The way journalists work has changed rapidly over the last ten to fifteen years. Digital technology has given journalists new tools and newsroom processes have changed. New forms of outlets—mostly Internet-related—have emerged both within the traditional media companies and in new media companies in competition with traditional media.

How has this development influenced the journalistic work and the professional roles for journalists? Are new ways of doing the daily work influencing thinking about journalism and journalistic values? Are new processes in the newsrooms only a more efficient way of producing the same old journalism, or are professional values also changing? Several scholars emphasize the need for research addressing questions such as how technological change influences work practice, the role of sources, and news content (Cottle, 2003; Schudson, 2005). The sociology of news production was developed in the USA in the 1970s (for example: Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1983), and since then much has happened calling for an in-depth analysis of how practices of news production are changing.

### **Methodological Approach**

This article investigates these questions empirically basing the result on research projects in Sweden and England involving an analysis of news production during 2006-2008. The Swedish project “The changing journalistic work” was conducted at JMK/Stockholm University from 2006-2007 and involved a multi-method approach. The main method concerned qualitative studies in different types of newsrooms. With observations during 3-6 weeks and interviews with journalists, the project has examined the daily work in regional newspapers, local radio and TV, national TV and an online-newsroom. In total eight newsrooms were examined (Nygren, 2008). In addition, it includes data collected through a survey among 175 regional and local journalists in Östergötland—a part of Sweden with many regional and local news media— as well an analysis of secondary data from national surveys among journalists (800-1100 per year) conducted by Gothenburg University 1989-2005 (Asp 2007). Last, a content analysis was conducted comparing journalism jobs advertised in the Swedish Union of Journalists' paper *Journalisten* from 1986 and 2006. The aim of the project was to analyze the daily work in different kinds of newsrooms. Questions addressed included issues of multi-skilling (or “re-skilling”), attitudes towards new technology, organization in the newsroom and how interactivity and constant deadlines influence the news production. On a more abstract level, the question is how these changes influence journalism as a profession: Can we still talk of a professionalization, or is the development rather going towards a de-professionalization where journalists become “media workers” or “content producers” in the media companies?

The British project “Spaces of news”—conducted at Goldsmiths College, University of London, as part of the Leverhulme Trust funded *Media Research Programme*—equally involved newsroom studies (a local media newsroom (MEN-Group), a national public broadcaster (BBC), and a national broadsheet newspaper (*the Guardian*)). The main body of data, however, comes from interviews with a variety of actors from the field, including national and regional journalists (broadcast and press), editors, and commercial directors, as well as sources of news, such as politicians, press officers of NGOs and bloggers (totaling 150 interviews). The project runs from 2007-2009 and explores the ways in which technological, economic and social change are reconfiguring news journalism and shaping the dynamics of the public sphere and public culture (Fenton, forthcoming). The data from the interviews have been coded by multiple coders using NVIVO.

In what follows we integrate the results of the respective projects and aim to answer the question of how new media technologies have changed the practice of journalism and how this impacts the nature of professionalism in journalism.

### **Ten Areas of Change in Journalistic Work**

We roughly distinguish ten areas of change in journalistic work, concerning mainly the daily work, but also more broadly the routines and norms/rules in journalism. The areas are intertwined and at times overlap, but we discuss them here separately for the sake of clarity.

***Demands in Daily Work*** The Swedish project shows journalists to be hard-working people, with half of them working overtime at least one day a week and many working overtime two to three days a week. In the regional media they produce two to three articles a day, and the journalists working for online media produce five to ten items a day. The Internet and digital production make the processes faster for all journalists. But newsroom studies and interviews also show that the gains from the technical development are used mostly to increase produced quantity, and not to increase quality and develop new forms of expression. The work is now more team-based and planned than before, and space for individualists is shrinking in the daily news production (while at the same time a new space for a more personal journalism has emerged in the form of media blogs). The work is also more concentrated in the newsroom, with less time “in the field” doing research as both the Swedish and the British project found. Particularly in the online newsroom where journalists make ten-hour shifts, day and night, the feeling among journalists is that they are not really conducting “proper” journalism, which they consider to be investigative journalism. In both projects it became clear that journalists find that they are dealing with so much information that comes in through e-mail or can be found on the Internet, that they hardly ever leave the newsroom.

***More Mobile Work?*** Reporting has always been mobile—you carry back what you get in the field (the origin of the French term *re-porter*). The new digital tools give new opportunities for mobile work; in TV, reporters can edit their features on computers in the field and send them to the newsroom via the Internet or satellite. Likewise, on newspapers the reporters and photographers can send their material directly to the newsroom from where they are. At least every second regional and local journalist leaves the newsroom every day for work according to the Swedish survey. But at the same time many journalist say that in spite of the increasing mobile possibilities they spend more time in the newsroom now than 5-10 years ago (see Table 1). Both projects found that the group of journalists that most seldom leave the newsroom are the online journalists—they use material collected by other journalists, sources on the net (mainly the wires in the UK) and the telephone to produce as much news as fast as possible. This feeling that journalism is becoming ever more a desk job concurs with the finding of other researchers that journalism is becoming more of a desk-job in spite of the increasing mobile opportunities (Lewis et al., 2008; Deuze, 2007).

Table 1: Changes in Time Spent in the Newsroom (Compared to 5-10 years before)

<i>Media Outlet</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Average†</i>
Local and regional press	243	4,09
Press in the big cities	95	4,07
Tabloids	28	3,39
Public service TV (SVT)	69	4,51
National public service radio (SR)	26	3,38
Local public service radio	51	4,37
Commercial radio/TV	34	4,62
Magazines	82	4,62
Total number of answers	628	4,24

† Respondents were asked whether they spent more or less time outside of the newsroom compared to 5-10 years ago. The answers are given on a scale 0-10, where 5 is no difference, over 5 is more time outside of the newsroom and under 5 is less time outside of the newsroom. Source: *The Journalist Survey 2005 (JMG/Gothenburg University)*

**Multi-Skilling** In most of Swedish journalism jobs advertised now, the demands are clear as the content analysis shows: you have to be able to work in different formats and to handle many types of technology. In regional media, as both projects observed, journalists are already involved in most of the journalistic processes—many reporters are also editing for radio/TV or subediting the newspapers. As the Swedish project shows, one in four journalists have taken photos or video over the last week (only one in ten is primarily a photographer). Moreover, in commercial regional TV-news the journalists are “video-reporters”: they do everything from filming to scripting to editing. The online reporters are also similarly multi-skilled. However, the Swedish survey also shows that journalists have an ambivalent attitude towards the expression “multi-reporter”: 60 percent say it is expected that you should be a “multi-reporter”, but only 38 percent consider themselves to be a “multi-reporter”. Nearly all believe most journalists will be multi-skilled in the future, but very few think it will make journalism any better. Similarly, British journalists expressed their concern of multi-skilling for the quality of output. These negative attitudes towards multi-skilling may lie in the fact that it is mainly used by management to lower costs, and increase productivity rather than to provide journalists with new creative opportunities.

**Editorial Systems and Content Flow** Content management systems (CMS) have changed the daily work for journalists. Previously the flow of content was limited and followed hierarchical structures within the newsroom. Now content is managed within the media companies through CMS, and these networked structures give journalists access to a lot more content. Swedish and British public service radio and TV have

CMS that give all journalists full access<sup>1</sup> to content produced in the company, which is used and reused in different formats, making it possible to increase output. Also in regional newspapers content is being reused in different titles and repurposed for web-TV and radio. This increased use of the CMS has also brought new areas of conflict between journalists and companies. According to the Swedish copyright legislation, the journalist holds the copyright even if he/she is employed in a media company, and this is a problem for the media companies in their multi-channel publishing. The fight for control and ownership of multi-purposed content has led to a serious and protracted conflict between the Union of Swedish journalists and owners groups<sup>2</sup>.

***Creative Opportunities versus Formatting*** The different kinds of journalism are all based on some sort of format. Formats are considered to make it easier for journalists to produce and for the audience to consume news journalism. Digital tools give journalists new creative possibilities, but at the same time the increased speed leads to a greater need for standardization in the daily production. New CMS of newspapers have standard layouts so the reporters can write directly into the pages without a sub-editor doing the editing. The formats in newspapers make the pages look the same every day, and in TV and radio news the format leaves very little room for surprise. The most well defined formats are used in online news where the news has to be published immediately. BBC online news formats are so standardized that the number of characters of the title are prescribed (between 31 and 33 characters). The first four paragraphs of online news have to be suitable for Ceefax and mobile phones (often defining word order and word choice). The technology thus very much “dictates” the way a story is written. At the same time digital tools make it easier to create new formats and news types of content, for example “photo galleries” and chat-sessions, as well as redesigning which more often give readers a changed interface.

***Constant Deadlines and Accuracy*** The journalistic process has three parts: newsgathering, evaluation and production. The constant deadline in online media compacts these three parts, and the phase of evaluation is often carried out in front of the audience; “facts” are published, only to be checked retrospectively and new information is published on the site as “ongoing news”. The responsibility for accuracy is to an increasing degree given to the sources and the public, as journalists often do not check the facts before publishing. *The Telegraph* in the UK has started with an experiment on post-publication editing where material is put

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<sup>1</sup> Within the BBC this is sometimes limited, with some programs having material “embargoed”.

<sup>2</sup> On the local level this conflict is still ongoing where the journalists take issue with the use of material originally written for the paper in the online outlet.

online by journalists directly and only moderated live one time (Ponsford, 2008). Constant deadlines conflict with the need for accuracy: the Swedish survey as well as the British ethnographies and interviews show that verification is still the (abstract) norm but many journalists say that speed makes it more difficult to fulfill the norm (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Attitudes towards the Need for Verification (In Percentages)*

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
I check all news in the same way, regardless of where it will be published	71	16	13
The audience does not hold as a high standard for verification on the web as they do for our main outlet	8	68	24
There are more incorrect facts on our web than in our main outlet	20	45	34
The demand for speed in publishing forces me not to check the facts as carefully as I would like to.	41	48	11

Source: The survey "Changing journalistic work 2006" conducted amongst local and regional journalists. N=156.

Of course, no journalist believes they have "the final truth", and news always changes during reporting. The difference in the online media is the speed: the audience sees how stories change and with the increasing interactivity provided by new media technologies the audience becomes a part of the process. The verifying has moved from the journalistic backstage to be visible in front of the audience, and a more relative and post-modern view on accuracy is developing in journalism (see also Karlsson, 2006). At the same time, however, the British journalists state that fact checking and accuracy is what sets journalists apart from other sources of (online) news, as will be discussed more thoroughly below.

***New Media Logic*** In most media organizations the web is still a channel for distribution of content produced for the traditional news media—the newspaper and radio and TV. The web is another way for the audience to listen to radio, have a look on the newscasts on TV and read the newspaper. But "web journalism" is increasingly becoming its own genre with its own media logic as was discerned in both projects, with routines and news selection that differ from the traditional outlets. These are some differences observed in the newsrooms and expressed in the interviews:

- Time is the most important news value on the web, with the best news on the web being the ongoing news like accidents, sports and crime.
- The web has a more informal style, supported by interactivity where the audience is engaged through debates.

- The web is more dependent on sources like police reports, PR-consultants' press releases and the news wires. These sources are easy to access and give fast and up-to-date information regarded as authoritative. There is also a growing tendency to publish more user-generated content (UGC) generated from the readers online. In the UK, some media organizations now have a large department dealing with UGC only. In Sweden this is often integrated with the online news department.
- There is no size limit on the web, but the norm is to write short. News organizations with resources can also use the web for giving depth and background, but the dominant media logic of the news web is fast and short (for a content analysis of online news see: Redden and Witschge, forthcoming).

New types of content are developed on the web, and there is now more “web-specific” content than ever before.

**Interactive Journalism and User-Generated Content** Journalism has been a one-way communication, even if there have always been channels to feed back into the media (such as letters to the editor in newspapers and phone-ins on radio). The increased amount of UGC is influencing journalism in two ways: through news values and content. The constant flow of metrics tells the online journalist what the audience reads and does not read and this is beginning to influence news selection. Articles with bad metrics can be dropped and other articles with lots of readers are put on top. The surveyed journalists say that subjects generating a lot of response from the audience or UGC such as pictures and debates are given high priority. But it is still the journalist who ultimately decides which debates get pushed to the fore or even if debate is possible at all. For example, news that is likely to result in xenophobic reactions is seen as unsuitable for debate (e.g., the Mohammed-pictures in the Danish newspaper *Jyllandsposten*). Research in the area of news selection has shown two different kinds of thinking: on the one hand there is the approach in which journalists determine what they deem important for the audience and on the other there is the approach in which journalists look at the perceptions of what the audience want to read or see (Johansson, 2004). Both of these approaches have always existed in news journalism, but the increased interactivity tends to put more emphasis on the (more market-oriented) latter.

**Technological Development** Today journalists deal with technology to a much greater extent than ever before. They have taken over work that was previously done by technical staff, and in Swedish newsrooms of today journalists and technicians are working side by side. According to the Swedish survey journalists on regional media use on average 4.4 different software packages per day—content management systems (CMS), web browsers, e-mail, software for pictures, layout, editing sound

and video, and spread sheet software. The Swedish survey and the newsroom studies show a positive attitude towards digital technology among journalists, especially in TV and radio. The video reporters in regional TV and the radio reporters see creative opportunities in the new technical tools. Online journalists say they do not have to know all the programming but that they do have to know enough to talk to the technicians. On newspapers, both Swedish and British journalists are more ambivalent, and there are negative attitudes coming from the fact that new technology is introduced without a budget for new resources and training. In general most journalists think the technological development has made the work faster and more creative, but they also believe that there are a lot of opportunities that they have not tapped into yet. The technological developments have also lead to a more stressful work environment, with more production problems and more errors in the news published according to the journalists.

#### ***Relation to the Financial Departments of the Media Company***

Financial motives are much stronger today in media companies than five to ten years ago, according to the Swedish survey. The journalists link this to a weakening of the journalistic motives. This is not a uniquely Swedish development; the British project shows how financial motives diminish the autonomy of journalists. Likewise, other research in western countries shows a similar pattern (Picard, 2004). Newsroom editors nowadays talk about “eyeballs”, “target groups”, and the “portfolio” the company offers the advertisers. New investment seems to follow profits, free newspapers proliferate and everything is done to defend the position in the advertising market. Journalism is more connected than ever to finance and the old wall between the newsroom and the advertising and finance departments is no longer the great wall of China, but more the Berlin wall, crumbling and seen as a museum piece. The same is true for the Swedish public service companies; the finance departments’ influence is stronger, more production is done outside the company and large groups of journalists are temporarily employed with lower salaries.

The conditions of news production have changed, and so has the work for journalists. Table 3 summarizes the way in which the work has changed for local and regional Swedish journalists in the last 5-10 years, highlighting some of the issues discussed in the above such as on the one hand the increase in amount of time spent dealing with technical problems and on production, and the increase of workload and stress and on the other the decrease of time spent evaluating the work, discussing ideas and working outside of the newsroom.

Table 3: *Changes in Journalistic Work the Last 5-10 Years*

Has there been an increase or decrease in the following aspects of your work:	Average†
Solving technical problems	5.4
Workload, stress	5.2
Writing, production	4.6
Editing	4.2
Research and verification	4
Tasks relating to photography	4
Contact with the audience	3.9
Discussion of ideas	3.8
Evaluation of the work and published content	3.5
Work outside the newsroom	3.4

† On a scale of 1-7 where 4 is no difference, above 4 is an increase and under 4 is a decrease  
 Source: The survey "Changing journalistic work 2006" conducted amongst local and regional journalists. N=145.

## NEW PROFESSIONAL ROLES?

A professional role is a kind of collective identity, something that shows the difference between the profession and other groups within and outside of the company. It provides an identity that shows the "appropriate" way of doing the work, the values and attitudes, and professional language and symbols. The professional role prescribes to a certain extent the work at hand, what you can do and what you should not do. It is preserved and reinforced by institutions like unions, by ethical rules, professional education and a strict demarcation with other groups in similar areas of work (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; McQuail, 2000). But professional identities are not set in stone; they change. The journalistic profession developed with the modern mass media, and when the media system changes, it is also likely that the professional identity will change.

### *Trends of De-Professionalization*

The research in Sweden and the UK shows professional identities to be dynamic on different levels: on the *basic level of daily work* and on the level of *routines, unconscious norms and rules*. First, on the *basic level of daily work* there is no doubt that the professional role has changed. The work content has changed and the relations to other groups in the organization are closer than ever before. Journalists of today handle a bigger part of the production, more technical tools and emphasis have moved from research and content towards production and form—from "input" to "output". Today, multi-skilled journalists have to produce much more with less time to do the basic work of research and verification.

The professional institutions of journalism are getting weaker as the professional boundaries erode. The Swedish union for journalists is

losing members, and has recruiting difficulties in “new media”, production companies, and commercial radio and TV. The union is now discussing whether or not to include groups close to the field of journalism as members, such as those performing information-related tasks in state authorities. Also, the ethical rules and standards are still pretty much the same for the old media, but are not so much valid in the new media sector.

What is more, differences between journalists themselves have increased. The work force has been divided into a “core staff” on the one hand who give the company its profile and temporarily employed journalists on the other. Especially in the daily news production, an increasing amount of media employ a majority of journalists on temporary jobs. Furthermore, a large part of the content comes from sources outside the newsroom, such as freelancers, user-generated content, the wires and PR. At the same time some journalists become key personalities for their newscast or newspaper. These “journalist-stars” then become part of the company’s marketing, again stressing the commercial motives.

Likewise, we can identify a trend towards breaking up the profession from within: differences are growing between journalists in terms of work content, salaries and in the form of employment. Thirty percent of all European journalists have different kinds of temporary jobs (Deuze, 2007) and turnover in the profession is increasing (in Sweden, for instance, more journalists are leaving the profession after 10-15 years than ever). This does not mean that there will be no journalists in the future. But it does mean that it is now more difficult to define the profession “journalism”, to say what a journalist can do and to define the standards of the profession.

On the level of *routines, unconscious norms and rules* it is slightly more difficult to pinpoint the change. In the “old” media there is certain conservatism: old ways of doing the work are preserved in the daily routines even with the introduction of new technological solutions. Newspaper journalists keep thinking in terms of the needs of the newspaper, even if the company also has an online service that needs news 24/7. In radio the work is focused on the newscasts, and the web is mostly another way of listening to the same programs. But new ways of working have been established in the new newsrooms of the online media and commercial TV news. In those there is not so much “tacit knowledge”<sup>3</sup> in the walls telling the journalist to work as they always have done and new norms and routines are emerging in these new newsrooms, influencing journalism at large.

The routines, norms and rules are thus changing—slowly in some newsrooms and less slowly in others. We mentioned a number of them in

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<sup>3</sup> Tacit knowledge is implicit and based on experience and thus learned during the course of work, rather than in classrooms (Freidson, 2001:25)

the above: the move towards (even) more market-driven news selection, a more relative approach towards accuracy, and the increasing interaction with the audience. The question is how these areas influence journalism as a whole, and whether (and if so to what extent) we can perceive differences in norms between different kinds of journalism.

### ***Return to Professional Ethics in Times of Administrative News Cultures***

In the theoretical section of this article, we distinguished between organizational demands on the one hand and occupational professionalism on the other. We observed that the demands from within the organizations regarding the standards, routines and goals for the media have changed considerably. We may even go so far as to say that from a perspective of the organization a de-professionalization has been instigated, countering the process of professionalization observed by scholars during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The external forces have changed practices to such an extent that it is difficult to talk of a homogeneous profession, with huge variance in tasks within journalism, and groups outside of traditional journalism now practicing journalistic tasks more and more.

But what about the internal forces; how has occupational professionalism—the values, norms, and identity among journalists themselves—developed in light of these changes? The Swedish surveys show that the ideals and values that are most important to journalists—to be a watchdog, to explain complicated events and to stimulate new ideas—are to remain pretty much the same throughout time (Asp, 2007: 79). These journalistic values have been steadily developed since the first press in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and constitute a kind of ideological basis for journalism.

The British project shows furthermore that journalists go back to core journalistic values, precisely because of the external pressures. They are keen to guard the borders of their profession, and demarcate where journalism ends and something else begins.<sup>4</sup> In the interviews the journalists were asked how they feel about new spaces where news is produced, such as blogs and citizen journalism and were asked what sets journalists apart from these spaces. Answers to these questions provide much insight into how journalists perceive their own profession and show the importance they attach to professional values. The new forms of journalistic-like communication force them to think about what a journalist does, and what is different in their practice. The core of journalistic practice is, according to the interviewees, filtering information and determining what is news. Most journalists consider themselves to have sole right in producing news. Bloggers and citizen

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that even though this is the dominant discourse, there were views expressed in the interviews that counter this. For this paper we focus on the ways in which journalists go back to traditional values rather than turn away from them.

journalists do not produce news, as “journalism is where news is reported” (TW Interview VII). They view news as being tied to journalism and do not (want to) envisage other spaces as creating news.

The main distinction between journalism and these other spaces for the journalists lies in the distinction between facts and opinion. They hold that journalism is factual and the other spaces provide “mere” opinions.

*[blogs and citizen journalism are] not news; it's opinions. The most important thing in journalism is to make a (...) totally clear distinction between fact and opinion. [Correspondent regional newspaper TWVII]*

However, it becomes clear that even though journalists find it hard to describe the identifying traits of journalism, they consider it to be a separate profession or trade and compare it to other trades and professions:

*Well, what makes a carpenter a carpenter? Well, they've learnt how to do it. [Online journalist, national broadcasting organization, TWXXII]*

*Well, that's like saying what sets lawyers apart from someone who can just do all their own legal operations, whether you assume it's a trade or a profession it's something that has training and laws and ethics and practice which is different from another job. [Online journalist, national broadcasting organization, TWXXI]*

Journalistic training, particularly the legal part of it, is seen as an important part of the profession. However, at the same time they describe journalism to involve an innate character trait that cannot be learned so much; it is an innate outlook on life as this interviewee explains:

*It's not just about education; it's about a hunger for knowledge and to get to the bottom of a story. [News editor regional newspaper, TWXV]*

Another important aspect that sets journalism apart, according to the interviewees, is the presence of an institution or brand behind it. The public will seek out media, because they have proven to be trustworthy and to provide reliable information. Moreover, the institution will provide access to sources to which others do not have access: the brand opens doors. The expert-status that journalists hold allows them access over other possible news producers:

*If you've got an education policy, you're not going to trust Mrs. Mop down the road to talk to you about education policy. Someone of the*

*Council is not likely to speak to anybody other than a journalist because they don't know what they're going to make of that information. [Web editor, regional newspaper, TWI]*

This quote shows well that journalists consider themselves to have a specific role in news production that cannot easily be taken over by others. The interviews furthermore show that journalists also consider their output much more valuable than that of other possible news producers. They state that this is because journalists—in contrast to others—provide “reliable” and “factual” information:

*If you want to get an authoritative, well-researched, well-written, unbiased report on the news, then that's something that we [traditional media] give you in the way that a blogger or citizen journalist can't. [Web editor, regional newspaper, TWIII]*

Journalists further believe that journalism provides a valuable and unique public service: Journalists do not merely give information that the public may find interesting, but rather provide information that is important for the public. In other words, they educate the people by providing information that they should know rather than want to know. Journalists argue that the journalistic values are such that journalism provides a public service that is of importance to democracy.

According to the journalists, online anything goes and bloggers can (and will) publish anything that pleases them: Bloggers do not consider the consequences of their writings. Most of what they publish, the interviewees maintain, is slander and gossip. In journalism there are safety-checks that are missing from the blogosphere. Here as well, the professional ethics of journalism are said to be such that journalists would not want to have the liberties that they ascribe to bloggers:

*We wouldn't want to do what they (bloggers) do. (...). They're not journalism. When I say journalism I'm talking about something where standards apply, basically. That to me is the hallmark of professional journalism. Professional doesn't just mean that you're paid. It's something (to do) with standards. You have to make an effort to be fair and rigorous about what's happened. (...) I think it's also important to any sort of democracy that you have rigorous and professional journalism. [Reporter, regional newspaper, TWXIV]*

Journalists embrace a public responsibility that is absent among bloggers and citizen journalists, they argue. And they maintain that it is not just the insiders of journalism who are able to distinguish the difference between the professional and amateur producers. Journalists feel that the public is equally able to see the difference “between a blog written by a qualified journalist and a blog written by someone in their

bedroom.”<sup>5</sup> And even though some bloggers are very good, journalists still provide a more valuable contribution to society:

*There are people out there who are very good at blogging (...), [but] that doesn't necessarily mean you should respect them or trust them as much as you would a qualified journalist. I believe in my profession and I respect my profession. [Media reporter, regional newspaper, TWIX]*

In this way, journalists foresee a viable role for themselves in the future: producing trustworthy, credible news that serves a public need will always be ascertained of a place in society. Journalism will not cease to exist: In this time of blogging and streams of online information, it is needed more than ever.

We can see that in this time of extensive pressure on the profession from outside—whether it is from the financial departments within the media, or the emergence of online spaces of “news”—within the profession there is a return to professional values. This development is, of course, very understandable: when people feel threatened they will try and protect their interests.

What is most clear is that that the journalists seem to focus on one source of the external pressure, namely that of the other online news sources such as bloggers and citizen journalists. The real threat to their profession, however, may lie much more in the commercial surge in the profession. Many of the journalists interviewed for the British project do not feel they are conducting journalism “properly”. They feel they are not given enough time to investigate stories to the extent they wish to; feel that they are more and more conducting a desk job, regurgitating stories produced by the wires, and reproducing other existing material. Even though journalists draw from the journalistic values in describing what sets them apart from other sources, they cannot put these values into practice to the extent that they wish to. In the long run, this redesigning of journalism may prove to be the bigger threat than citizen and blogger journalists. The question arises what, if these values fade to such an extent that they do not set journalism apart any longer, the added value of journalism will be in the proliferation of sources of information.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Media researchers have often described the development of journalism during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a process of professionalization. Journalists have become a “semi-professional” group with a strong professional ideology binding them, and giving them some kind of control over their

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<sup>5</sup> Media reporter, regional newspaper, TWIX.

own work. In this paper, we have provided an overview of recent changes in the practices of journalists in Sweden and the UK and discussed the consequences for journalism as a profession. Based on qualitative and quantitative data on every day practices in journalism, attitudes of journalists as well as contextual information, we have shown how there is a trend towards de-professionalization within journalism driven by market pressures, and at the same time we see that journalists try to protect the boundaries and values of their profession.

Examining the characteristics used to describe a profession we have shown journalism to be a profession under pressure. First, the “knowledge monopoly” that journalists have traditionally maintained has crumpled with the Internet. Nowadays, all citizens with access to the Internet have access to an enormous body of information and have the tools to publish on the net. Journalists still have more easy access to sources than bloggers and alternative publications, but sources can now build their own communication channels in different forms on the net without necessarily using the established roads through the newsrooms. In Sweden, for example, the political parties put much effort in building relations with bloggers and through bloggers find new ways of reaching both the audience and news media. The journalistic control on the mediated public sphere thus seems to be fading, and this affects the perception of journalist as a representative of the audience.

Second, the division of labor in the media production has become much less clear: Journalists perform more and more different tasks in the production process and take over the technical production. Also, the borders between the newsroom and other parts of media companies—whereas traditionally clearly defined—are eroding. Surveys in Sweden and the USA clearly show the power of management and economic motives in media to be growing, as well as an increase in cross-border cooperation between journalists and business departments of media companies (Gade, 2005; Asp, 2007; Nygren, 2008). Moreover, an increasing part of the content is produced by suppliers outside of media companies who produce not just “journalism”.

An important indicator of a profession is professional education and research. This has never been strong in journalism and even though many journalists today have a background in some kind of journalism education (academic or not), journalism education is less connected to the industry and the profession. People in journalism have a background in a variety of studies, such as media studies, PR and marketing, which could cause a further dissolving of the professional boundaries.

Organizations representing the profession and ethical values of a profession only cover a limited part of the new media landscape. New online-based media can have a journalistic identity, whether or not they are connected to traditional media firms. However, a growing part of media activities does not fall under traditional journalistic practices, and as such the media landscape becomes ever more diversified. Professional organizations, such as unions, have problems getting members and are

looking to extend their membership to other related fields such as PR and marketing, blurring the distinctions further.

One of the important values of the journalistic profession is the public service nature of journalism. However, this is increasingly under pressure, as the financial motives in media companies grow stronger. New media platforms are more often than not developed in light of financial motives, trying to include new target audiences for advertisers. Of course, financial motives are not new; they are as old as media themselves. The balance between financial and journalistic motives, however, has changed, making journalism more like any other industry. Increased competition has shifted the balance towards economic motives and the working conditions have changed with it introducing more and more outsourcing and a higher demand on efficiency.

To belong to a profession means that there is a certain degree of autonomy of the members of the occupation allowing them to exercise control over their own work. Professional values should ensure high professional standards and quality output (Freidson, 2001). However, with increasing importance of economic gains the autonomy of both groups and individuals within the profession comes under pressure. The changes in the journalistic profession visible in the Swedish and British research show contrasting trends with regard to journalists' autonomy.

The multi-skilled journalist has control over more stages of the process than ever before and can develop new creativity and become less dependent on other professional groups in the production process. However, the demands in the daily production process are often so high that journalists can seldom develop this creativity. Multi-skilling is more often a way of increased efficiency than increased creativity (Quinn, 2005). The production process is ever more planned and the creative freedom in the work is less. As a group, journalists are more integrated in the media company, which means they have to think more about technology and economy and not solely in terms of the journalistic value of their work.

The technological and economic developments have changed the daily journalistic practices as well as the division of labor in media companies with trends towards multi-skilling and increasing "recycling" of content between media platforms and outlets (see also Phillips, forthcoming). Technological developments have changed the relation to the audience: the journalist no longer has the privileged position of exclusive access to sources and the public sphere, except perhaps in specific cases such as breaking news. Both the sources of news and the audience can build their own channels in the public sphere, reducing the journalist to one of many actors in the public sphere.

All of these changes make it difficult to say that journalists are in control of their own work, at least as a professional group. Taken together, all the conditions that allow us to see journalism as a profession are getting weaker; the trends rather point to a process of de-professionalization. We are not implying, however, that there will be no

journalism in the future or that high quality journalism is under threat of complete extinction. We can observe a growing diversity in media content, reflecting a fragmentation of the audiences and a blurring of media genres such as journalism, entertainment and fiction, making journalism more difficult to define as a profession. Somewhere in this mediascape, even though this may be marginal, there may be a sustained place for high quality journalism, whether that is published online or in more traditional forms, performed by professional journalists or amateurs.

The defense of the profession from within seems to indicate that journalists are at least not ready to let go of the professional standards. They try to guard the boundaries of the profession and ensure its perceived distinctiveness. Of course, this can be seen as a direct response to the pressures put on the profession by external forces—the economic focus and the production of news by non-journalists: When people's identities are threatened, they may try to reinforce it.

We are therefore not suggesting that these two trends—the internal return to professional values when the profession is under pressure from outside—as opposing one another, but rather think that they are two sides of the same coin. When faced with economic and technological change and insecurity, it may be natural to reinforce basic values that are considered to be at the core of the profession. On the long run, however, the practices that are de-professionalized may affect the values, causing an internal de-professionalization process. The question is thus whether the trend of returning to professional values can counter the former trend—the seeming fading of the profession—or that the de-professionalized practices prove the stronger force.

This is a question that cannot be answered at the moment. Moreover, the question may not be the right question to ask. We may first need to reconsider the nature of journalism, and question where the boundaries of the profession lie, as well as whether or not the fading of the profession is an issue at all. If the answer to this last question is yes, what do we consider journalism to be, and what is the basis of this definition? There are a lot of implicit normative assumptions surrounding the analysis of journalism—many of them related to journalism's role in society and democracy. However, journalism is not changing in a vacuum and society and democracy may need a different type of journalism if they need it all. These more fundamental questions will need to be addressed if we want to make sense of the current trends in journalism and want to be able to suggest what is needed to deal with the current situation.

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