

# The journalist's 'toolbox' of competencies in the Digital-Global Age

## Reflections on the global state of research

**Abstract:** The different crises that journalism continues to face worldwide make it imperative to talk about the journalist's 'toolbox', a set of competencies that journalists must have in this so-called age of disruption. This article maps the global state of research on journalistic competence, offers ways of conceptualising journalistic competencies and provides the necessary context by which the development of the competency construct can be understood. What are the approaches in studying journalistic competence and what perspectives are dominant, clashing, or need to be challenged? The state of research shows an imbalance in perspectives: Studies on journalistic competencies are concentrated in US, Europe, and the Nordic states. The environments beyond the Western context or the 'Global North', so to speak, continue to be underrepresented, despite a strong research and journalism tradition unique to some of the Global South regions. Secondly, the industry perspective continues to dominate the discourse, although it has been described as hostile to innovation and critical reflection. The article ends with a call not just to further define and theorise journalistic competencies, but also to de-westernise the discourse.

**Keywords:** digital skills, global journalism, Global South, innovation, journalism, journalism competencies, journalism education, journalism models, Philippines, Western journalism

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**I**T IS always necessary to talk about journalistic competence, despite the steepening crisis of relevance of journalism (Gibson, 2017; Lepore, 2019) and its financial crisis (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012; Drok, 2019; Fortunati et al., 2009; Price, 2015). In fact, it is this 'double crisis' (Drok, 2019, p.9) that makes it urgent to talk about journalistic competence. The disruptions in technology, news consumption behaviour and media economy, which rippled across journalistic

roles, newsroom practices and ultimately journalism ontology across countries, have called for a re-think of the journalist's 'toolbox', a set of competencies that journalists are expected to have in order to function in the current landscape. This begs the question(s): how are journalistic competencies conceptualised and studied in research and what perspectives are dominating the discourse? Furthermore, what perspectives are marginalised, and which potentially game-changing issues or trends are not well-explored?

In this article, I am mapping the scholarship on journalistic competencies and discussing the context in which these competencies should be understood. The term 'context' refers to the different disruptions that irrevocably changed the way journalism is viewed by its publics, the way it is practiced, and the way it is studied. This discussion is structured along three 'points of rupture': First, how the convergence of technologies altered the form of news, newswork, perception of news values, gateways to news, and news consumption behaviour, Second, how the news media economy and journalists' working conditions were transformed by this convergence of technologies and third how journalistic roles and role performance (and the corresponding scholarship) evolved in the Digital-Global Age.

### **Conceptualising journalistic competencies**

But first, what exactly are competencies? The term competencies is usually used interchangeably with words like 'skill', 'ability', and 'standards', but despite the liberty taken by scholars and practitioners in using different terms for more or less the same concept, there is a need to properly define and conceptualise 'competencies' and 'competence' if we want to further develop (and theorise) this field of research.

Competencies as a concept is broader than 'skill' or 'ability'. It refers to the 'knowledge, skills, and attitudes' (Himma-Kadakas, 2018; Dubois, 1998; Lizzio & Wilson, 2004; Sturgess, 2012) that result in successful practice depending on the context. A competency 'may incorporate a skill, but are more than the skill, they include abilities and behaviours, as well as knowledge that is fundamental to the use of a skill' (Sturgess, 2012). There is a need to stress how Klieme et al. (2008, p. 8) defined competencies: 'context-specific dispositions for achievement that can be acquired through learning'. According to them, the 'defining characteristic' of competencies is that they can be developed through 'learning processes where the individual interacts with his or her environment' Therefore, 'competence constructs' adhere to 'specific areas of demands' in real life (Klieme et al, p. 7).

Indeed, the term 'competencies' appears to be the more inclusive term compared to other terms used interchangeably or loosely, like 'skills' or 'abilities'. It makes sense to look at journalistic competence as a domain of competencies—

knowledge, skills, attitudes, personality traits and what (Weinert, 2001), cited by Klieme et al., 2008, p. 7) labeled as ‘meta-competencies’, those that ‘facilitate the acquisition and use of specific competencies’ like knowledge of personal strengths and weaknesses and thinking or planning strategies.

For decades, we have seen an accretion of scholarly and professional work on the subject of journalistic competencies. Like many other fields, the body of works can be broadly categorised into three: normative, descriptive-analytical, or a combination of the two. The normative works prescribe competencies or ‘must-haves’ for journalists (Levin, 2015; Loo, 2013; Marshall, 2013; Nowak, 2009; Poynter Institute, 1998, cited by Clark, 2014) or present standards primarily for evaluation of journalism programmes (see the set of qualifications/standards of accrediting bodies such as the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications or ACEJMC, 2013; European Journalism Training Association or EJTA, 2013; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation or UNESCO, 2013). Other authors prescribe specific competencies as learning goals or where the emphasis should be in journalism education (Harrington, 2012; Hirst, 2010; Hujanen, 2017; Loo, 2013; Mensing, 2010; Nettleton, 2015; Robie, 2019; Rodny-Gumede, 2016).

The descriptive-analytical works (in other fields, descriptive works are distinguished from the analytical, but in this case, most descriptive works are also analytical, or they need to be analytical), meanwhile, identified key competencies through empirical methods such as

1. interviews with professionals (for example, Deuze, 2001; Robie, 2019) and educators (for example, Bettels-Schwabbauer et al., 2018);
2. surveys with professionals and/or educators (for example, Drok, 2019; Finberg & Klinger, 2014; International Center for Journalists, 2019; Opgenhaffen, d’Haenens, & Corten, 2013; Willnat et al., 2013), surveys with students (Nygren & Stigbrand, 2013), and surveys with professionals and students (Curriculum Development-Communication Sciences-Europe, 2010, cited by Claussen, 2010; Drok, 2013);
3. analysis of job postings (Cleary & Cochie, 2011; Marta-Lazo et al., 2018; Massey, 2010; Wenger et al., 2018); and
4. analysis of journalism school curricula (for example, Bettels-Schwabbauer et al., 2018).

The third category undermines the supposed dichotomy between the normative and the descriptive-analytical. Many works explored the normative claims of different populations through empirical methods. These claims include what professionals think journalists in the future must have in terms of skill, which can still be broken into what journalists must have in the future for the journalism industry to thrive financially versus what journalists must have in the future for journalism to realise its normative role in society, which might not serve

the profit motive of the organisation. Some authors compared how different populations perceive the importance of competencies prescribed by accrediting organisations, such as Drok (2013; 2019) who asked professionals, educators and students to rank EJTA qualifications. Therefore, while there are purely normative works in the form of critical research essays, there are also works that explore normative claims through empirical methods.

There are also works in which the authors proposed theoretical or conceptual frameworks for journalistic competence based on empirical methods such as interviews and document analyses, such as the works of Weischenberg, Altmeppen, & Löffelholz (1994) and Himma-Kadakas (2018).

While many of the studies mentioned above dealt with competency matrices or competency sets, there are those that focused on specific competencies, such as Carpenter, Cepak & Peng's (2017) work on journalistic interviewing competencies and Garyantes and Murphy's (2017) work on United States print journalists' 'cultural competence'.

In studying journalistic competencies, it is crucial to articulate what type of competency is in question. Scholars who studied journalistic roles and role performance, topics that are inextricable from the discussion of journalistic competencies, distinguished among different role concepts in response to the conflation of terms (and even careless use of terms) in literature (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Mellado, 2019). Hanitzsch & Vos' (2017) and Mellado's (2019) typologies inspired the typology of competencies that I drew based on extant literature (see also Estella, 2021):

1. *Normative competencies*: Those deemed necessary for journalists to fulfill the societal role of journalism, depending on the mandate bestowed upon it by structures of power or prevalent professional ideology/ideologies, whatever the case may be.
2. *Institutionalised competencies*: These competencies work on two levels: the organisational level (the competencies that the newsroom or media organisation emphasise in practice and training and are created by how the organisation negotiated normative competencies with environmental constraints) and the individual level (competencies that the journalist believes are necessary based on socialisation with fellow journalists or how he or she internalised the normative competencies).
3. *Performative or practiced competencies*: Those used in actual newsroom practices and may or may not adhere to normative notions of the role of journalism in society, or 'skill performance', as Grugulis & Stoyanova (2011; Himma-Kadakas, 2018) called these set of competencies. In research, these competencies can be identified through ethnography or participant observation in actual news work, supplemented by content/textual analyses of journalistic output, or vice versa.

4. *Perceived performative competencies*: Competencies professionals think they use in practice. These can be identified through surveys and interviews. This also covers studies on competencies in which practitioners were asked to weigh different journalistic competencies used in practice.

Normative, institutionalised and perceived performative competencies function in the cognitive level, meaning that they can be measured or identified through methods like perception surveys. The performative competencies, on the other hand, can be thought of as realised normative and institutionalised competencies—they are normative and/or institutionalised competencies translated into practice, a product of negotiation and internalisation of norms.

### **Gaps and disbalances in research**

There is a strong connection between journalistic roles and journalistic competencies, with the former being the primary determinant of the latter. However, while the scholarship on journalistic roles has developed significantly since the 1940s (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016; 2017; Willnat et al., 2013), the scholarship on journalistic competencies has lagged behind, especially in terms of theory. The deficiency in theorising is apparent in the rare attempts to model journalistic competence. Fewer are the competence constructs that are based on empirical studies, such as Weischenberg, Altmeyden, & Löffelholz's (1994) model of journalistic competence in Germany and Himma-Kadakas' (2018) model of competencies based on her study on online newsrooms in Estonia. This is despite the popularity of the competency sets crafted by international accreditation and training bodies, particularly ACEJMC, EJTA and UNESCO, which were presented to different conferences attended by professionals and academicians (Opiniano, 2018, p.203).

As stated earlier, the literature also suffers from an imbalance of two kinds. First, research on journalistic competence, particularly the large-scale empirical studies, are concentrated in Europe, U.S., and the Nordic countries, which is commonly referred to as the 'Global North,' although the term is contested (Bettels-Schwabbauer et al., 2018; Cleary & Cochie, 2011; Curriculum Development-Communication Sciences-Europe, 2010, cited by Claussen, 2010; Drok 2013; 2019; Finberg & Klinger, 2014; Marta-Lazo et al., 2018; Massey, 2010; Nygren & Stigbrand, 2013; Opgenhaffen et al., 2013; Wenger et al., 2018). The 2019 study of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), titled 'State of Technology in Global Newsrooms', is an exception. A survey of 4100 respondents from 149 countries, it focused on digital skills and the adoption of new technologies in the newsroom. The oft-cited collaborative projects on journalistic roles, the 'Global Journalist in the 21st Century' surveys (see Willnat et al., 2013) and the 'Worlds of Journalism Study' (see Hanitzsch et al., 2019), focused on journalists' profiles, worldviews

and role perceptions and only touched on journalistic competencies slightly.

However, the lack of large-scale empirical studies does not mean that the Global South is a barren research landscape. In fact, works on journalism practice and journalism education in the Asia-Pacific carry strong themes that assert a specific identity and perspective, part of a conscious attempt to distinguish itself from the approaches of the Global North, and part of an attempt to register itself in the discourse dominated by Global North perspectives. For instance, Robie (2013; 2019) wrote on the ‘deliberative paradigm’ for Pacific journalism practice as well as the ‘Pacific way’ of journalism education and media research culture. Robie (2013, p. 92) critiqued Lule’s (1987) ‘Three Worlds’ news model, arguing that such an approach failed to account for structural changes in previously developing countries and the environments that do not neatly fall under any of the three categories specified in the model. He modified the model into the ‘Four Worlds news values prism’, which included ‘independent Pacific post-colonial states’ and indigenous minorities (Robie, 2013). In environments such as these, the ‘critical deliberative paradigm’ of journalism can ‘enable the participation of all community stakeholders’, including the disenfranchised or marginalised, through ‘issue-based reporting’ covering ‘diverse views about the community good’ (Robie, 2013, p. 84). *Pacific Journalism Review* has also become a repository of works on distinct journalism cultures and journalism education in Asia-Pacific countries, as well as works advocating new perspectives or ways of doing journalism specific to the Pacific context (see for example Cho, 2011; Moala, 2005; Opiniano, 2017; 2018).

Journalism guided by a ‘critical deliberative paradigm’ is a form of development journalism, which continues to thrive in many developing and developed countries with media systems different from those in Europe and the United States (see Estella & Paz, 2019, Loo, 2013; Wong, 2004). Development journalism, which distinguishes itself from the Western paradigm of journalism in terms of journalistic roles and norms, is also understood in different ways. Some authors emphasise its tendency to be ‘hijacked’ by agents of repression under the pretext of promoting harmony and political stability (Ali & Khan, 1996, p.148; Lent, 1978; Loo, 2013).

However, for other authors, development journalism focuses on grassroots phenomena that mainstream or commercial media may not find newsworthy and should help facilitate change, hence the term ‘interventionist, developmental, and educational’ journalism (Kalyango et al., 2016, p. 3; Anand, 2014; Richstad, 2000). An interesting form of this is the *talanoa* journalism and media research paradigm in the Asia-Pacific region (Robie, 2014, 2019). According to Robie (2013, p. 12) the journalism and research methodologies guided by the philosophy of *talanoa*, which means ‘frank face-to-face discussion with no hidden agenda’, focus on ‘public interest, civil society and community empowerment’ and ‘recognises

and deploys indigenous, diversity and cultural values'. This stands in contrast with the detached observer stance of journalism in many Western democracies.

Indeed, there is a rich body of work on indigenous journalism cultures, research methodologies and perspectives outside the Global North and Western democracies. However, the fact remains that there is still a dearth of research specific to journalistic competencies in many developing countries. The fact that the scholarly discourse on journalistic competence is dominated by voices from the West or the Global North could be the unfortunate outcome of systemic circumstances in developing regions: On the one hand poor scientific infrastructure and appreciation for scientific research, let alone journalism research (see Hanitzsch, 2005, in the case of Indonesia, and Estella & Löffelholz, 2019, in the case of Philippines) and, on the other, obstacles to the professionalisation of journalism obstacles, especially in countries where journalism is still struggling to 'find its footing and position in society' (Lehmann-Jacobsen, 2017).

Because journalistic competence is heavily dependent on context and much of extant research was published in Western democracies, some themes in literature simply do not apply to developing regions. For instance, computational journalism, entrepreneurial journalism, and freelancing, topics that are gaining attention in Europe and US, still receive little attention in many countries.

This Western-centric state of research prevents us from having a truly global perspective on journalistic competencies and further entrenches what Nerone (2012, see also Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016) call the 'Liberal hegemonic view' of journalism that originated in Western democracies. This view presupposes the existence of democracy for the healthy practice of journalism and puts a premium on journalistic roles in the domain of political or public affairs, as opposed to the affairs of everyday life or the private sphere (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). However, as Zelizer (2013) noted, such a paradigm of journalism exists only in the minority of countries and the idea that democracy is the prerequisite for a perfect form of journalism 'has not been supported on the ground'. Under this 'hegemonic model of journalism', other journalism paradigms are treated as the 'other' (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016) or merely a stage toward maturity for emerging democracies, despite the fact that paradigms like development journalism continue to thrive in settings like developed Asian countries (Estella & Paz, 2019).

Second, the industry perspective is still dominant in the discourse on journalistic competencies, especially in the case of empirical studies and even in journalism education. For the most part, the standards or prescribed competencies were identified through surveys or interviews with practitioners. However, this industry-centeredness in empirical research and journalism education can be hostile to innovation and can be a disservice to students who were prepared for a career in an industry shaken by disruptions of different sorts (Folkerts et al., 2013; Hirst, 2010; Mensing, 2010). According to Hirst (2010), the notion

of journalistic professionalism, for the most part consists of socialisation into industry norms and values. Several scholars before him noticed the same trend: Becker et al. (1987, cited by Mensing, 2010), for example, wrote that the goal of journalism education for decades has been ‘to produce an individual who can effectively and efficiently function in the occupations of journalism and mass communications’. For Zelizer (2004), professionalism is ‘ideological orientation that facilitates the maintenance of journalism’s collective boundaries’.

By identifying key competencies almost entirely through industry responses and perspectives, scholars might be contributing to journalists’ fierce boundary-keeping, treating journalism as a ‘rarefied collection of tacit embodied knowledge’ (Harrington, 2012, p.157). This can create an environment hostile to fresh views and change so necessary in an age of disruption. Professionals and even educators (Mellado & Subervi, 2013) can use these disciplinary boundaries, to also ‘exclude potential newcomers from being seen as ‘proper’ journalists’ (Harrington, 2012, Deuze, 2005). This ‘journalism orthodoxy,’ developed in pre-existing news templates and news production methods, is problematic because the disruptions in news media economy and practice, as well as the innovative approaches, are coming from ‘outsiders’, who, more often than not, are not recognized as ‘proper’ journalists based on industry or even academic standards (Harrington, 2012). For example, the rise of news aggregation as one of the most important forms of news work in the Digital-Global Age is something unexpected if we are to look into how news publishers spoke of aggregator news in the past decade. News aggregators were described as content-stealers profiting from the hard work of ‘real’ journalists (Chyi, Lewis, & Zheng, 2016; Fraga, 2012; Isbell, 2010) and were often regarded as a lazy and inferior type of journalism compared with ‘shoe leather’ journalism (Coddington, 2018).

After discussing the deficiencies in literature, I will now discuss resonant trends in research that should contextualise the transformation of the journalist’s toolbox. The structure that I have used could be a guide in discussing how the economy and practice of journalism has called for new normative and performative journalistic competencies.

### **Point of rupture (1): Journalistic competencies and convergence**

The place of technological competencies in the journalist’s toolbox expanded and became more elaborate with the internet coming of age, which can be seen by comparing the older analytical frameworks of journalistic competence (see for example Nowak, 2009; Weischenberg et al., 1994) with the new ones (Himma-Kadakas, 2018; Poynter Institute, 1998, updated by Clark, 2014). The research on technological competencies reveals another shift: from technological competencies as a mere subset of journalistic competence to technological competencies as operational competencies by which journalism is done.



The journalist of the Digital-Global Age has a ‘technological profile’, not just technological competencies, such that many core competencies used even before the convergence of technologies are performed through this technological profile. The electronic journalistic text or news production in news media is no longer just an option and technical skills are no longer limited to computer-assisted reporting or the ability to use a video camera. Furthermore, the convergence of technologies led to the rise of hybrid (mix of traditional and digital platforms) and even purely digital newsrooms (ICFJ, 2019), a development that might even lead to the abolition of old platform divisions such as print versus broadcast versus digital. This lends credence to the calls for a shift to generalist journalist training.

The convergence of technologies allowed the transmutations of the news form—it enabled newsmakers to create layered, media-rich, interactive, hyper-textual, and non-linear journalistic texts (Lister et al, 2009; Pavlik, 2001; Pew Research Center, 2008), as seen in online news articles with photos, social media links, polls and videos in a single page. News is disseminated as different forms in different platforms, as evidenced by the findings of the ICFJ 2019 survey: two-thirds of the newsrooms around the world disseminate content in at least four formats. The form of the news offers more opportunities for audience involvement and customisation to engage an audience presumably distracted by a plethora of options online. The rise of social media networks, mobile applications, and content aggregators that function through preference-based ‘algorithms offered the public(s) new gateways to news. In one of the Reuters Institute’s (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019) latest cross-national surveys on digital news consumption behaviour, more than half of the global sample get their news not directly from the publisher, but from social media, aggregator services, and search engines. In Asian markets in particular, accessing news directly via publisher websites is at a very low level compared with the rate they are accessing via aggregator services and search engines. This further challenges the already beleaguered role-keeping function of news publishers.

In this kind of environment, the ability to produce texts aimed at greater audience engagement (texts with content that the audiences deem to be relevant) gains currency. As more and more people access their news through their smartphones (Westlund, 2013; Newman et al., 2019), publishers started using strategies for constantly engaging the audience through micro-updates and more intrusive lockscreen notifications. However, this struggle for greater audience engagement also generated practices and forms that some scholars and practitioners found ethically alarming.

In the 2019 ICFJ survey the competencies in ‘engaging the audience’ and ‘data verification’ emerged as some of the most important technological skills, congruent with the findings of the other surveys with different populations (see for example Drok, 2013; Drok, 2019; Finberg and Klinger, 2014; Opgenhaffen

et al., 2013). The values of reliability, relevance to the public and connectiveness are overarching themes when describing what journalists need to have in the Digital-Global Age. Newsroom managers, editors, and journalists also use data analytics regularly to monitor audience behaviour, modifying content and dissemination patterns accordingly (ICFJ, 2017; 2019).

Research on news consumption preferences also suggests that journalists in this age of disruption should have the capacity to critique their by-the-book news values. Researchers have noted a rising preference for non-political news or soft news across markets (Newman, 2016; Bird, 2003; Bogart, 1989; Hagen, 1994; Hamilton, 2004; Prior, 2007; Schaudt and Carpenter, 2009; Tewksbury, 2003), probably except in special cases of ‘heightened political activity’ such as elections (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Walter, 2011, a reality that is problematic if we are to consider the gap between what journalists think is newsworthy and what the audiences perceive as important. For instance, in Germany, Wendelin, Engelmann, and Neubarth (2015) found that internet and social media audiences are less likely than journalists to be interested in stories about politics and ‘social significance’, supporting Kepplinger and Ehmig’s (2006) idea that ‘news values’ are simply reflections of journalists’ characteristics and their ‘judgment on the relevance’ of phenomena. Therefore, the interpretation of news values, which depends on how the individual journalist internalises institutional norms, is a function of journalistic culture. It is far from unimpeachable.

The journalists’ perception of political affairs as the supreme phenomena in the hierarchy of newsworthiness, as I mentioned earlier, marginalises news about the private sphere of identity, emotion, and consumption (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). The deeply entrenched professional belief that political affairs reportage is the only proper journalism could be one of the contributors to the ‘alienation’ between audiences and the professional industry (see for example Aldridge and Evetts, 2003; Drok, 2019; Nordenstreng, 1998).

For Drok (2019), this alienation between audiences and the professional industry could be explained by the evolution of the so-called *trias journalistica*, the three most important values for journalists. The *trias journalistica*—‘autonomy’, ‘objectivity’, and ‘immediacy’—evolved to ‘detachment’, ‘neutrality’, and ‘scoop-orientedness’, respectively (Drok, 2019, p.10). However, this new form of *trias journalistica* no longer satisfies the demands of the 21st century environment.

The most recent empirical studies point to a shift in journalists’ primary role: from ‘speedy news hunters’ to ‘beacon of reliability’ (Drok, 2013, Opgenhaffen et al., 2013, Weaver et al., 2007). This shift, according to Drok (2019), is part of a larger shift from the ‘20th century mass model’ of journalism to the 21st century ‘network model’. In the network model, journalism infrastructure is ‘interactive’ as opposed to the ‘disseminative’ infrastructure of the mass model. Journalists in the new model are expected to be more ‘context-oriented’ and ‘accountable’

rather than ‘scoop-oriented’ and ‘neutral’. Journalists need to establish the relevance of the practice to the everyday lives of the audiences as well as establish themselves as credible sources of information in the sea of content and online disinformation campaigns (Ong & Cabañes, 2018).

The greater weight of relevance as a value in news work is congruent with the fact that most newsrooms around the world can be considered as small (with 46 or fewer staff) and catering almost exclusively to the hyperlocal (ICFJ, 2019). In other words, disseminating information to the imagined general public—or a ‘phantom’ public, to borrow Lippman’s (2017, originally published 1927) term—is no longer as important as maintaining relevance, something that is easier done through targeting a niche or a specific audience. This bolsters Mensing’s (2010) claim that journalism must be ‘community-centered’ (p. 511).

The need to engage the audience in news work is perhaps most visible in journalism done through and in social media networks. The frame of discourse shifted from viewing social media as a ‘challenge to the social function’ of professional news work (Domingo, 2008) to exploring ways by which journalism can thrive in social media. Some scholars observed that journalists use networks like Twitter for promoting their own ‘brand’ of journalism and giving an impression of transparency in news work (Lasorsa et al., 2012). Big news organisations have been employing ‘social media managers’ or online ‘community managers’ for about a decade now to boost online audience engagement (Newman, 2009). Social media skills, in fact, are one of the commonly used technological skills of journalists worldwide, ‘used more frequently than any other in every aspect of journalism’ (ICFJ, 2019). These skills include ‘posting stories and comments on social media’, ‘competitive research’, ‘finding user-generated content’ to enhance stories, data verification, audience engagement, and brand-promotion..

The hyper-acceleration of news work and multiplication of content online (due to the rise of ‘algorithm-based aggregation’) gave birth to ‘prediting’ or ‘curation’ as a distinct form of news work in the Digital-Global Age (Bakker, 2012; Bakker, 2014; Barodel, 1996; Dimitrov, 2014; Miller, 2007). ‘Prediting’ (Dimitrov, 2014) refers to the role of the journalist as both producer and editor—while the journalist at times uncovers new information through old data-gathering processes like interviewing (production), the journalist also collates and filters content from social media and other sources and redacts the information into a coherent and verified form (editing). By being the ‘curator’ of content online, news work in the time of the internet strengthened the ‘mediator’ role of journalism (Barodel, 1996; Dimitrov, 2014).

The process of redaction is at the core of another form of news work distinct to the Digital-Global Age: news aggregation. Although publishers had been vocal with their animosity toward aggregators in the last decade (Chyi et al., 2016), current circumstances call for new ways of looking at it as a legitimate

‘epistemological process’ central to news work (Coddington, 2018). In fact the abundance of information online and the hyper-acceleration of news work gave birth to aggregation as a form of news work, with audiences increasingly reliant on aggregators as a ‘one stop shop’ for news (Chyi & Lee, 2015). Although news aggregation is often viewed as governed by algorithms, it also refers to the human practice ‘by which disparate pieces of information are quickly gathered, validated as accurate representations of reality, and presented to the public as reliable forms of knowledge’ (Coddington, 2015).

Although the convergence of technologies brought with it the expansion of the technological competency matrix, some competencies that are already at the core of the journalist’s toolbox remain supreme, hence the term ‘evergreens’ (Bettels-Schwabbauer et al., 2018, p.53; see also ICFJ, 2019). In some studies, like Finberg and Klinger’s (2014), they were regarded as even more important than the technological competencies (although many of these evergreens are performed within technological work). These include competencies such as ‘Accuracy’, ‘Curiosity’ or ‘Inquisitiveness’, ‘Good news judgment’ or ability to ‘discover newsworthy issues on the basis of in-depth research’, among others (see for example Bettels-Schwabbauer et al., 2018; Drok, 2013; Drok, 2019; Finberg & Klinger, 2014; Loo, 2013).

‘Teamwork’ and ‘collaboration’ with technical experts in media organisations were also some of the increasingly important competencies, given that higher level technological work requires collaboration between journalists and the IT department of their organisation.

The continuing supremacy of the evergreens implies a need to be cautious of the hype about technology, since there is a tendency to reduce the future of journalism to ‘technological visions’ (Creech & Mendelson, 2015). They argue that looking at technological proficiency as a prerequisite for successful practice obfuscates ‘more persistent, systemic critiques of technology and journalism’ and puts emphasis on skills development over critical reflection.

### **Automated journalism, data journalism and other important questions**

On the subject of journalistic technological competencies, there are several questions arising from the state of research (which could act as recommendations for future research). First, to what extent are the more sophisticated technological skills a necessary component of the journalist’s toolbox? The 2019 ICFJ survey showed that despite the remarkable increase in the adoption of technologies in the newsroom, the more sophisticated data-related and technical skills are still uncharted territory. Indeed, journalists still see themselves as journalists first and they ‘value technological work insofar as it supports their journalistic work’ (Royal, 2012, cited by Karlsen & Stavelin, 2014). One of these advanced technical skills is working with ‘AI/robo journalism’ (ICFJ, 2019),

which Clerwall (2014) defined as a branch of “algorithmic news’ (p.519). The research on automated journalism remains sparse, perhaps because automated journalism is still uncommon even in some advanced economies, despite the fact that journalists consider aggregator news and automated content as journalism (van Dalen, 2012). Many scholars from different parts of the globe (whom I interviewed) do not think of automated journalism as a potential game-changer, primarily because it cannot attain the level of human complexity. However, this topic deserves more scholarly attention because even though machine-written news cannot compete with the quality of human work, for ‘information which is freely available on the Internet, the bar is set relatively low and automatically generated content can compete’ (van Dalen, 2012).

Second, does the technological profile exist in the settings that are not represented in extant literature on journalistic competencies? Or does it exist in a different form or a different extent?

Last, based on literature, data journalism has been described as some sort of ‘saviour’ of journalism as its way of regaining public trust. Many practitioners believe that it is an important source of revenue by virtue of quality content and that data journalism skills will be an essential component of journalistic competence (ICFJ, 2019; Stalph & Borges-Rey, 2018). Stalph & Borges-Rey (2018) wrote that data journalism might remain a niche format but will find its way into smaller newsrooms because of ‘decreasing limitations’. However, they claim its rate of adoption across big news organisations remains low and that one of the possible scenarios is data journalism will ultimately be ‘abandoned’ by the big newsrooms and outsourced to non-legacy actors. Therefore, its future remains unclear. To what extent then should data journalism skills figure in the journalist’s toolbox especially in environments different from Western democracies?

## **Point of rupture (2): Journalistic competencies and new media economy**

The financial crisis brought largely by the erosion of the gate-keeping function of journalism gave rise to works that explore the idea of ‘entrepreneurial journalism’ and the possibility of including ‘entrepreneurial skills’ as part of the journalist’s toolbox. As people’s gateways to content multiplied, the ‘golden era’ of financial growth for journalism that characterised the second half of the 20th century came to an end (Drok, 2019). Newsrooms are struggling to develop new revenue streams and are diversifying their revenue sources (ICFJ, 2019). Current trends in people’s attitudes toward paying for news are not promising (Newman et al., 2019), despite the optimistic view of newsroom managers on paid news as a revenue stream (ICFJ, 2019). With the decline of legacy media and rise of hybrid newsrooms came the layoffs, the emergence of ‘low pay or no pay’ journalism, the rise in freelancing, and the depression of journalists’ wages in many parts of the world (Picard, 2010; Vos & Singer, 2016).

It is in this context that hybrid roles in the newsroom were created, such as that of the editor who functions under both the logic of market imperatives and the logic of journalism (Poutanen, Luoma-Aho, Suhanko, 2016). It is also in this context that scholars started to examine ‘entrepreneurial journalism’ and entrepreneurship as ‘ways of being in the world’ (Deuze, 2017, p. 307). However, entrepreneurial journalism, like other emerging fields of study, is still short on theory and conceptualisation, as students and even educators still view entrepreneurial journalism as non-lucrative endeavours or endeavours best left to the business side of media. Furthermore, entrepreneurial skills were among the lowest ranked journalistic competencies among professionals, educators and students (see for example Drok, 2013; 2019). Perhaps these views on entrepreneurial journalism show the need for a shift in how entrepreneurship in journalism is understood: a shift away from the mindset of being media workers to being prospective business owners (Deuze, 2006, cited by Casero-Ripollés, Izquierdo-Castillo, & Doménech-Fabregat, 2016) and a shift from viewing media business ventures as non-lucrative endeavours to ‘laboratories of innovation’ away from the constraints of commercialised news organisations (Casero- Ripollés et al., 2016, p.289; Paniagua-Rojano, Gómez-Aguilar, & González-Cortés, 2014).

Another competency that becomes crucial in this kind of crisis is the capacity to reflect on the political economy of the media, which was also emphasised by some of the scholars that I interviewed on the subject of journalistic competencies. This capacity to critique the political economy of the media entails an understanding of the labour conditions of journalists, the precarious nature of some media work and the ownership of production (Creech and Mendelson, 2015; Nettleton, 2015). This also provides the necessary context in which the impact of technological upheavals on the practice should be understood.

### **Point of rupture (3): Journalistic competencies and the evolution of roles**

As Drok (2019, p. 123) said, looking for solutions in the ‘techno-economic sphere’ of journalism is not enough to deal with the double crisis it is facing. There is also a need to rethink the ‘central values’ of journalism, which are influenced by the journalistic role to which the organisation and journalism as an institution adhere. We can see significant development in research on journalistic roles since the 1940s, punctuated by the massive surveys on role perceptions in the U.S starting 1972 (Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman, 1972; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996), in Europe (Donsbach, 1981; Köcher, 1986), followed by the global projects that include countries outside the so-called ‘West’ (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Weaver et al., 2007; Willnat et al., 2013).

The study of journalistic roles expanded from roles in the political consumption of news to include roles in the domain of everyday life (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017), a development congruent with the increased preference for soft

news or non-political affairs. Second, the set of roles in the domain of political life was expanded to include roles in non-Western settings, where the political system can be far from the democracies of the West. Last, the scholarship has benefitted from works that define the distinctions among different role concepts (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016), such as the difference between role orientation and role performance (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Mellado, 2019).

Insofar that ‘perceived roles tend to set the boundaries of journalistic skills, knowledge, and abilities’ (Willnat et al., 2013, p.11), the journalist’s toolbox requires competencies in understanding established journalistic roles vis-à-vis larger systems (political economy of the media and political systems). This competency becomes very important especially as different forms of journalism continue to operate in different environments and authors write about new forms of journalism. In an age of disruption, however, socialising oneself into these roles and systems is clearly not enough—being equipped with the tools to critique roles, routinised practices and professionalisation will allow a journalist to break outside the inertia of the industry.

## Conclusions and recommendations

In studying journalistic competencies, it is imperative to understand competency constructs in the context of the three ‘points of rupture’: technological, economic, and cultural (roles). Contexts vary across societies, so to prescribe competencies without context is meaningless. Hence, the state of research calls for a global perspective that takes into account non-Western settings that are also witnessing these different disruptions as well as views outside the professional industry. The state of research on journalistic competencies call for ‘defining’ and ‘de-centering’—to borrow Muhlmann’s (2008) term—the discourse.

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