

Are the Times A-Changin'?

On Journalists' Readiness for a Digital Future

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Summary

In our contribution, we investigate the adaptability of Swiss editorial teams to the changes brought to the journalistic profession by the advent Social Media. Based on a survey designed to measure adaptability to change, we observe reservations on the micro level (changes in role and relationship models of journalists) as well as on the meso level (adaptability of the organization). Despite these reservations, there is wide-spread acceptance of Social Media as a distinct new journalistic form, that regardless of necessary organizational and personal adjustments to be made in the near to mid-term future, there is the promise new form of author-reader interaction and more immediate forms of journalism long thought gone from editorial practice.

Theoretical Grounding

Our article is based both in the research on social media journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004; Jarvis, 2006; Jones & Lee, 2012; Rosen, 2006), as well as on the literature on individual and organizational readiness for change (Holt et al., 2007). In this sense, our contribution is embedded in research that refers to (changing) journalistic skill sets and role models on the functional level. In recent years, authors such as Lavrusik (2009) referred to (social media) journalism as demanding for multiple requirements, such as being a "Multimedia Storyteller", "Social Journalist[s] and Community Builder", as well as a "Blogger and Curator[s]" (Lavrusik, 2009). Likewise, classic concepts such as agenda setting and gatekeeping face revised concepts, which speak of a more discursive relationship between recipient and journalist (e.g. Robinson, 2009), as well as altering classic concepts (e.g. from gatekeeper to gatewatcher (Bruns, 2005)). Together, both recent bodies of literature on the changing journalistic profession, as well as on organizations' readiness for change, form the theoretical foundation of our empirical deliberations.

Relevance to Conference Theme

Our article intends to address this year's conference topic both by looking at journalism and its function in society in general, and the changes brought to the profession in particular. We deem looking at the readiness of journalists and editorial teams especially relevant as the me-

dia face particular demands for change by virtue of them becoming ‘social’. On one hand, editorial teams see themselves confronted with eroding revenue streams, being forced to adapt to ever more rapidly evolving, but still sustainable, business models. On the other hand, many journalists have to adapt their products to new establishing standards and particularly customer expectations. In this development, changes on the micro and the meso level come together: Social media first change the news product per se as production becomes an iterative process and recipients get involved. These product changes, together with the opportunities of social media, in turn lead to changes for today's journalists with respect to role and relationship models. Together, the question to how well journalistic organizations may face these challenges from an internal perspective may foster knowledge in both social media research, being this year's topic, as well as journalism and media research in general.

Links to Existing Knowledge and Research Question

In our study, we are interested in the journalist's perception of their own role as a journalists and their relationship to recipients for the editorial team's *readiness for change*. We expect media companies to rely in their adaptability to a large extend on the attitudes and behaviors of their editorial team members (journalists). To realize an organizational change process, Holt et al. define it as a crucial factor to create "[a] state of readiness" among the organizational members (2007). Thus, in our study, we are looking for this state of readiness among the editorial staff (redactors and journalists) as a precondition for the readiness for change of the organization. In short, the research question of our study is how the individual journalist's readiness for change impacts the readiness for change of the editorial team (the news organization).

Methodology

To study our research question we chose a quantitative questionnaire, surveying chief editors as well as journalists in charge of social media for a traditional print daily or weekly newspaper or magazine, all from one large Swiss corporate media group. The questionnaire consists of three groups of questions. For the first group, we adopted the Readiness for Organizational Change scale of Holt et al. (2007), which consists of four factor batteries (appropriateness, management support, change efficacy, personally beneficial). Due to absence of current available scales concerning the role and relationship change in journalism, we developed three new item batteries (core competencies, reader expectations, relationship to readers) derived from current literature.

Key Findings and Contributions to New Knowledge

Several qualitative studies provide insight into the changes in the profession of journalists (e.g. Paterson & Domingo, 2008). Theoretical-conceptual studies propose new role models, which see journalists more as curators or information evaluators, and propose more discursive relationship models between journalists and recipients. Against this background the results of our study are unique in the way they provide explicit (unique) empirical data about the perceptions of Swiss journalists of their role as journalists in a social media landscape and how they experience the transformation of their respective profession, particularly the changing relationship to their readers in the new media ecology.

Literature

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