

Errand boy or entrepreneur? Journalists' expectations of their future roles in Finland



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ABSTRACT: This paper looks at the future of journalism by studying journalists' expectations of their profession and future roles. Expectations have been linked with industry legitimacy and reputation, making them a timely topic for journalism practice. Based on a qualitative study that has investigated different journalists' expectations in Finland, ranging from fixed contract to freelancers, the results point towards increasing pessimism about the future of the media. The paper first introduces the role of journalistic expectations. Secondly, it aims at connecting theory on journalistic roles with changes brought about by media convergence. It also aims at defining future roles of journalists based on recent trends and changes in journalistic work. All the results are presented from theory-driven qualitative interviews carried out with journalists in Finland, yielding 15 potential roles for future journalism development, ranging from errand boy to entrepreneur.

KEYWORDS: journalistic roles, expectations, legitimacy, media convergence, Finland



INTRODUCTION

Globally, the media industry and journalism are going through major changes brought about by media convergence and technological developments (Compton & Benedetti, 2010; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Lawson-Borders, 2006). Most journalistic products are digitized, and articles, audio, and videos flow free of charge on the Web. New and social media offer places for interaction between journalists and readers. The operating environment of today's media companies consists of diverse players, and in addition is influenced by different technologies, infrastructures, and political agendas as they "translate" sometimes unexpected individuals and groups into important stakeholders on issues (Luoma-aho & Paloviita,

2010). Search engines and other automated robots pick up weak signals and cues for change and process them in real time, and the digital is becoming the norm (Lasorsa et al., 2012; Miel & Faris, 2008).

Moreover, new social networking services, like Facebook and YouTube, have challenged the old news media models and fostered a totally new kind of social sharing ecosystem. In 2009, Castells (2009) argued that YouTube was the largest mass communication medium in the world, but now, in 2012, it is Facebook. The content of these leading social networking services is created by all of the users, not any single media company. These services can be understood as the new arena of citizen and grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2004).

The traditional societal roles of journalists have been supplemented with new, more market-oriented roles (Hujanen, 2009). Hence, the old way of publishing newspapers is threatened, and as savings are the aim, thousands of journalists have been laid off. These changes in the media environment have not only affected the organization of the media companies, but have also impacted the roles and professional experience of the journalists by increasing and speeding up their workload (Brennen, 2009; Usher, 2010; Örnebrink, 2010; Reinardy, 2011). The changes have been met by journalists with caution, as they fear that quality may be compromised (Hermida, 2010; Juntunen, 2011) and that they may be hindered (Jyrkiäinen, 2008). Much nostalgia and lack of self-reflexivity among unemployed journalists has been apparent (Usher, 2010): the journalists blame Wall Street rather than their occupational values and practices in a changing media landscape. More openness to self-reflexivity and a better understanding of the new journalistic roles in the new media world are needed (Usher, 2010).

The quality of journalism and people's trust in institutions are central factors for economic growth and a nation's well-being (Dutton & Shepherd, 2003; Fukuyama, 1995). Finland, due to its freedom of the press, high trust among citizens, low levels of corruption, high competitiveness, and human development scores (see Transparency Intl., 2011) makes an interesting research context. Moreover, in Finland, the Internet has become the most important media (see, e.g. Taloustutkimus, 2011, p. 7), and reader expectations are moving towards more co-production and speed (Rosen, 1999; Gillmor, 2004; Hujanen, 2008; Karlsson, 2011; Fenton, 2012). However, thus far, co-production has not succeeded, and newspapers' online sites are still in favour of professional "official sources" (Rebillard & Touboul, 2010).

The future of the profession and journalists' new roles have been the focus of recent research in the context of media convergence (Deuze, 2005; Hermida, 2010; Lasorsa et al., 2012; O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008). The future is not independent of expectations. Journalists are a vital stakeholder group for media companies, but their expectations towards the media have not been previously studied. We propose that journalists' expectations contribute not only to the

media industry's reputation (Deephouse & Carter, 2005), but also to its basic legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), and as such are an important area for study.

We look here at journalists' expectations and future roles. Hence, the journalistic roles are revisited and the future roles are established. The results of a recent qualitative study on journalists' future expectations in Finland are reported together with their implications for journalism practice. In the end of the article the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research in this field are put forth.

JOURNALISTS' EXPECTATIONS

Media companies reflect societal needs, have communication power (Castells, 2009), and can be understood to have an expectational relationship with their stakeholders (Podnar & Golob, 2007). Media stakeholder refers to those groups or individuals without whom the industry or company would not exist, such as employees, customers, and funders (Freeman, 1984). Expectations operate as standards against which industry and company performance is assessed (Weber & Mayer, 2011), and can contribute to future developments (Walker & Baker, 2000). Unrealized stakeholder expectations can lead to problems in organizational legitimacy, thus making them critical factors for the media's success (Reichart, 2003).

Journalists' expectations are important because of journalists' intermediary status in society (Bourdieu, 1984; Nixon & Du Gay, 2002). Historically, journalists have been able to sketch the first draft of history, and journalistic products are still used as important source material by many historians. However, during the Internet era this intermediary role of journalism professionals has diminished and other actors, including independent bloggers and social media with their algorithms, in particular, have entered the field (Wiesslitz & Ashuri, 2011).

Expectations have risen higher up on the agenda as attention has become a more valuable asset. In fact, society can be seen as divided into innumerable large and small markets in which information providers actively try to catch people's attention (Laermans, 2011). As expectations often vary between different stakeholder groups, media companies must distinguish their central stakeholders from those who are less central. Individual journalists as central stakeholders are crucial in this process. In fact, Deuze (2005, p. 458) noted that "it is by studying how journalists from all walks of their professional life negotiate the core values that one can see the occupational ideology of journalism at work."

Generally, expectations change as the industry changes. If legitimacy is social acceptance resulting from institutional adherence to norms and expectations (Deephouse & Carter, 2005), its grounds are affected when societal expectations change. Should expectations not be met, trust is lost and a "legitimacy gap" may result (Sethi, 1979). To reduce the gap between expectations and perceptions, organizations and institutions often communicate to and educate their key stakeholders about their policies and goals (Sethi, 1979). In the media world, new business models are tested

to meet stakeholder needs, but the underlying changes in journalistic values and journalists' own expectations often are not central part of the analyses.

FUTURE ROLES OF JOURNALISTS

Previous few studies have focused on journalists' expected roles taking into account factors such as journalistic culture, news functions, media roles, and role perceptions (Hanitzsch, 2007). Summarizing the field under the notion of journalistic culture, Hanitzsch (2007, p. 369) noted how journalists' thoughts and actions manifest journalistic culture. The author defines journalistic culture as "a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists, consciously and unconsciously, legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others."

Among the earliest roles mentioned are journalists' neutral and participatory roles (Cohen, 1963). Interestingly, the modern hype of participation in and the co-creation of news was already apparent in Janowitz's (1975) description of journalists' roles as advocates, where journalists take part in the process of advocacy. The traditional role of gatekeeping (Janowitz, 1975) has changed more dramatically, as public access to publishing opinions online has altered the news process.

Deuze (2005) further noted how trends, such as control and transparency, and major developments, like multiculturalism and multimedia, have changed the field and journalists' self-image. To answer the need for a more global model, Donsbach and Patterson (2004) proposed two dimensions to describe journalists' roles: the passive-active dimension of independence and the neutral-advocate dimension of taking a stand. Hujanen (2009) described how "good journalism" today could actually be described as a hybrid, where journalists' professional role consists of various responsibilities ranging from informing to entertaining to empowering.

Studies focusing on journalists' future roles have focused on issues such as speed (Karlsson, 2011), online skills (Allan, 2006), curation (Fahy & Nisbet, 2011), and combining multiple skills and mastering multiple platforms (Masip et al., 2007; Beckett, 2008; Russell, 2011). DIY-backpack journalists often work independently and from anywhere, and require skills related to editing and recording. Sreenivasan (2010) suggested that future journalists will be multimedia storytellers, bloggers, and curators, who not only create themselves, but also enable others by building and managing communities. Masip et al. (2007) called these future flexible journalists converged journalists, who have to be able to take care of the entire production process themselves, adapting to the technical and language demands of different media. The converged journalists are influential, as their work reaches wide audiences across all media. Both Beckett (2008) and Russell (2011) have argued that journalism needs to redefine mainstream news institutions, from both inside and out. Moreover, new collaborative skills are needed between the professionals and the non-professionals in networked journalism.

media has also faced recent political changes: in late 2011, the Finnish parliament ratified two decisions related to media, a 9 percent value-added tax for newspapers and magazines was set, and the funding of Yleisradio (Yle), the Finnish public service broadcasting company, was reformed into a new mandatory "Yle tax."¹

The questions guiding this study focused on how journalists expect the media to develop, and what kind of roles journalists will fulfil in the future. The approach was qualitative, and the sixteen interviews were semi-structured. The chosen method of analysis was theory-driven deductive content analysis, where the analysis is driven by themes or a map of the established concepts of the field (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002). This approach was chosen because it enabled the researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of the journalists' expectations through their own terminology and judgments (Patton, 2002). According to the requirements of the standardized open-ended interview, the exact wording of all of the questions was set before the interview (for interview questions see Appendix).

As there are no set rules for sample size in qualitative research (Patton, 2002), data collection continued until the saturation point of information redundancy was reached. Moreover, information-rich cases were purposefully selected through maximum variation sampling and snowball sampling. Dozens of journalists were contacted via email and phone, but only a small number replied, and many declined to participate. Fourteen full-time and two freelance journalists participated in the study, representing the fields of print, broadcast, and online media.

The interviews were conducted during the winter of 2011–2012. The interviewees represented the leading top five Finnish news organizations (Sanoma News, Alma Media, MTV3 Media, STT, and Yleisradio). The number of interviewed journalists from each newsroom (1–4) was based primarily on the size of the audience: the bigger the audience, the more interviewees were chosen from that newsroom. The individual journalists were chosen so that there would be an even mix of general and specialist journalists representing different fields, such as foreign, regional, or political news. There were nine male and seven female journalists, and their age varied from 25 to 62.

HOW JOURNALISTS SEE THE FUTURE OF THE MEDIA

Firstly, the results of this research indicated that journalists' expectations are not currently fully met by their employers. These expectation gaps are mostly related to media companies' personnel reductions, leadership problems, and fixed-term contracts. When the number of journalists working in a newsroom is reduced,

¹ The effects of these political decisions in the Finnish media landscape are not yet clear in 2013. Naturally, for example, The Federation of the Finnish Media Industry was against a 9 percent value-added tax for newspapers and magazines. The Federation predicted increasing financial uncertainties for the Finnish print media. On the contrary, the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation was satisfied with the new "Yle tax" that will stabilize its funding in the near future.

those remaining have to do more work, and work becomes more mechanical and hasty. Many journalists felt that they do not have enough time for analysis or to dig for information and discover their own story ideas. Most of the journalists' expectations about the future of the media and their assessed outcomes for journalism in general were negative, or a mixture of positive and negative expectations.

None of the interviewees expected the traditional media business to grow in the near future. Rather, the media business was expected to shrink, and the current trend of diminished resources was perceived as a new norm. Some interviewees showed strong emotions when reporting these changes. Interestingly, some changes that are often perceived as purely negative were seen as both negative and positive. For example, the speed and extent of change from print and broadcast news into online and mobile news had divided opinions. Most interviewees believed that mobile news will be just another medium among others, and that it will not replace other media outlets. Some interviewees thought that only short and fast news will shift to mobile devices, and the media will still save their most important stories for their main platforms, such as newspapers or evening television news broadcasts.

The journalists saw possibilities in the emergence of social media and the shift of newspaper content to tablet computers. They believed that, during this phase, the media companies have an opportunity to increase the quality of their journalism, if they invest the money saved in printing and distribution costs in the newsrooms. Tablet publications were also seen as a possibility for media companies to create new business logics. However, the interviewees noted that the benefits of the tablet shift will not come automatically. The new tablet publications cannot be just like newspapers in a digital form. It was expected that both journalists and media companies will have to learn how to use the new technology properly. As noted by one of the journalists:

We should learn to use the possibilities offered by the new technology in the best possible way. It is not enough to have moving images and funny stuff. The stories have to become deeper and they have to be packaged in such a way that the new information, the piece of news, is connected to a larger information context more seamlessly than before (interview, 2011–2012).

The interviewees saw major changes taking place and still ahead for the role of the journalist. News robots offer newsrooms new possibilities to free journalists from mechanical reporting and allow them to concentrate on more important work, such as analysis. The respondents who had an opinion about this were not convinced that the media companies will take an advantage of this possibility. The interviewees expected that journalists' working conditions will deteriorate because the media companies are always looking for ways to cut costs. Media convergence, personnel reductions, and accelerating news cycles are expected to create pressures

for the remaining workforce. At the same time, the quality of journalism was expected to suffer. According to one of the interviewees:

Unfortunately, I expect the working conditions to weaken. We'll have to make stories faster and for more news platforms than before, which means inferior news stories than before. This is what I expect and fear (interview, 2011–2012).

The respondents predicted that the demand for fixed-term, outsourced, and freelance work will increase and in turn erode the personnel's trust in their employer. Shift work was also expected to become more common in the future, though it may hinder the quality. Another threat was seen in the increase of entertaining content in news, which was expected to continue to increase in the future. Some interviewees believed tabloidization may lead even quality-media journalists to pay more attention to the way they present their stories. Some respondents thought that the shortening of newspaper articles affects the topics journalists can write about, weakening the quality of serious journalism. Journalism was expected to become more mobile and film crews smaller because of new technology: one journalist can carry and operate all of the needed equipment for making multimedia journalism. Together these expectations formed the basis for assessing the future roles of a journalist.

MULTITALENTED JOURNALISTS NEEDED

The interviewees had various views for their future roles, since according to them some of them may overlap. The most common expectation was that in the future, journalists will be multitaled. They have to be able to create content for all types of media:

You have to handle at least two mediums, such as print and online. But we also do TV on the Web. You have to know the basics of television work. All the time you have to be more and more multitaled in everything. That is the biggest change (interview, 2011–2012).

In addition, many interviewees believed that the traditional role of specialist journalist will remain the same, but that the qualifications have risen. Journalists are better educated than before. They have more skills and better general knowledge. Some interviewees expected that the journalist's role will divide into two groups, which do different kinds of work. These roles are the fast information broker and the background information creator:

I think journalists will divide into two distinct groups. There will be those who are fast information brokers, those who write fast news items for online. When they have finished it, they already have another article to write. Then there will be those who create background information for this kind of fast news. They will probably do it for another medium (interview, 2011–2012).

Some expected that a third group of journalists would also emerge with the role of moderator. The journalists were a little skeptical about this new role, because they do not believe that Finnish audiences will participate significantly in citizen journalism or send useful information into the newsrooms:

Citizen journalism is, maybe surprisingly, clumsy. It may work in some special magazines, but it is not easy to get people to participate. It would be nice if you could. But it is quite hard for me to see that typical Finnish audiences of general papers would start to participate significantly (interview, 2011–2012).

The interviewees saw two different trends regarding journalists' need to specialize. Most interviewees believed that in the future, journalists will have to specialize even more. On the other hand, some believed that media companies will try to get rid of specialist journalists because of their higher salaries.

Social media was expected to shape the role of the journalist somehow in the future. The respondents expected the fragmentation of the audiences to continue. At the same time, the roles of journalists will differentiate. Different audiences have different expectations towards the media they follow. Journalists' roles were expected to be shaped according to what kind of media they work for:

The role of the journalist depends on the newsroom they work for. Our work has more to do with entertainment than what the work includes in other beats (interview, 2011–2012).

The respondents also named several specific journalists' future roles including the servant of the public, the errand boy, the assembly-line worker, the celebrity, the commentator, the co-operation partner, the entrepreneur, and the part-time publicist. Some older respondents thought that journalists have become errand boys for their news editors. This means that journalists' freedom to choose their own topics has diminished. Instead, they have to create stories about the topics their news editors choose for them more often than before:

Before, a newspaper's errand boy could become the leader of a nation. Now journalists have been turned into errand boys. This is a backward development (interview, 2011–2012).

The assembly-line worker has to do the worst kind of fast information-brokering work mentioned earlier. The assembly-line worker only shovels articles into the Web. The respondents stated that journalists' opinions and comments have become more common in newspaper content. The commentator and the celebrity roles of the journalist are linked together. Some commentators become celebrity journalists. The respondents expected more celebrity journalists to pop up in the future.

One respondent thought that some parties in different sectors of public life have started to consider journalists as co-operation partners:

I don't know if journalists want it, but they are being considered as co-operation partners. I think it wasn't like that before. I've done different stories as a sports journalist and I remember that back then journalists were separate from the ice hockey teams and their background influencers. Nowadays they are all like one family (interview, 2011–2012).

Media companies were expected to continue reducing staff, and at the same time switch to buying articles from freelancers. If this happens, more and more journalists will become entrepreneurs. Also some freelancer journalists' and publicists' roles may become mixed or combined in the future (see e.g., Briggs, 2012).

Along with media convergence and technological developments, there will be more players in the journalistic environment. More players in the media environment means more competition. Many journalists believed that the news cycle will accelerate even more in the future. This will increase the risk of mistakes in reporting, as journalists will have less time to check facts. Some journalists believed that the competition for news on the Internet will go global. In the future, foreign online news media is expected to challenge Finnish media more and more when reporting international news, because people are able to follow any media outlet they choose on the Internet. At the same time, the offered points of view about different events are expected to become more diversified. At the global level, some journalists expected the power of international news agencies to grow in foreign reporting, because only a few major news agencies provide photos, video footage, and news reports to almost all media organizations across the world.

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the trends and changes reported in this study were not new, and have been reported globally. Trends such as the diminishing workforce and accelerating news competition are reality everywhere, yet the reactions of Finnish journalists showed more proactiveness than reported by a previous US study. In the US the journalists, for example, did not want to change their work practices in order to survive in a new news ecosystem (see e.g., Usher, 2010). In general, Finnish journalists were well aware of the drivers of the changes in the digital news ecosystems, and did not lack the self-reflexivity called for by Usher (2010). Actually, Finnish journalists suggested several counter-strategies, like specializing and the developing of new roles (moderators, co-operation partners, and entrepreneurs) that were in line with the scholars focusing on networked journalism (Beckett, 2008; Russell, 2011), thereby making journalists active agents of their own future.

The future roles of journalists arising from our data were also in line with previous predictions (Figure 1).

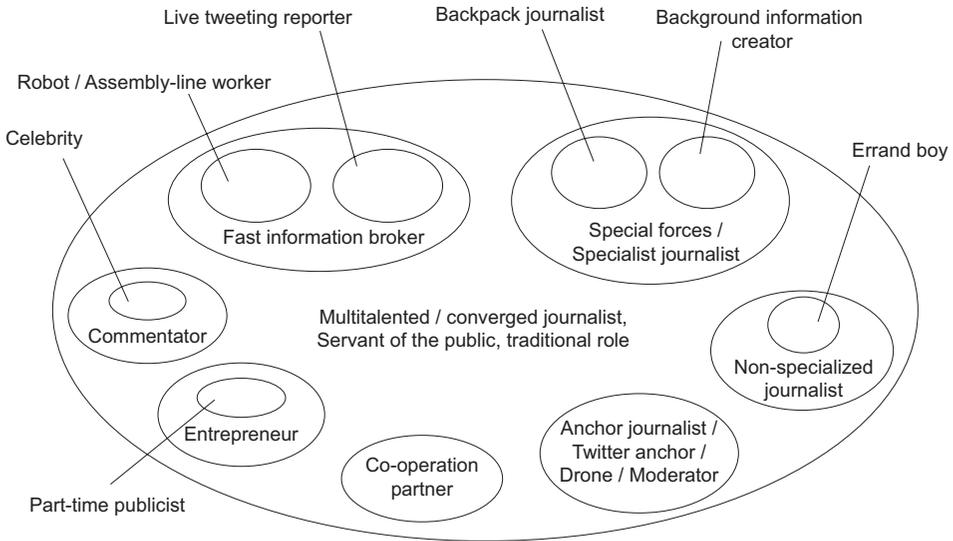


Figure 1. The different roles suggested for future journalists

Source: authors.

The requirements for the multitalented and non-specialized do-it-all journalist match well with the idea of the converged journalist (see Masip et al., 2007), and the servant of the public or commentator similarly reflect the backpack journalist and multimedia storyteller (see Sreenivasan, 2010). The traditional role of a journalist remains an ideal that is even more difficult to establish today. The specialist role arising from the data reflects what others have called the elite forces (Vehkoo, 2011), who actually produce stories on their field of interest and expertise.

Similarly, the brainless work of the robots and drones (Vehkoo, 2011) can be seen in the roles of the fast information broker, errand boy, and assembly-line worker. On the other hand, the fast information brokers can be understood as j-tweeters (Lasorsa et al., 2012) or live tweeting reporters (Clayfield, 2012; Wolfe, 2008). The moderators in our data reflect traits similar to the anchor journalists and conductors (Clayfield, 2012; Lewis, 2011).

In the end, a news media company's success depends on the quality and credibility of its content. If the content is good, people are more likely to be willing to pay for it. If the quality is bad, very few want to pay for it. Journalists are the people who report the news and they are saying that the quality of journalism is in danger. This message should ring some alarm bells on the managerial bodies of media companies.

As Hanitzsch (2007) noted, much of the research on journalistic roles is rooted in the Western understanding of news and media, with a lack of understanding of the factors that affect culture, such as interventionism, power distance,

and market orientation. This points to a clear limitation of the present study as well; it was set in Finland, and in the context of Finnish media and its present challenges.

In this research, validity deficiencies might have been caused by the research framework. The research was centered on journalists working for the biggest media companies in Finland. Journalists working for smaller media companies might have different expectations and visions for the future of the media. Only two freelancers were interviewed in this study. The results show that some of their expectations towards media companies vary from monthly, salaried journalists' expectations. The data about freelancers' expectations was probably not saturated, so some of their expectations might have been missed in this study.

The subjectivity of the interviewed journalists may have had some impact on the validity of this research. As journalists are workers in media companies, they might have given more favorable answers to questions regarding their own employers than what they really think. A couple of respondents did not want to talk about situations when they had been disappointed by their current employer. The biggest issue in the research ethics for this thesis is privacy. The full anonymity of the participants was guaranteed by removing all information from the quotations that could be traced back to the respondents.

Finally, according to this study journalists are under increasing work pressures in the leading Finnish news organizations. Also their work roles are on the move. In this study 15 potential roles were altogether detected for journalists, ranging from errand boy to entrepreneur. The most common expectation among the interviewed journalists was that in the future journalists have to be able to create content for all media. It can be easily argued that multiskilled and multitalented journalists are needed not only in Finland, but all over Europe. This offers valuable starting points for many future comparative research projects.

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- 24.* Could you describe a situation when you have been particularly satisfied with the media you work for (expectations have been exceeded)? How did it affect your work, if at all?
25. Have you considered changing your work place/job? Why?
- 26.* Which media will you be working for in 5 years? Why?
27. Is there any important thing that we didn't handle here? What is it?