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Broersma, Marcel; Peters, Chris

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RETHINKING JOURNALISM

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Transformed News Landscape

Edited by
Chris Peters and Marcel Broersma

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INTRODUCTION

Rethinking journalism: the structural transformation of a public good

Marcel Broersma and Chris Peters

There is no doubt, journalism faces challenging times. Since the turn of the millennium, the financial health of the news industry is failing, mainstream audiences are on the decline, and professional authority, credibility and autonomy are eroding. While over the course of the twentieth century, mass media succeeded in unifying large communities of readers – and in some instances they still do – this seems to be disintegrating. The market for news, traditionally structured by supply through mass media, is now increasingly guided by the demands of ever-fragmenting audiences. Consumers have far more possibilities to obtain news whenever and wherever they want and they at least feel they have the capabilities to navigate the news themselves. What do they need journalism for when they can get personalized information at any time for free?

Some fear this might lead to the deterioration of the profession. Revenues from readership and advertising are shrinking, especially in the US and Europe, newspapers are merged, closed or go online-only, and journalists at traditional media companies are losing their jobs. The dire warnings about the influence of market logic on the news media seem to be coming true, which may mean that shareholders, advertisers, and the public will refuse to keep funding the ‘journalism we need’. Cuts in funding beget shortcuts in production and the worry is that a lack of resources for proper reporting leads to a decline in the overall quality of news, which quickly descends in a downward spiral (Davies, 2008). ‘Will the last reporter please turn out the lights?’ asks a volume on the depressing state of the US news industry (McChesney and Picard, 2011). The outlook is indeed bleak, and it is understandable that many are pessimistic.

Attempts to address these recent transformations in the profession are often negative because they usually start from the perspective of what will be lost if current trends are to continue. While there is a certain level of agreement in scholarship on the importance of journalism for democracy and civil engagement, as well as over the

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existence of a contemporary economic and professional crisis, the scale of the decline and the harm this does to democracy are perceived differently. Most authors stop short of predicting some sort of future equivalent of a journalistic nuclear winter; an informational wasteland populated by dazed and uninformed citizens, wandering about, texting and tweeting the latest celebrity gossip on their iPhones, unaware of politics or social issues. Yet many do argue that young adults seem to be ‘tuning out’ from the news, a trend that they find worrisome for democracy as the next generation comes of age (Mindich, 2005). Other observers have swung in the opposite direction, and tend to preach journalism’s historical resilience. They argue that journalism is a remarkably robust institution that has always been, and always will be, capable of absorbing change.

What both perspectives have in common, however, is the basic assumption that journalism primarily has to adapt to technological and economic changes in order to survive. Many point at journalism’s business model as being outdated, implying that the ‘crisis of journalism’ is first and foremost a crisis of funding that, some suggest, could be resolved by viable alternatives like micro-financing, apps and paywalls, or government and public funding (cf. McChesney and Picard, 2011). Others believe that journalism has to do a better job anticipating the rise and impact of digitization, the internet and social media. If outlets can find innovative ways to distribute news, and if newsrooms incorporate new technologies in journalism practice, the idea is that journalism can move more or less undamaged into a new era. Depending on the diagnosis, the range of possible cures is infinite.

Discussions concentrate, in sum, on the symptoms of the crisis, or the traditional conception of journalism. But the changing nature of the object itself often goes unnoticed. Moreover, since the challenges it faces are usually the analytic point of departure, it is easy to fall into the trap of quarantining the analysis of journalism from interconnected transformations in the broader media landscape. Much of this is because the focus is generally on the democratic deficit were the journalistic infrastructure to collapse, or on how journalism adapts to technological innovations. A primary thrust seems to be the idea that, with a few well-thought-out tweaks, journalism will keep itself relevant because its importance is self-evident. Solutions to journalism’s ills are thus generally looked at in terms of modifying the pre-existing structure of the news media to adapt to the changing environment. This urge to try to address the symptoms of the crisis is understandable, and is a good first step to move beyond apocalyptic visions to tangible solutions. However, we think this still misses the point somewhat. What is regularly overlooked in these conversations is asking what profession journalism ‘is’, and how it defines itself.

Research that strives to conceptualize the dynamics of change, and to understand the structure of transformation, is scarce. The fundamentals of journalism, at least in terms of its professional ideology, remain largely unquestioned by both journalists and academics. And while the *societal role* of journalism may be enshrined in many influential documents – the idea of a free press being fairly central to democracy – unfortunately, its *societal relevance* is not. Journalism tends to try to give the public what journalists think it needs or wants, so the profession tries to adapt to its current

crisis by treating symptoms of its perceived ailment. Declining audiences are considered in terms of ‘how do we get them back’; declining profits in terms of ‘how do we increase revenues’; declining influence in terms of ‘how do we make ourselves matter’? At first glance this seems reasonable. But what such thinking doesn’t recognize (or perhaps, more accurately, doesn’t want to recognize) is that the symptoms are part of a significant structural change which can’t be undone.

This book argues that the problems journalism is facing are far more structural than is often voiced and that to prepare the profession for the next century, we have to rethink journalism fundamentally. What strikes us about current scholarly, professional and social debates is the supposed stability of the object being discussed – journalism – and the commonality of what is considered. Aspiring to the idea of a mass press, distributing information to a mass public, employing a managerial discourse of acting ‘for the good of the public’ may work well in constitutional documents and philosophical treatises, but it’s a fairly unconnected and wishful self-definition in the current multi-media, digital environment. Basically, the point for many seems to be to hold onto this object, ‘professional journalism’, as tightly as possible, as though if we lose our grip on it, it is no longer journalism we have. If journalism alters its goals, practices, content and conventions too much, so the story goes, we don’t know what this future journalism would look like or what we would call it, but we are quite sure we know what it wouldn’t be. After over a decade’s worth of debate about the chaos in the industry, many of these discussions are, by now, quite familiar, and maybe even a little bit stale.

An apt metaphor for the challenge journalism faces might be found with climate change. Climate-change scientists can point to a number of problematic indicators: rising sea levels, unstable temperature patterns, the deteriorating ozone layer, retreating glaciers, and so forth. Yet most will say that any proposed solution also demands a fundamental reconceptualization of our relationship to the environment. If we don’t rethink concepts like progress, innovation, production, and sustainability we will face an increasingly polluted planet, where resources are scarce, and the quality of life is on the decline. Similarly, if we don’t rethink concepts like trust, participation, and engagement – if we don’t recognize that journalism itself must change in response to our relationship with information – we will face an increasingly feeble profession, alienated from the public it claims to serve, whose relevance is on the wane. The aim of this book is to rethink journalism, considering trends in a less fatalistic light, without practicing a naïve optimism that ignores its uncertainties. To reinvigorate discussion on its current situation and future cures, we will first discuss what we consider two intertwined trends that underlie the structural transformations of journalism: de-industrialization and de-ritualization.

The de-industrialization of information

The key to journalism’s success in the past century might be that it effectively claimed to be of crucial importance for democracy and society in general, while substantiating and reconciling this rhetorical claim with an orientation on the market.

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As a public good and a watchdog of the citizenry, journalism established itself parallel to the expansion of democracy and suffrage, and the rise of the industrial society. It thus succeeded in positioning itself in the heart of what Schudson (1978) has called a 'democratic market society'. By reaching out to as many people as possible and catering to their demands for various kinds of information, while simultaneously claiming to represent them politically, journalism established itself as a commodity that was not just valuable for the well-being of individual citizens but also necessary for a healthy society at large. By constructing social reality on a daily basis, it builds and connects communities. It provides the glue that binds parts of society together.

Accordingly, one can say that as an industry, journalism is first and foremost characterized by its focus on a mass audience and mass production. It is driven by and developed around an inherent industrial focus on standardized production and economies of scale. Just as the creation of the mass-market automobile was the result of industrial logic brought to transportation, the rise of the mass press was the result of industrial logic *brought to information*. Journalism disseminates a limited amount of identical information in a fixed order to a mass audience in an efficient, attractive, relatively cheap and convenient way. News consumers can, like in a department store, pick from every individual issue or broadcast whatever they consider interesting, useful or just fun to read, listen to or watch. However, contrary to shoppers, they are charged for the whole package, and usually before they even know what they will be buying or what it will look like. This 'trick' is essential to journalism's business model. In the past, consumers were prepared to pay for this because journalism was the most important tool for obtaining not just information on current events and developments, but also everyday practical information like movie programmes, weather reports and arts reviews, and – maybe just as important as these categories – advertisements that helped them to find jobs, houses, partners and bargains. Advertisers, from multinationals to local stores, were equally eager to pay for journalism because it put them in touch with a wide audience. Moreover, they did not have (many) alternatives. Key to all of this was that journalism in various ways connected people to the democratic market society. It succeeded in positioning itself as an essential commodity to navigate daily life, a rich source of knowledge to climb the social ladder, and an invaluable asset to breed an informed citizenry that fuelled democracy.

Over the course of the twentieth century, journalism successfully created an information monopoly because it controlled the distribution channels for news, advertising and other current information. This obviously has changed. The digitization of information, the innovation of home equipment to produce media content, and the rise of the internet as a free and easily accessible distribution channel has eroded journalism's position. Much of what made journalism 'journalism' in the twentieth century – basically the industrialization of information – therefore no longer works. Citizens increasingly stop consuming news and information in a linear way through one or a few mass media, but literally assemble information associatively by interacting with it online. They go on the internet for 'free' news and information

from various sources that satisfy their needs and interests. They upload content on community sites, blogs or social networks. They assess information by comparing different websites and then discuss these current issues, as well as their personal affairs, in online fora. And they visit the web to consult film listings, check Craigslist or other sites for classifieds, look at real-estate aggregators for house listings, head to travel sites to book cheap plane tickets, hotels and tours, check continuously updated weather apps for up-to-the minute radar imaging and reports, find a new love on a relationship site, and so on.

A major problem for journalism is thus that it tries to tackle the technological and social transformations of today with the logic of yesterday. Every aspect of the news industry is organized according to the principles of scale, which solved the issue of how to produce and distribute knowledge to a mass audience in a profitable way. However, it simply does not work, or is not good enough, anymore in a world with cheaper, faster and more 'personalizable' options. The original industrial function of journalism no longer matches its use-function. One-to-many communication with a strong dominance of the outlet that not only the content but also determines its use has been replaced by networked communication in which citizens have more power. This implies that both the news industry and journalism have to transform fundamentally to anticipate the new environment. They have to de-industrialize. This is a tough challenge, however, because of the dominance of industrial logic in every thread of the industry and the profession. One could discern at least three levels on which de-industrialization should take place: journalism's business model, its production process, and the paradigm that guides journalism practice and, accordingly, its societal function.

First, as is concluded by many observers, journalism's business model seems to be outdated. Firmly rooted in the notion of mass marketing and economies of scale, it rests on two pillars: revenues from readers, listeners and viewers and, of course, advertising. These sources are mutually dependant: when circulation increases, the rates of advertisements will follow. This interplay has in the past led to an upward spiral which resulted in obtaining information monopolies – more readers meant more advertisers and revenues, which in turn allowed an outlet to invest in the quality and breadth of its reporting, which consequently (it was hoped) attracted a larger audience, and so on. However, the inverse relationship also held true. When the circulation of number of viewers dropped, the outlet would fall into a downward spiral from which it was hard, if not impossible, to escape. This is what happened in many local, regional and even national markets in the course of the twentieth century. In many cities of the world only one major catch-all outlet survived. Today many of these 'dinosaurs' – mainly newspapers that, it should be noted, not only employ most journalists but are also far more important for the informational infrastructure than radio and television stations – have gotten into trouble themselves. They try to compensate for the decline in readership and advertising revenues with cuts and raising subscription rates, but this only compensates for short-term losses. In the long run this – industrial – strategy will probably be disastrous. After eating all the other species they are now cannibalizing themselves.

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New technological opportunities have also affected the position of advertisers. For them, it has become far easier to reach out to specific target groups themselves through direct marketing, websites and databases, based upon the aggregation of personal information of (potential) customers. Moreover, advertisers are increasingly dissatisfied with the logic of scale and one-to-many communication through news media. They aim less at reaching a large, singular audience, but rather want to target specific groups of consumers that are of possible commercial interest through media. Quantity as such is not good enough anymore; advertisers want to have a clear insight in the specifics of the people they reach with their ads. This desire for personalized marketing on the part of advertisers potentially conflicts with another law of scale that says that it is profitable to diminish production costs by acquiring as many outlets as possible, merging them or, at least, standardising and rationalizing all processes of individual outlets. This strategy of selling 'mass' to advertisers, which many media outlets and media chains employed over the past century, resulted in a loss of organizational flexibility and a decreased ability to tailor content and distribution to specific audience demands. To turn this around, the business model has to be de-industrialized.

Second, every step in the production process – from the processing of information, to printing or broadcasting, to distribution – is organised according to industrial principles. To get the news out on time to as many people as possible, fixed deadlines are set for every department involved, and the production of both news and news outlets is to a large extent routinized. There is no time for delay and it is nearly impossible to diverge from the planned organisational patterns. As a consequence, a large degree of social control and discipline is present in news companies, even for journalists who, contrary to those involved in the technical production of news, tend to envision themselves as bohemians with much freedom. The domestication of news workers is still an ongoing project but has, according to many 'old hacks', now reached a level with which they are, to put it mildly, not comfortable (Davies, 2008). Their complaints about a lack of time and resources, and of being chained to their desks to meet ever-growing requirements to fill as many columns, seconds or pixels as possible, at least resembles the images of factory workers trying to keep pace with a fast-moving assembly line. Work patterns are even more rationalized now that many journalists have been laid off because of cuts.

This industry-like organisation of news production was obviously a historical necessity for a media that targeted mass audiences with a fixed frequency. And despite the decline in readers, subscribers, and viewers over the last few decades, traditional mass media have transposed these principles even more rigorously to their online newsrooms. But these procedures go against the logic of the internet, which does not have to care about the distribution of a physical product, does not know deadlines, has infinite space to publish and archive information, and is networked so it can use knowledge and information from others. The industrial logic underlying news production could therefore be restraining innovation in the industry. Successful initiatives like the *Huffington Post* or hyperlocal sites seem to have found – or are at least looking for – new ways to deal with the overload of information on the internet.

They organize, specialise, and make use of other outlets and the wisdom of the crowds. They are less focused on publishing ‘everything that’s fit to print’ as soon as possible and don’t try to cater to an audience that is as wide as possible. Rethinking the organization of journalism might therefore involve the de-industrialization of news production.

Third, journalism itself, as both a practice and discourse, is structured by industrial logic. During the twentieth century a political or ideologically oriented journalism that wanted to unite distinctive political communities to obtain the power to change society gave way to a journalism that aimed at unifying the audience and constructing large, overarching communities. The pace of this development obviously differed from country to country, and to some extent one could argue that a political press has still a strong position in some parts of the world (Broersma, 2010c). But it is no secret that mainstream news outlets began to cater to the needs of as many news consumers as possible, an aim to which many organizations still hold fast nowadays. To do this, journalism became depersonalized and standardised. Therefore reporters had to follow a single news format that turned them into ‘machines, without prejudice, colour, and without style’ of their own, as Lincoln Steffens provocatively wrote in the early 1930s (Matheson, 2000: 565). To be attractive to news consumers, journalism presented itself as a non-biased representative of the public good and phrased the news in neutral, authoritative language. In aiming for the masses, journalism made an imagined social contract with the audience in which it promised not to take sides in its representation of social reality. This promise resembled the guarantee every other industrialised commodity offered to its customers: each product that left the assembly line was exactly the same and had the same unrivalled quality.

This stance, typically referred to as the ‘objectivity norm’, provided a strong rhetorical claim to persuade a mass audience of journalism’s ability to cater to their needs and to be an independent Estate in democracy. But it also had a more profound function. Moral norms act as a ‘stick’ to establish and discipline social groups. As Michael Schudson (2001: 151–52) points out, building upon Durkheim and Weber, the objectivity norm was used to establish both ‘horizontal solidarity’ and ‘hierarchical social control’. It united journalists through shared rituals and a shared identity, and allowed the profession to discern itself from competing professions in the information market. In this respect it also encouraged a ‘pedagogical economy’ in which professionals were disciplined and controlled by their (editorial) management. One might even say the objectivity regime is thus closely connected to, and could even be considered a precondition for, the industrialization of journalism. However, it is questionable if the new dynamics of a networked media system fit within this regime. Successful new informational outlets on the net often do not seem to bother with the pretence of objectivity. They connect and support, favour attachment over detachment, and are openly biased in the knowledge that their readers are exposed to multiple truths and outlets and wish to be convinced (cf. Broersma, 2010b; Peters, 2011). To be visible, valuable and to differentiate themselves from competitors in the jungle of the internet they have to demonstrate and display their convictions.

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Another way to rethink journalism may thus be to reconsider if the objectivity regime still fits the new de-industrialized reality, especially when it comes to how people select and engage with media.

The de-ritualization of news consumption

Historically, or so we would like to believe, the story of everyday life for many people included regular, definitive moments of news consumption. Journalism, in fact, was distributed around these routines: papers were delivered before breakfast, television news buttressed the transitions from work to home (early evening news) and home to bed (nightly news), radio updates centred around commuting patterns, and weekend editions of newspapers contained longer feature articles to contemplate. There was a certain stability to news consumption, and although audience research has never been a strong suit of journalism studies, the notion of ritual – habitual, formalised actions which reinforce the ‘symbolic power’ of media institutions (Couldry, 2003) – provided a good fit to explain these practices.

Many of the archetypal moments when journalism entered our lives – watching the evening news in our living room, reading the newspaper by the breakfast table, listening to the radio on the way to work – helped shape, structure and give meaning to everyday life. However, what it seems we are witnessing now, in terms of many of these old familiar patterns, is a de-ritualization of news consumption. As journalism spreads to any potential moment and every possible location we desire, it becomes somewhat diluted and indistinguishable from other mediated forms of communication. As Livingstone (2005: 76) notes, ‘The activity of viewing ... is converging with reading, shopping, voting, playing, researching, writing, chatting. Media are now used anyhow, anyplace, anytime.’ When technology overcomes many of the temporal and spatial limits of news consumption, when the public is unshackled from the distributional constraints of unidirectional, programmatic, mass media, our habits have a tendency to transform. Although the pace of technology outstrips the pace at which audiences incorporate such change, there seems to be little doubt that audiences are slowly catching up to the possibilities. This is not to say that ‘new’ news rituals will not form, however; as we’ve seen with entertainment programming, many of the old patterns of consumption are becoming outdated or obsolete.

So if we want to know what journalism ‘is’, or what it might be in the future, a more sound empirical basis is to look at how it is actually being perceived and used. How has the structural transformation of journalism impacted what is ‘done’ with the news? More and more, it seems that young people – also sometimes referred to as the audience, public, citizens, consumers, users, participants and producers – a terminological smorgasbord which indicates the danger of oversimplifying journalism’s relationship to the world outside the newsroom – tune into the news for specific information, or in response to particular incidents, as opposed to as part of a daily ritual or out of a sense of civic duty to be informed. Of course specificity and personalization of the news has always been an aspect of journalism – newspaper sections are a great example of this – but more and more journalism isn’t an everyday thing,

even though it's increasingly available in all spaces of our everyday lives. This should have an impact on professional autonomy, and should have an impact on how journalists perceive their role. But often, as we see, it does not.

The traditional conception of journalism's role in society is resilient, surprisingly so in the face of a profession that seems to be having difficulties sustaining a consistent and stable relationship with 'the public'. The old model and perception of journalism's societal role sounded great for democracy and even better for the news industry. News audiences supposedly read, watched or listened to journalism on a regular basis, by which they familiarised themselves with social issues, so they could potentially fulfil their 'duty' as 'good citizens'. The inverse also held true. The bourgeois norms of self-improvement became widespread in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and many groups embraced the newspaper as part of a broader strategy of developing themselves. However, the trends we have seen over the past decade indicate a widening gulf between the news industry and the public and point to a news media less and less able to connect with audiences. An attentive citizenry can no longer be assumed. This is somewhat troubling for many theorists of political communication, who look to what impact this has on civic culture – 'the factors that can enhance or impede political participation' (Dahlgren, 2005: 157) – in terms of how people come to see themselves as potentially active citizens. Being politically up to date means being informed, and journalism has historically been conceived of as a key social institution in this respect. If people turn away from journalism, it seems, there must be some impact on social cohesion, effective politics, sustainable communities, and individual self-governance.

In this sense, we seem woefully uninformed in terms of how people's view of themselves as citizens relates to contemporary reconceptualizations of journalism, and how this changes the way people 'use news' to inform their everyday lives. Media and communication technologies have been, and will continue to be, fundamental for connecting diverse members of society but it's hard to envision exactly what role journalism plays in this new media landscape. As mediated communication becomes increasingly ubiquitous in every aspect of our social life, we have progressively more possibilities and opportunities to connect. However, the mediation of everyday life has not necessarily led to increasingly stable social bonds – many authors assert that the degree of social cohesion and willingness to interact with others is being challenged or, at the very least, that the public is being fractured, fragmented, and splintered. Both perspectives have some validity. There is no doubt that connectivity may lead to action, but as the 2011 riots across Britain demonstrated, the ability to connect may not always lead to benevolent outcomes or a more stable society. The move towards sustainable, modern social relations is not linear, but is associated with conflict, disruption and negotiation processes for which media provide the stage. One thus wonders what function journalism continues to play in increasingly mediated, yet increasingly fragmented, societies?

In this sense, it is not enough to just look at the institution of journalism in isolation; it is necessary to consider it in terms of the social role it fulfils and how various changes across different aspects of society alter journalism from how we traditionally

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think of it. In terms of individuals, the last few decades have seen the emergence of an era where the governance of the self – what Foucault called governmentality, the conduct of conduct – no longer relies so heavily upon established social institutions, including journalism. Put another way, there is much speculation that modernity underwent a ‘reflexive’ transformation in the latter half of the twentieth century, a move which saw prominent ‘modern’ institutions that were charged with producing ‘truthful information’ experience a decline in authority while smaller social groups and individual experience rose in terms of their epistemological prominence (Giddens, 1994). As Rose, O’Malley and Valverde (2009: 26) note, the dominance of large institutions was mitigated by the increasing influence of the ‘grey sciences, the minor professions, the accountants and insurers, the managers and psychologists, [those] in the mundane business of governing everyday economic and social life.’ In other words, journalism as the principal and authoritative source for conveying knowledge became fragmented by the emergence of – more mundane – forms of authority and power.

The rise of the digital era only exacerbates this further, as people turn away from journalism to blogs, discussion boards, independent media, specialist websites, Twitter, Facebook, and infinite other sources of readily available information. People can increasingly access the material to ‘think for themselves’, they can navigate this information easily, and they have cheaper and customized ways to cater to their needs. In such an environment, while we could try to focus on why such social changes happen, a more sensible analytic approach may be to look at how change happens and how it differs from what came before. Using this as a jumping-off point, perhaps we should view it as problematic when, generally speaking, our inclination is to ask why the changes journalism is facing are a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ thing, rather than questioning how they came about and how they change journalism as an object of study. For example, instead of asking what can be done to ‘save’ journalism, it may be more fruitful to look at how the technological proliferation of video and online platforms provided alternatives for watching, learning, and being informed; how the knowledge economy and digitization shifted our modes of engagement with information; and how discourses of citizenship shifted from civic requirements (be a good citizen, be informed) to managerial requirements (know what you need to know for yourself) to then see how contemporary journalism, and how we think of it, has been fundamentally redefined by audiences compared to what came before.

This underscores moving away from the assumption that the old rituals of news consumption are the ones that matter or count, and that trying to ensure their survival is essential for journalism. In commercial terms, journalism may be at the end stage of its product life cycle, and attempts to reinvigorate demand by relying on the same old rituals of use are unlikely to halt its decline. Instead, it helps us to recognise that the young, technologically proficient, ‘sped up’ generation may have different needs and expectations for news. Perhaps daily rituals are no longer necessary for ‘monitorial’ citizens (Schudson 1998), who expect journalism to act as a ‘gatewatcher’ (Bruns 2005) on their behalf, which can be tuned into during critical moments. The routinized consumption of journalism by the next generation of citizens may be less

critical than the feeling that they can potentially consume when it is interesting, necessary, or convenient. In this respect, the most significant effect of the rise of internet and digital technology might be that the autonomy to decide when to ‘tune in’ has essentially shifted; rather than a public being led to develop certain habits of consumption based around the temporal and spatial constraints of the media, it seems that journalism increasingly needs to habituate itself to the temporal and spatial elasticity of one-and-all.

Participation, trust and the redefinition of a profession

Journalism-studies scholars, students and practitioners are in need of new perspectives to tackle the numerous economic, professional, and perceptual challenges, which challenge journalism as we know it, or perhaps more appropriately, want to know it. The problems the news media faces – often referred to under the ‘crisis of journalism’ label – can appear insurmountable despite the fact that scholarship and industry observation on how to ‘fix’ the crisis is not in short supply. However, too often it’s the symptoms that garner all the attention and not the idea of journalism itself. The chapters in this book address this by considering journalism on a structural level.

The last few decades demonstrate quite clearly that the authority and status of journalism are questionable, and that it bears many of the tell-tale signs of an industry in decline. It has long been said that journalism is there to serve its public; in fact, one could arguably say that this public-service element of journalism is its definitive mission. Yet measures which ask people about their faith in the news media to fulfil this function seem to indicate that public trust is waning. Much of this seems to coincide with the proliferation of media outlets and alternative media channels, emanating from the rapid technological developments of the past few decades. Economic pressures have also followed suit, forcing journalism outlets to continuously adapt. Increased competition between outlets and pressure on individual journalists have likewise brought ethical issues to the fore, evidenced by a number of prominent scandals around the world, with each country now seemingly able to tell its own story of how the press fails. Journalists’ perception of their own role is in disarray, the public’s view of them is questionable, and research into the historical specificity of this moment and current responses are lacking. This somewhat austere reality provides the backdrop to this book.

For journalism, this means if it wishes to ‘survive’, if it still aims to serve ‘the public’, its practitioners must understand the limits and demarcation of their role in dialogue with it. The ability of the news media to convince the public that its stories were authoritative and important increased over the course of the twentieth century as professional journalism honed its performative discourse (Broersma, 2010a; 2010b). People believed the news gave them important, factual information and many people still likely feel this way about their preferred outlet. However, much of the social status of journalism came from its rhetorical ability to position itself as a necessary public good that implemented itself in the spaces of everyday life (Peters, 2012). It is this explicit or implicit social value that has historically driven the financing of the

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news media, both in terms of public funding and private revenue. And yet it is this same value which now seems to be weakening in terms of the demand for regular journalistic consumption and its pre-eminence as an informational commodity. The ways that contemporary individuals attain self-knowledge and social awareness – news consumption being one such technique, long deployed in an effort to ‘improve the self’ – have changed. Yet it appears that journalism, as a social institution, has not come to this recognition. The industry often still seems to declare its importance by fiat, by its possible use, while ignoring that its functional use has changed.

Therefore, rather than just focus on the ‘crisis’ indicators, this collection tries to understand the structural transformation journalism is undergoing. It explores how the news media attempt to combat decreasing levels of trust (Part I), how participatory culture creates new dialogues between journalists and audiences (Part II), and how emerging forms of news affect the established journalistic field (Part III). In the fourth part the previous chapters and themes are discussed and related from different angles. Crucially, despite creating these somewhat artificial divisions, the various chapters within the collection do not treat these developments as distinct transformations. Instead, most consider how the interrelation of these factors accounts for both the tribulations of the news media and the need for contemporary journalism to rethink itself.