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## Starving at the Laid Table? Journalism, Digitalization and Corporate Capitalism

**Abstract:** Professional journalism fulfills an important role in modern democracies, while always standing with one leg in the public sphere and the other in the private media economy. Within the era of digitalization, the limits of a market-driven professionalism become apparent. Since information appears to be easily accessible due to new media, journalism lost its role as a gatekeeper for “what the world needs to know”. But dropping an anachronistic idea of professional authority—as reform projects within the journalistic profession demanded for decades—does not necessarily lead to a more open and participatory public sphere. On the contrary, the chance for reliable news seems to shrink in the everyday flood of information. Facing a severe shortage of professionalism against the background of an oversupply in the field of journalism might indicate a general paradox of contemporary societies.

**Keywords:** Journalism, democracy, market, public good, digitalization

From the sociology of professions perspective, journalism is discussed as a *permeable profession*, torn between serving the public and private profit (Abbott, 1988; Lewis, 2012). The professional project of journalism commenced with the rise of modern mass media. Always standing with one leg in the public sphere and the other in the private media economy, it went through challenging times during the 20th century. The following article will discuss the development of the journalistic profession with regard to the tension resulting from a public duty carried out within the increasingly commercialized media.

Journalism is widely seen as an important element of democratic societies, assigned to control the ruling elites and the government and promote deliberative processes. The concept of professionalized journalism was developed in the US and was adapted to the European countries after World War II. In continental Europe, journalism has been traditionally attributed to the intellectuals, situated somewhere in between arts and politics. However, in Germany, for example, the US American model prevailed as an academic discipline due to the American occupying power influence in media politics after the political abuse of the media during the Nazi regime and the historically new emergence of journalism studies. With regard to the professionalization of journalism, the second half of the twentieth century is particularly important—not only because the idea and the term professionalization itself became more prominent, but journalism also developed tremendously, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in that period. Since this process of professionalization was directly connected to the expansion of the media economy, the relation between professionalism and market structures is strikingly clear in the journalistic field. Within the era of digitalization, as will be illustrated in this article, the limits of a market-

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driven professionalism have become apparent.

The following argumentation is based on long-term observations of the development of the cultural and media professions led by own empirical works and referring to sound literature in the overlaps of sociology, journalism, and media studies. The aim of this article is a reconstruction of the historical development and drawing a line from the core ideology of professionalism to recent challenges of journalism. This results in a helicopter perspective, tending to pass over the multifaceted reality of journalism and presenting quite condensed micro-level findings. The empirical research, which nevertheless substantiates this argumentation, is based on document analysis, ethnographic observations, expert discussions and qualitative in-depth interviews with journalists of different cohorts and specializations in Germany (Schnell, 2007, 2009, 2016a, 2016b).

Furthermore, the development of the journalistic profession might be considered in correspondence to general tendencies of contemporary professionalism. On the one hand, journalism left behind the paternalistic concept of the professional as a gate keeper who decides “what the world needs to know” and took over the very modern idea of professional journalism as a compass in the everyday flood of information. On the other hand, journalism also exemplifies a problematic combination of hybridization, consumer sovereignty and the blurring distinctions between professional and non-professional work. Within digitally accelerated and commercialized mass media, journalistic achievements seem to lose relevance due to the lack of obvious distinctions between professionally conducted information, other types of content and “fake news”.

In the following, the traits and pathways of the professionalization of journalism (section one) and the role of academisation for the process of professionalization (section two) are summarized. Section three discusses the transformation and rationalization of journalism in the era of new media. In section four, the problem of serving the public under market constraints is reflected. In section five, the current crisis of the democratic public is discussed before resuming the paradox of shortages and oversupply of professionalism in the field of journalism.

## Traits and pathways of professionalization

Before diving deeper into the contradictions journalism faces today, a brief history of the professionalization in the field of journalism is summarized in this section. The development of the journalistic profession in Western industrial societies has been influenced by the Anglo-American model (Esser & Umbricht, 2013; Polumbaum, 2010; Williams, 2005), as outlined in the article “Journalism as an Anglo-American invention” (Chalaby, 1996). Journalism developed with industrialization and emergence of the press as the first mass medium. According to these historical roots, the ideal of journalism refers to news work and newspaper journalism while essentially ignoring the rising diversity of journalistic work. Even most scholarly work on journalism has focused on institutional news journalism, and the research on “alternative” journalism suggests that journalists across genres and media types invoke the same ideal-typical value system when discussing and reflecting on their work (Sparks, 1992; Van Zoonen, 1998). These evaluations have shifted subtly over time yet have always served to maintain the dominant sense of what journalism is (and should be) (Deuze, 2005; McNair, 2003).

Five ideal-typical traits that form the traditional core values of the professional ideology of journalism are discussed in the literature (Deuze, 2005.; Golding & Elliott, 1979; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001): First, the public service ideal is the main legitimizing feature of journalism, implying that journalists share a sense of “doing it for the public”. The figure of the “watchdog” or the claim of a fourth, which is controlling the political elite, stands for this self-perception. Overall, journalistic

work is interpreted as important to the public—as consumers but even more as citizens—insofar as journalism’s public task is conceptualized as promoting democratic deliberation (Deuze, 2005; Merritt, 1995).

*Objectivity* is the second key element, particularly in Anglo-American professional self-perception (Mindich, 1998). Since recent approaches question whether any information is objective in the sense of value neutrality, academics and journalists revisit this value through synonymous concepts, such as fairness, professional distance, detachment, and impartiality, to define and legitimize what media practitioners do.

Of course, the claim of professional *autonomy* plays an important role in the field of journalism as well. As in the established professions, autonomy is demanded in different directions and encompasses the freedom of opinion, free media and protection from censorship as well as the independence of the journalistic work from market forces and newsroom hierarchies. Whereas the general claim for autonomy unifies editors, media companies and journalists, claiming autonomy within the editorial department is supposed to defend the interests of journalists against editors’ expectations and within their working environment so that they will not have to subordinate themselves to editors and managers. But as discussed below, editorial autonomy has become even more fragile due to changing working conditions in today’s journalism (Singer, 1998).

*Immediacy* has always played an important role in the journalistic working culture. Fast decision-making and hastiness are part of the professional habitus, corresponding with the defining principle of “news”—the novelty of information. Of course, with regard to the technological development and the emergence of real-time publishing in a “non-stop” 24/7 digital environment, the notion of speed has become more ambivalent, as it increases the conflict between prudence and actuality (Deuze, 2005; Hall, 2001).

Last but not least, the development of a professional code of ethics, the fifth trait, has been another central element of the professionalization of journalism. Regardless of contextual differences, the commitment to truth and objectivity are key dimensions of ethical guidelines, as they legitimize the claim of autonomy and societal trust and recognition (Hafez, 2002; Ryan, 2001).

The professional ideology is particularly important in the field of journalism, as it has always been an “open” profession unable to institutionalize social closure. Even though the concept of professionalized journalism refers to an expert role for the freedom of expression and a specific responsibility for the democratic public, this jurisdiction must not be monopolized. Constitutional democratic rights imply that everyone is allowed to express his or her opinion publicly. Lacking institutionally secured boundaries, journalists tend to refer to these ideal traits to distinguish themselves from other occupational groups within the media and sustain some operational closure, thereby keeping outside forces at bay (Deuze, 2005, p. 447). With regard to the following development of journalistic professionalism, it is important to recognize that the frame of journalism as a “watchdog” over politics is rooted in the liberal ideology and corresponds with the commercialized structure of the Anglo-American press. Limitations of journalistic freedom resulting from market structures and economic dependencies have not been taken into account by theoretical approaches as a challenge to professionalism, even though the problematic implications became more obvious with the rise of the media economy.

Journalism studies have stressed the contrast between Anglo-American professionalism and continental European traditions in journalism. However, the Anglo-American ideal of journalistic professionalism has been progressively imported and adapted in newsrooms throughout continental Europe, while the overall picture changed completely throughout the course of the expansion and internationalization of media production in recent decades. But to understand the similarities and differences of the journalistic field, the systems of media production and the social and

political preconditions for professionalization in Europe are still of interest. Therefore, one line of differentiation is drawn between a highly politicized literary style in South or Central Europe and the corporative style allocated to the more Northern European countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Germany and Switzerland are representatives of a liberal version of the corporatist media, which correspond with a political system traditionally emphasizing compromise and power-sharing. This socio-political framework has supported the development of strong ties between newspapers, political parties and organized social forces, and thus also a partisan reporting style. However, the ideal of a neutral professionalism and information-oriented journalism has prevailed against the background of a moderate degree of external pluralism and a legacy of commentary-orientated journalism (Esser & Umbricht, 2013, p. 992). Therefore, media-theory mentioned the influence of the US American allies explains how the German media developed after World War II.

## **Professionalization via academization**

Academization has been another important aspect of the professionalization of journalism, starting in the late nineteenth century, but mainly taking place in the second half of the twentieth century. Journalism studies have evolved principles of teaching, learning and researching journalism, which were adopted at an international level (Deuze, 2005). It has been relatively common for journalists to hold a university degree for quite some time, but often from other academic areas, such as social or political science, that was meant to build up their analytical skills or to broaden their intellectual horizons without directly preparing students for journalistic practice (Schnell, 2007). Journalism studies show evidence of the shift from a “profession of talent” to a “profession of qualification”, whereas established journalists still tend to doubt that universities could prepare new entrants for the “realities” of journalistic work (Donsbach, 2013; Kepplinger, 2011). For the former generation of journalists, which was socialized within the “old industry model”, journalism was understood as a craftwork that was learned in the

By the end of the 1990s, there had developed a peculiar disjunction between the reality of how people did become journalists and the ideology of how they should become journalists, between the empirical evidence that journalism was now a career for graduates and the editorial suggestion that it should not be. (Schnell, 2007, p. 139)

In contrast to established professions, the relation between society and journalism is in a constant process of redefinition, and the profession is in a more reactive than proactive role of defining its position in relation to society. This became particularly evident in the discussion of academization, as the notion of social closure associated with academization was interpreted as dysfunctional with regard to the functional role of journalism. In the UK, for example, the loss of social proximity and how journalism might keep in touch with the “ordinary people” was problematized, implying that the academic elite would not be able to communicate the right things in the right way and represent their reality. In Germany, the idea of an intellectual avant-garde was much more accepted in the second half on the twentieth century, but the need for practical learning and socialization in the field was emphasized as well.

In terms of professionalization, academization might be understood as the development of a theoretical body of journalistic knowledge and an attempt to self-regulate the occupational field. In terms of education and socialization in a professional culture, which is conducted by the described values and principles, the academization of journalism has been quite successful. However, it has not achieved social

closure; rather, the opposite is the case. The growth of journalistic university programmes and degrees has contributed to enhanced competition in the journalistic labour market, and instead of stabilizing the social status of journalists through a university degree, it has become a standard, if not a formal requirement within the field over time. An interpretation of the academization of journalism as a successful collective upwards mobilization would be misleading. A more adequate interpretation seems to be that academic education and training have taken over parts of the reproduction of journalistic culture and offered training that is no longer provided within the general journalistic working conditions (Schnell, 2008; De Burgh, 2005).

## **Transformation and rationalization in the era of new media**

Parallel to the attempts to professionalize journalism, the structural preconditions of media production changed fundamentally. Technological innovations have always influenced journalism and led to new specializations, but new media have generated an unprecedented and widespread proliferation of new technologies, new genres, platforms, and industries. The manifold dimensions of change are interconnected, and the consequences with regard to journalism are complex. In addition to the technological development, the literature discusses social change in general (which also includes a transformation of the audience), changing political and legal frameworks, and of course, structural changes of media systems as concentration processes take place at the national and international levels (Knoche, 2007). Thus, it would be heavily abbreviated to understand digitalization merely as a new type of publishing, rather than considering the profound changes for the concept of journalistic professionalism associated with the ongoing processes of computerization, multimedia production and interactivity (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002; Wise, 2000).

The emergence of a new type of journalism has been discussed since the 1990s. It is often entitled cyber-journalism or network journalism and is adapted to the online media logic (Dahlgren, 1996). In contrast to the traditional ideal of news production, which is characterized by a more-or-less individualistic top-down process, editorial organization patterns of multi-media journalism are much more team-based and include participatory elements. Moreover, the technique of storytelling differs from mono-media production insofar as multimedia journalists must organize content differently and produce story “packages” that could be integrated in digital network technologies instead of writing single stories, likely repurposed in multiple formats. Overall, technical skills have grown in importance in relation to the traditional core skills of writing and information gathering. It is claimed that more working time is being taken up in dealing with technical problems. Whether this should be interpreted as a de-skilling, a change or an extension of professional skills is still controversial. According to Örnebring (2010), re-skilling, multi-skilling and de-skilling occur simultaneously. New training programs have been designed to teach journalism in the new media environment, considering that a broader skill base is needed within these segments of the news-gathering process from investigation to production (Deuze, 2005). With regard to professionalism, the diagnosis about the consequences for journalism is just as ambivalent: taking over parts of the production leads to an expanding control over more stages of production, but it is also time-consuming; therefore, writing and investigating tend to take a backseat (ibid, p. 67). However, the changes resulting from digitalization and new media go far beyond the need for qualifications and the acquisition of new skills.

Clearly, these changes are challenging the traditional self-conception and the professional ideology of journalists and catalyzing new tensions in the industry and among journalists. However, the development of new media goes far beyond concrete editorial organization. It is embedded in, and interlaced with the transformation of the media economy, which is increasingly being driven by commercialism and market rationality (Cottle, 2003; Dickinson, 2007). In continental Europe, where

the cultural landscape (including the media) has traditionally been assumed to be predominantly “public territory”, a shift has taken place from public cultural services to a prospering private-commercial domain within progressively internationalizing market structures. Audio-visual media, newspapers and magazines, the book trade and music were falling more and more in the hands of globally operating media companies. Overall, capital considerations and the “shareholder value” have grown in importance in medial production and changed the labour market and the working conditions in the journalistic field (Schnell, 2007; Hallin, 1996). Against this background and combined with the 24-hour multi-media news cycle, immediacy has been evolving more and more from a key value in the journalistic culture to a contradiction of journalistic liability and diligence (Blair, 2004). Digitalization has accelerated the news process and afforded a “discourse of speed” (Hampton, 2004), which tends to overlap with other criteria of journalistic labour. However, this development has become stronger and more encompassing over time, and journalistic work practices have had to adapt to the pressure of immediate publication and broadcasting.

After all, the discourse of speed appears as a mechanism of economic competition insofar as the technology is used to rationalize the news process in the very narrow sense of increasing the output and reducing the costs of media production. In effect, this can be interpreted as a devaluation of the traditional principles of journalistic professionalism (i.e. news gathering according to the principles of verification, ethical clarity, and depth) and as a shift in occupational control from journalists to managers (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Ursell, 2003). Instead of using new technologies to support elaborate investigation, many journalists seem to carry out desk jobs and must take over technical production (Witchge & Nygren, 2009, p. 55). Örnebring (2010, p. 64) sees a risk of a “proletarianization” of journalism in this development in which technology becomes a tool “that allows managers to implement organizational changes aimed at making journalistic labour more cost-effective and more easily controlled”.

Another aspect of change resulting from digitalization and convergence is the conceptualization of the producer-consumer relationship (Baroel & Deuze, 2001; Neuberger & Quandt, 2010). With the increase of interactivity, the hierarchical relationship between producers and users is blurring, which is being discussed in the literature of journalism studies as a challenge of “one of the most fundamental “truths” in journalism: the professional journalist is the one who determines what publics see, hear, and read about the world” (Deuze, 2005, p. 451; Hall, 2001; Löffelholz, 2000; Pavlik, 2001; Singer, 1998). The more-or-less unlimited access to information in the digital era is changing the jurisdiction of journalistic professionalism from the level of the generation of information to the level of supporting consumers to cope with the flood of information (Schnell, 2008). At the same time, journalists must consider the rising social complexity resulting from changes in the social structure and multiculturalism (Deuze, 2005). This is identified as another problem of journalists’ role perception in contemporary society by authors of journalism studies because the active awareness of social diversity contradicts the valued detachment of society that has been the traditional ideal of journalistic professionalism (Golding, 1994; MacGregor, 1997; Quandt & Schweiger, 2008).

In the era of new media, core values of journalistic professionalism have been challenged. Even the public service ideal is questioned in a multi-media context and is “not the same safe value to hide behind like it used to be in days of print and broadcast mass media” (Deuze, 2005, p. 455). It is much more difficult to meet the general public’s interest and therefore to legitimize the professional authority in a public that is characterized by individualization and an audience considered to be becoming increasingly fragmented. This seems to be even truer since new media also imply a further loss of control in respect to the reception of information in the face of surfing the internet and shrinking attention spans. As a consequence of this development, theories of journalism indicate a shift towards a notion of serving the public

that is increasingly based on a bottom-up principle. Instead of pretending to be responsible for what people need to know (or not), journalism must take over the role of the moderator of the “conversations society has with itself” and offer filters and interpretations with regard of the overload of accessible information (Deuze, 2005; Carey, 1989 [1975]).

Additionally, the value of journalistic objectivity is being questioned insofar as it follows the common understanding of “getting both sides of the story”. The increasing similarities of different media cultures in new-media production combined with news platforms that support interactivity and direct feedback from the audience are challenging journalists more than ever before with a plurality of interpretations of reality. As a result, the core value of objectivity appears much more against the background of social complexity. Moreover, the value of autonomy, which was developed as a concept at the individual level, must now be reflected in a more transparent and sometimes even participatory news environment. Obviously, as argued before, immediacy potentially turns from a value to a menace of journalistic professionalism, particularly if the quality and depth of news and information are not adequately valued in the context of online publishing. In addition, journalists might refer to ethics to defend against structural changes or commercial, audience-driven or managerial encroachment, but they will need to rethink their ethical standards to be able to deal with new conditions of working and publishing.

In sum, the concept of journalism as a social authority representing the public, which was developed within the expansion of mass media, seems to have lost power against the background of changing technical, economic and social preconditions (Bardoel, 1996). Compared to traditional professions, which have been affected by the overall developments as well, journalism is confronted much more directly and is forced to react consequently to these developments.

## **Serving the public under the terms of commercialization**

With regard to journalism, a paradoxical interplay of the societal needs and requirements and actual circumstances of professional work can be observed. On the one hand, journalism represents a specific type of expertise, which corresponds to the idea of a knowledge society. The concept of a knowledge society covers an understanding of social change, which emphasizes the opportunities of new technologies and rising sources of data creation as well as the eased spreading of information around the globe. Therefore, a key resource to promote development on individual and societal levels, as well as economic growth, is the ability to deal with huge amounts of data and information. On the other hand, the de facto structural conditions of professional work in the era of neoliberalism develop quite contradictory to the optimistic reading of the rise of a knowledge society. The paradoxes resulting from this situation are particularly obvious in the field of journalism.

### ***Quantification and market validation***

When structural changes in the sphere of professional work are discussed, the transformation of welfare state politics, called new governance and New Public Management (NPM), are mentioned initially. Professions are facing external measurements and the expectation to have cost-efficient performance, which is colliding with the historical model of professional autonomy. Keywords like accountability stand for this management of public services following the principles of business administration. The amount of sociological literature discussing the relationship between professionalism and managerialism is huge and still rising, indicating that both “logics” are still struggling with each other or merge into a new hybridized type of professionalism (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2007). In the field of journal-

ism, the transformation towards further economization took place much more radically, as substantial parts of the media are traditionally driven by commercial interests. Above that, journalistic work has always been measured in countable pieces, in lines and concrete products, which catalyzes the principle of quantification, even though the essential value of journalistic work is immaterial (Schnell, 2016b). Therefore, media production was quite easily reduced to managerial indicators and quantitative outcomes, while largely ignoring journalistic quality and societal relevance (Schnell, 2007). Consequently, the inflation of accessible information by digitalization exacerbated the devaluation of professional work, particularly if it is already measured by numbers. Moreover, journalism faces the paradox of the de-constructivist turn towards knowledge and knowledge production, which correlates with the plurality of information and co-existence of perspectives disseminated within the global digital communication (Usher, 2016). While the traditional idea of a monopoly of professional knowledge and jurisdiction has become anachronistic, journalism might be exemplary for the impending loss of the differentiation between qualified and unqualified perspectives.

### ***Accessibility and consumer sovereignty***

Consumerism is the other side of the coin of the transformation of professionalism in the neoliberal era. Due to the process of modernization during the 20th century, the gap between professional experts and laymen seems to have shrunk. The increase in the educational level and a general trend toward academization have contributed to the loss of professional superiority. Some sophisticated approaches (e.g., Oevermann, 1996) have always stressed the relevance of true cooperation between experts and clients instead of a professional paternalism. However, with regard to the general decrease of professional authority, the interaction between professionals and laymen appear in a new light. In journalism, the dimension of co-production has become much more important. Even before digitalization was an issue, the public journalism movement questioned the ways in which information has been gathered and provided in the late 20th-century mass media (Ahava, 2013). Public journalism was guided by the idea that the audience must be involved into the production of news to produce a closer relation between mass media and society, provide more suitable information and support the media competence of recipients. For this purpose, projects have been invented to involve lay people in local editorial offices and enable them to participate in news production. With the digital age and the emergence of social and interactive media, this direct co-production has become the norm. But what might have sounded like a utopia of progressive journalism soon revealed its ambivalence. Instead of strengthening professions like journalism, which are promoting the translation of information into knowledge, they are further weakened. Journalists no longer control the accessibility of information, and journalistic and other content has become difficult to differentiate (Luengo, 2016). In particular, recipients, who are not conscious about the invisible aspects of professional work, might be fooled by the idea of consumer sovereignty (Schnell, 2016b).

### **Journalism and the crisis of democratic public**

Researchers interpreting journalism from the sociology of professions perspective need to take the broader social context into consideration. First, journalism refers to a specific constellation of profession and organization, which is significantly characterized by international corporations. The relationship between journalists and publishers had already lost the quality of a working symbiosis during the 1990s, but with the shift towards ever-larger private media conglomerates, the power balance tipped over. Journalism finds itself on the defensive, but likely just as dramatic are the consequences to the democratic public. Analogous to the institutional frame of

the traditional professions, the professionalization of journalism has been promoted during the 20th century in the context of nation states, through particular welfare and media politics. Journalistic autonomy has been supported in Western democracies by the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press, but also by the provision of public service broadcasting. Before digitalization, the technological preconditions were the reason to offer a public infrastructure to ensure a pluralistic and democratic mass media. With the development of new media and the growing diversity of outlets beyond public regulation, journalism lost, at least partially, its hegemony as a provider of information (Schnell, 2016b; 2018).

The theoretical re-definition of journalism as a compass or navigator within the everyday flood of information disregarded the fact that journalism might be deselected completely within contemporary media communication. Due to technological preconditions, the reception of information has been previously canalized, and consumers have been driven into the arms of journalism. Now they must decide if they want to receive professional outlets or other sources of information. This development is reinforced by the downgrading of journalism, as mentioned above. If journalists tend to use already accessible information, the contrast between journalistic and other types of content is fading. However, even beyond corporate media, new and, in terms of journalistic professionalism, ambitious formats have been established within the new media. How important these new and independent media becomes visible when journalism suffers from censorship or political suppression. And beyond the socio-economic and cultural dimensions mentioned, just recently this political dimension of professional journalism has become more visible. Next to the traditional nemesis of the democratic public, the media monopoly, information overkill has emerged as a new threat, which is anything but less prone to manipulation. Exemplarily one can watch this currently in the US: On the one hand, there are some high-standard media, which show with their everyday reporting that they are taking the task of a societal corrective seriously and do their best to uncover undemocratic developments and political misconduct. On the other hand, there are platforms, which formerly would have been dismissed as dubious, feeding the political debate and the public aggressively and alas successful, while the established press is discredited as “fake news” (Astheimer, 2018; Schnell, 2018).

On the background of this new constellation, it is clear that the professionalization of journalism was only possible during a historical phase of relatively stable socio-cultural and economic preconditions of mass media communication. To guarantee the democratic standards of media communication, broadcasting services were understood as a public duty and a public good needing to be regulated. Distribution technologies have been so cumbersome and expensive that the model for the press, promoting democratic pluralism by market competition, was not applicable to broadcasting. Most journalism studies reflected the social change and chances of a rising knowledge society but failed to steel professional journalism against post-democratic attacks. The interpretation of journalism as a compass or navigator assumes that the public, as the general client, acts not only as a sovereign customer but also as a competent and responsible citizen. Above that does the metaphor of journalism as a compass ignores, that giving orientation within the huge amount of information will not be enough. There is no guarantee that all relevant facts will find their way to the public. Thus, producing news on the basis of investigative and reliable reporting will still be necessary. In politically turbulent times, solid journalism might again become distinguishable against the diffuse oversupply of content by background research and critical reporting, but there needs to be a public who appreciates professionalism. Or, as the prominent Jeffrey Alexander put it: “Certainly, the preservation of any professional craft is never guaranteed. The more central a profession to a society’s core beliefs and institutions, however, the more existential struggles generate defence and support” (2016, p. 23).

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