

Professional journalism in transition: probing possible futures of prosumerism in journalism

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Journalism in turmoil

- Rapid technological, social and institutional changes affecting the field
-> Need for a plausible business model
- Financial crisis

Prosumerism as a driver (1/2)

- means the growing fusion of production with consumption
- term coined by Alvin Toffler (Third Wave 1980)
- he envisioned a future where users conjoin to create products to meet their demands
- now a strengthening trend with radical impacts on media industry
- accelerated by digitalisation and experience society

Prosumerism as a driver (2/2)

1. sense: fusion -> production + consumption
(Don Tapscott "prosumption" 1995)
2. sense: mixed roles -> professional + consumer;
consumer/provider, peer provider, peer-support specialist
3. sense: combination ->; non-corporate-producer
+ consumer (DIY, voluntary simplicity, Indymedia)

prosumer: A consumer who adopts an active role in the design of the products he or she purchases, or who purchases component elements of products in order to build or administer his or her own goods and services or an amateur who takes an enthusiastic interest in technologically advanced products that are intended chiefly for professionals.

Oxford English Dictionary

- proactive process -> consumer steps in at an early stage
- tailor-made -> own needs better fulfilled
- enthusiasm -> empowerment

Social media shifting the balance in mainstream media (1/2)

Social media means tools, spaces and modus operandi for people interacting with each other, creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting contents in virtual communities and networks

(Making Sense of Social Media 2007)

- the roles of producer and consumer mixing

- new business models

Social media shifting the balance in mainstream media (2/2)

several possible implications



journalistic practices in the future

Delphi

- First round: formation of four different images of the future
- Second round: desirability of the images, backcasting scenarios

The respondents represented the following categories:

Nationwide newspaper (N=2, women 2)
Alternative newspapers (N=3, women 2)
Magazines (N=2, 1 woman)
Regional newspapers (N=2)
Media researchers (N=4, women 2)
Television (N=1)
Blogger (N=2)
Futurist (N=2, women 2)

1st round: Questions

Both qualitative and quantitative questions categorized under six general themes:

- 1) personal image of the future (of the respondent),
- 2) production and consumption of media contents,
- 3) interdependencies,
- 4) technology, and
- 5) values

Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the responses was aided by performing a cluster analysis on the quantitative data.

Second round

The panelists were asked to select

- 1) Preferred image of the future
- 2) Most probable future, and
- 3) Most dystopic image of the future

Then, they were asked to modify their favorite image of the future to form their preferred or optimal state of professional journalism in the year 2020.

Thirdly, the panelists were asked to envision five events / things that needed to happen for this particular future to have come to be.

Scenario I: Truth Is Merely a Tool

- Blogs, social media and other means of journalism outside the traditional media form the core of information transfer.
- Professional journalists deliver information found in networks to their paying customers.
- The task of journalism remains the same: to deliver objective information on what is going on in the world.

Scenario II: Printing Press Returns

- The traditional professional information transfer has experienced a new boom after a lengthy period of recession.
- The change towards digital environments has significantly increased the interaction between journalists and their audiences. The line between the subject matter of amateur journalists and the work of professionals is rather thin.
- Journalism reports what is going on in the world in a critical, balanced and equal way, and aims to direct the audiences' attention towards issues important to all humanity.

Scenario III: People Versus a League of Specialists

- The building of communities and the maintaining of a national viewpoint in the global operational environment are considered important tasks of the national level of media that also emphasizes regionality and locality.
- Alongside newspapers, the role of Internet and social media as sources of information and entertainment has remained important.
- Journalism is considered the watchdog for those in power, and such watchdog journalism aims to bring forth a multitude of viewpoints, which can then be assessed and analyzed as fairly as possible.

Scenario IV: New Atlantis

- Spontaneous action, the rise in the importance of one's own social contacts and communities, the search for meaningfulness, and the creation and sharing of subject matter related to one's own interests are the cultural drivers of change in the 2010s.
- Journalists are the maintainers of systems of collective intelligence.
- The ethos of journalism is to understand the logic behind the knowledge creation that takes place in new networks, and to offer the citizens better access to the best possible information.

Results of the Delphi panel

Most preferred: Scenario II, Printing Press Returns

Most probable: Scenario II, Printing Press Returns

Most disliked: Scenario I, Truth is Merely a Tool

Backcasting scenario approach

- Backcasting is a method of assessing alternative futures and analysing the measures needed to reach them.
- It is an opposite to forecasting approach, where the future is analysed primarily as a continuation of the present.

“Backcasting is similar to visioning, however backcasts are not intended to reveal what the future will be, but rather to weigh up a number of possible futures, and decide the implications and preferable options, then to map out steps along the way.”

2020

Critical approach to reliability of sources of information.
Emphasis on quality of information, not speed.

Source critique as a subject in elementary school. Newspapers have developed more towards a magazine format.

A demand for reliable information. New forms of sources of
funding, eg. sponsoring.

More newspapers function as non-profit organisations.

The role of information in democracy acknowledged as a political
issue.

Political initiatives to protect the delivery of objective and reliable news.

Journalists have a proficiency in digital environment and tools.

The education of journalists emphasises multimedia skills.

Disillusionment with social media as a reliable source of
information.

Collateral damage due to reliance on false information, e.g. in healthcare.

Mediahouses go out of business due to old fashioned business
models and decline of revenues from advertising and
subscriptions.

2009

Question:

Why is the scenario I judged most preferred and
most probable? What is your opinion on the
result?