



# What is journalism?

## Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered

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### ABSTRACT

The history of journalism in elective democracies around the world has been described as the emergence of a professional identity of journalists with claims to an exclusive role and status in society, based on and at times fiercely defended by their occupational ideology. Although the conceptualization of journalism as a professional ideology can be traced throughout the literature on journalism studies, scholars tend to take the building blocks of such an ideology more or less for granted. In this article the ideal-typical values of journalism's ideology are operationalized and investigated in terms of how these values are challenged or changed in the context of current cultural and technological developments. It is argued that multiculturalism and multimedia are similar and poignant examples of such developments. If the professional identity of journalists can be seen as kept together by the social cement of an occupational ideology of journalism, the analysis in this article shows how journalism in the self-perceptions of journalists has come to mean much more than its modernist bias of telling people what they need to know.

**KEY WORDS** ■ journalism education ■ journalism studies ■ journalism theory ■ multiculturalism ■ multimedia

Journalism is and has been theorized, researched, studied and criticized worldwide by people coming from a wide variety of disciplines. Indeed, research about journalism and among journalists has been established as a widely acknowledged field, particularly in the second half of the 20th century. Worldwide one can find universities, schools and colleges with dedicated departments, research and teaching programs in journalism. The field even has its own international and national journals.<sup>1</sup> This suggests journalism as a discipline and an object of study is based on a consensual body of knowledge, a widely shared understanding of key theories and methods, and an international practice of teaching, learning and researching journalism. Alas, this is

not the case. Several authors in various parts of the world have signaled a lack of coherence in the field of journalism (education and studies), and have sought to offer overviews into different conceptual approaches to theory and methodology – see for example Breen (1998) in Australia, Löffelholz (2000) in Germany and Austria, McNair (2003) in the United Kingdom, Schudson (2003) and Zelizer (2004b) in the United States, Deuze (2004b) in the Netherlands, and De Beer and Merrill (2004) internationally.

A lack of (international) consensus and disciplinary dialogue in journalism studies can be attributed to several factors. Journalism as an academic discipline is still very much under critical debate (Fedler et al., 1998). Throughout the history of journalism (education and studies), the field has had to balance between industry and university, each with its own institutionalized expectations and assumptions, leading observers to conclude: ‘[J]ournalism education [. . .] has ended up as neither fish nor fowl; it feels itself unloved by the industry and tolerated, barely, by the academy’ (Raudsepp, 1989: 9). If one furthermore considers the variety of disciplines and paradigms deployed to understand journalism, another contentious factor emerges: the perceived clash of perspectives coming from scholars trained in the (critical) humanities, with those in the social sciences (Zelizer, 2000). Between and within these backgrounds there exists such a variety of approaches to journalism, that authors like Rühl (2000) in Germany or Schudson (2003) in the USA lament the ‘folkloric’ inconsistency of the field as well as the impossibility to generate a more or less consensual body of knowledge out of the existing literature. It is therefore safe to say that many scholars, educators and students all over the world are involved in journalism studies and education, but only rarely do their approaches, understandings or philosophies meet.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I explore the concept of journalism as an occupational ideology as a possible meeting point for journalism studies and education, operationalizing it to analyze how emerging sociocultural and socioeconomic issues stand to transform ways of thinking about and doing journalism. Although the ideology of journalism is an approach widely used in the literature, only rarely has it been adequately defined and operationalized to fit immediate concerns in a pragmatic way. As pressing contemporary case studies in point I investigate how new media and multiculturalism (which I understand to be two key social issues recognized in media industries across the globe at the start of the 21st century) interface with contemporary journalism. I argue that this approach is inspiring because it helps us to look beyond infrastructures (as in computer hardware and software) or representationalism (as in the number of minority journalists in a newsroom) when assessing what journalism as a profession is (or can be) in a context of fast-changing technology and society.

In choosing new media and multiculturalism as conceptual case studies I temporarily turn a blind eye towards other areas of change and challenge for journalism that warrant critical inquiry; one could think of economic issues (corporate colonization of the newsroom, media concentration), and political issues (localization and globalization, press freedom, media law). This article does not aim to establish a hierarchy of pressing issues, after all. While acknowledging the selectivity of my approach, I argue that multimedia and multiculturalism can be considered valid developments of how the ideology of journalism takes shape and is shaped by internationally acknowledged relevant issues of the day.<sup>3</sup>

### **Journalism as ideology**

The 20th-century history of (the professionalization of) journalism can be typified by the consolidation of a consensual occupational ideology among journalists in different parts of the world. Conceptualizing journalism as an ideology (rather than, for example, other options offered in the literature such as a profession, an industry, a literary genre, a culture or a complex social system) primarily means understanding journalism in terms of how journalists give meaning to their newswork. Although most scholarly work on journalism is reduced to studies of institutional news journalism, research on other more feminine or so-called 'alternative' journalisms suggests journalists across genres and media types invoke more or less the same ideal-typical value system when discussing and reflecting on their work (Van Zoonen, 1998).<sup>4</sup>

In decades of journalism studies, scholars refer to the journalists' professionalization process as a distinctly ideological development, as the emerging ideology served to continuously refine and reproduce a consensus about who was a 'real' journalist, and what (parts of) news media at any time would be considered examples of 'real' journalism. These evaluations shift subtly over time; yet always serve to maintain the dominant sense of what is (and should be) journalism. Schlesinger (1978) for example writes about 'newsmen's occupational ideology', Golding and Elliott (1979) speak broadly of 'journalism's occupational ideology', while a decade later Soloski (1990) talks about an 'ideology of professionalism', and Zelizer (2004a) mentions 'journalists' professional ideology'; yet most of these authors do not make explicit what this ideology consists of, other than claiming it contains 'self-contradictory oppositional values' (Reese, 1990). Schudson describes the occupational ideology of journalism as 'cultural knowledge that constitutes 'news judgment', rooted deeply in the communicators' consciousness (2001: 153). Elliott (1988) and McMane (1993: 215) locate journalism's ideology in a 'class

spirit', whereas Zelizer (2004a: 101) refers to the 'collective knowledge' journalists employ. This understanding also trickles down to the way journalism is taught, as Brennen (2000: 106) concludes in her study of US journalism textbooks published in the 1980s and 1990s: '[a]ll of them address the practice of journalism from an identical ideological perspective that neglects to consider all the changes in journalism that have occurred over time'.

In the particular context of journalism as a profession, ideology can be seen as a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular group, including – but not limited to – the general process of the production of meanings and ideas (within that group). This kind of thinking about journalists and journalism builds on an international tradition of journalism research, surveys among and interviews with journalists (Weaver, 1998). Comparing 21 countries, Weaver found support for claims that the characteristics of journalists are largely similar worldwide (1998: 456). A cross-national comparison of findings from surveys among journalists in different and more or less similar countries yields results that to some extent suggest similar processes of professionalization as expressed through the measured characteristics of media practitioner populations (Weischenberg and Scholl, 1998). Weaver however concludes there is too much disagreement on professional norms and values to claim an emergence of 'universal occupational standards' in journalism (1998: 468). Other scholars have addressed this variety of views on how important certain universal standards are in terms of what their meanings can be in (country-)specific circumstances and different cultural contexts (Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Deuze, 2002a). What these overall findings and conclusions suggest is that journalists in elective democracies share similar characteristics and speak of similar values in the context of their daily work, but apply these in a variety of ways to give meaning to what they do. Journalists in all media types, genres and formats carry the ideology of journalism. It is therefore possible to speak of a dominant occupational ideology of journalism on which most newswriters base their professional perceptions and praxis, but which is interpreted, used and applied differently among journalists across media (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996: 11).

Ideology is seen here as an (intellectual) process over time, through which the sum of ideas and views – notably on social and political issues – of a particular group is shaped, but also as a process by which other ideas and views are excluded or marginalized (Stevenson, 1995: 37–41; Van Ginneken, 1997: 73). Although the notion of a 'dominant' ideology (or 'dominant discourses' through which the ideology is perpetuated as suggested by Dahlgren, 1992: 9) denotes a worldview of the powerful, the term is chosen here not in terms of a struggle, but as a collection of values, strategies and formal codes characterizing professional journalism and shared most widely by its members. This

ideology is generally referred to as a dominant way in which news people validate and give meaning to their work.<sup>5</sup> Journalism's ideology has, for example, been analyzed as a 'strategic ritual' to position oneself in the profession vis-a-vis media critics and publics (Tuchman, 1971). Ideology has also been identified as an instrument in the hands of journalists and editors to naturalize the structure of the news organization or media corporation one works for (Soloski, 1990). Especially when faced with public criticism, journalists apply ideological values to legitimate or self-police the recurring self-similar selection and description of events and views in their media (Molotch and Lester, 1974; Golding and Elliott, 1979; Hall, 1982; Hallin, 1986; Reese, 1990; Zelizer, 1993; Bennett, 2001). This criticism also comes from within the profession, as, for example, supporters of the public journalism movement blame this ideological way of thinking for the news media's inability to engage citizens (Merritt, 1995; Rosen, 1999).

In short, there seems to be a consensus among scholars in the field of journalism studies that what typifies more or less universal similarities in journalism can be defined as a shared occupational ideology among newsworkers which functions to self-legitimize their position in society. Even though scholars are comfortable to refer to journalism as an occupational ideology, the distinct building blocks of such an ideology are sometimes left to the imagination of the reader. Indeed, some scholars tend not to venture much further than an acknowledgement that there exists a professional ideology and that it is not a 'set of things' but an active practice and that it is continually negotiated (Reese, 1990). In the context of this article the core characteristics of this ideology have been identified, as these can be located in the concept and historical development of journalism professionalism (Soloski, 1990: 208).

Hallin (1992) sees the ongoing professionalization process and the corresponding development of a shared occupational ideology as a period of 'high modernism' in journalism. Hallin in particular mentions the sense of wholeness and seamlessness in the practitioner's vision of professional journalism in this period (roughly between the 1960s and 1990s). Indeed, research by Russo (1998) suggests that journalists identify themselves more easily with the profession of journalism than for example with the medium or media company that employs them. Key characteristics of this professional self-definition can be summarized as a number of discursively constructed ideal-typical values. Journalists feel that these values give legitimacy and credibility to what they do. The concepts, values and elements said to be part of journalism's ideology in the available literature can be categorized into five ideal-typical traits or values.<sup>6</sup> Colleagues like Golding and Elliott (1979), Merritt (1995), and more recently Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) describe these as:

- Public service: journalists provide a public service (as watchdogs or 'news-hounds', active collectors and disseminators of information);
- Objectivity: journalists are impartial, neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible;
- Autonomy: journalists must be autonomous, free and independent in their work;
- Immediacy: journalists have a sense of immediacy, actuality and speed (inherent in the concept of 'news');
- Ethics: journalists have a sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy.

Reese (2001) suggests the ideological perspective can be seen as a global factor of influence on journalistic decision-making processes, enabling us to analyze how media symbolic content is connected with larger social interests, and how meaning is constructed in the service of power. Power in the context of an occupational ideology must be understood as the power to define what ('real') journalism is, enacted for example through access to mainstream debates about journalistic quality.

One has to note that these values can be attributed to other professions or social systems in society as well, and that these values – as I will show hereafter – are sometimes inevitably inconsistent or contradictory. To journalists this generally does not seem to be a problem, as they integrate such values into their debates and evaluations of the character and quality of journalism. In doing so, journalism continuously reinvents itself – regularly revisiting similar debates (for example on commercialization, bureaucratization, 'new' media technologies, seeking audiences, concentration of ownership) where ideological values can be deployed to sustain operational closure, keeping outside forces at bay. I move on by briefly operationalizing the five ideal-typical values of journalism's ideology.

### **Journalists provide a public service**

The public-service ideal can be seen as a powerful component of journalism's ideology. It is an ideal that journalists aspire to, and use to legitimize aggressive (Clayman, 2002) or increasingly interpretive ([Patterson, 1997](#)) styles of reporting. Journalists share a sense of 'doing it for the public', of working as some kind of representative watchdog of the status quo in the name of people, who 'vote with their wallets' for their services (by buying a newspaper, watching or listening to a newscast, visiting and returning to a news site). One may find evidence of such a value by specifically examining journalists' images of their audience, and by looking at their views on what they do and how their work may affect (intended) publics – as citizens or consumers. The expanding body of literature on the public journalism movement has actualized this value, serving to rethink journalism's role in society by invoking old or new notions of the public service ideal through 'people's journalism'

(Merrill et al., 2001). Woodstock (2000) and Schudson (1999) indicate that practices of public journalists tend to reinforce the dominant position of news media in communities while at the same time endorsing a more responsive attitude towards publics, indeed showing how an age-old ideological value can serve to maintain the status quo in journalism while its practitioners adapt to a changing media culture.

### **Journalists are neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible**

American authors in particular have identified objectivity as a key element of the professional self-perception of journalists (see Schudson, 1978 and 2001; Reese, 1990; Ognianova and Endersby, 1996; Mindich, 1998). Although objectivity has a problematic status in current thinking about the impossibility of value-neutrality, academics and journalists alike revisit this value through synonymous concepts like 'fairness', 'professional distance', 'detachment' or 'impartiality' to define and (re-)legitimize what media practitioners do. Objectivity may not be possible but that does not mean one should not strive for it, or redefine it in such a way that it in fact becomes possible, as [Ryan \(2001\)](#) argues. Other voices lament this kind of detachment as an overriding reflex of journalism that makes its professionals immune to any kind of comment or critique, and therefore failing in journalism's task of promoting democratic deliberation (paraphrasing Merritt, 1995: 127–30). Feminist media scholars argue, however, that subjectivity does not contradict objectivity as both values can be considered as constitutive elements of a professional identity of journalists (Van Zoonen, 1998). The point is that the embrace, rejection as well as critical reappraisal of objectivity all help to keep it alive as an ideological cornerstone of journalism.

### **Journalists must enjoy editorial autonomy, freedom and independence**

Reporters across the globe feel that their work can only thrive and flourish in a society that protects its media from censorship; in a company that saves its journalists from the marketers; in a newsroom where journalists are not merely the lackeys of their editors; and at a desk where a journalist is adequately supported through, for example, further training and education (Weaver, 1998). Any kind of development from perceived extra-journalistic forces – be it public criticism, marketing or corporate ownership – tends to get filtered through this overriding concern to be autonomous to tell the stories you want to. [Research by McDevitt et al. \(2002\)](#) suggests that this notion of autonomy as a building block of journalists' professional identity serves as a way to preclude attempts by individual news people to be more interactive and

supportive of community engagement in their work. Most if not all innovations in journalism tend to be met by doubts regarding their perceived impact on editorial autonomy (see for example [Singer, 2004](#) and [Boczkowski, 2004](#) on journalists and newsroom convergence). This elevates editorial independence to the status of an ideological value in that it functions to legitimize resistance to (as well as enabling piecemeal adaptation of) change.<sup>7</sup>

### **Journalists have a sense of immediacy**

According to journalists, their work is reporting the news. This lends the work of journalists an aura of instantaneity and immediatism, as 'news' stresses the novelty of information as its defining principle. The work of journalists therefore involves notions of speed, fast decision-making, hastiness, and working in accelerated real-time. Stephens (1988), Nerone and Barnhurst (2003) and Lule (2001) note that from its earliest days journalism has relied on certain forms, archetypes, themes and routines enabling its practitioners to manage an ever-increasing volume of information within the confounds of continuous deadlines. Working under time pressure is acknowledged in surveys among journalists in the USA and elsewhere, as respondents are specifically asked how important it is to them to deliver the news 'as quickly as possible' (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996: 263). The scholarly literature has re-kindled this notion of speed regarding emerging journalistic practices and genres on the internet, signaling the implications this medium has as it propels journalists to work in a so-called 'non-stop' 24/7-digital environment ([Pavlik, 1999](#); [Hall, 2001](#)). When experienced through the eyes of journalists, speed can be seen as both an essentialized value and a problematized side effect of newswork.

### **Journalists have a sense of ethics and legitimacy**

Parallel to the history of 20th century professionalization of journalism runs the history of professional codes of ethics – especially since the adoption of the *Code of Bordeaux* by the International Federation of Journalists in 1956 (Nordenstreng and Topuz, 1989). Although journalists worldwide disagree on whether a code of ethical conduct should be in place or not, they do share a sense of being ethical – which in turn legitimizes journalists' claims to the position as (free and fair) watchdogs of society. A comparison of ethics codes in a number of European and Middle Eastern countries shows that even though political and social systems in these countries may vary considerably, ethical guidelines reflect a broad intercultural consensus on certain key elements such as a commitment to truth and objectivity (Hafez, 2002). [Ryan \(2001\)](#) even goes



as far as to claim ethics as the all-encompassing value in journalism. In doing so, these academics confuse the function of ethical behavior as a legitimizing value with its concrete meaning or interpretation in a given situation or setting.

Hallin referred to the period of the 1930s to the late 1960s when describing high modernism in the professionalization process of journalism. Ever since, he argued, 'all of this was beginning to change [ . . . ] substantially' (1992: 18). Hallin (1996) suggests the collapse of political consensus and the increased commercialization of news were prime movers of these changes. In recent years, these trends can be seen as accelerated by the widespread proliferation of new media technologies and the twin forces of globalization and localization, uprooting or outsourcing peoples, ideas and industries across the globe (Bauman, 2000). The high modernism of journalistic professionalization has moved to a liquid modern state of affairs of feverish journalistic differentiation across media genres (including popular, tabloid, and infotainment journalisms), platforms, and industries. The hotly debated emergence of multimedia newsrooms ([Stone and Bierhoff, 2002](#); [Deuze, 2004a](#)) or pro-active diversity awareness policies (Campbell, 1998; Bealor Hines, 2001; Rich, 2005: 336ff) in media organizations can be seen as good examples of changes and challenges in journalistic praxis at the beginning of the 21st century. My argument is based on the assumption that the global picture of journalism is constantly and perhaps exponentially changing to such an extent that one has to analyze and discuss the main attributes of such (potential) changes in order to successfully study, describe and explain contemporary journalism. These changes are here selectively operationalized as coming to terms with the convergence of media technologies (multimedia) and sociocultural complexity (multiculturalism).

### **Journalism and technology: multimedia**

Parallel to the professionalization process of journalism in the 20th century runs a history of ongoing computerization and digitalization in all sectors of society ([Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002](#)). Distributed technologies, such as the internet and the proliferation of computer networks, inspired training programs all over the world to develop courses, curricula or even entire institutes devoted particularly to teach and study journalism in a 'new media' environment. The literature on the impact of converging technologies on the practice and education of journalists is expanding rapidly. Digital media and, more recently, multimedia newsrooms are transforming training and education of journalism worldwide (Castaneda, 2003). The disparity of approaches

and models of teaching and researching multimedia reveal one thing at least: multimedia means different things to different people ([Boczkowski, 2004](#)). Wise (2000) claims digital media, new media, information and communications technologies, internet, interactivity, virtuality and cyberspace are all used interchangeably with multimedia. The convergence process that characterizes multimedia poses challenges to departmentalized news organizations, and is generally considered to threaten a news culture that prefers individual expert systems and 'group think' over teamwork and knowledge-sharing ([Singer, 2004](#)). Professional experience and the literature suggest that new media technologies challenge one of the most fundamental 'truths' in journalism, namely: the professional journalist is the one who determines what publics see, hear and read about the world ([Fulton, 1996](#); [Singer, 1998](#)). The combination of mastering newsgathering and storytelling techniques in all media formats (so-called 'multi-skilling'), as well as the integration of digital network technologies coupled with a rethinking of the news producer-consumer relationship tends to be seen as one of the biggest challenges facing journalism studies and education in the 21st century ([Bardoel and Deuze, 2001](#); [Pavlik et al., 2001](#); [Teoh Kheng Yau and Al-Hawamdeh, 2001](#)).

Discussing the emergence of 'cyberjournalism' in the early 1990s, [Dahlgren \(1996\)](#) suggests we look at its online media logic as the particular institutionally structured features of a medium, the ensemble of technical and organizational attributes which impact on what gets represented in the medium and how it gets done, including the cultural competences of the producers and consumers of that medium. Seen in this light, one would have to consider the elements defining multimedia logic ([Deuze, 2004a](#)). The institutionally structured features of multimedia would assume some kind of cross-media ownership, participation or access to multiple platforms for storytelling. This convergence of communication modalities leads to an integration and possible specialization of information services, where the existing unity of production, content and distribution within each separate medium will cease to exist ([Bardoel, 1996](#)). The multimedia journalist has to make decisions about what kind of platforms to utilize when practicing his or her craft, and in the case of multimedia productions has to be able to oversee story 'packages' rather than repurposing single stories in multiple formats. This relates to organizational features of convergent media and the competences of journalists working in such new media contexts. Applied research suggests the necessity for multimedia operations to organize people in teams, and to arrange these working units in cross-departmentalized ways ([Huang et al., 2003](#)). This advice is underscored by the experiences of multimedia newsrooms such as *Tampa Bay Online* (TBO.com) in the US where the convergence process met with the resistance of reporters, who did not want to give up their

established way of doing things, and in particular refused to work in synergy with colleagues in other parts of the media organization (Stevens, 2002). Similar accounts can be found in case studies elsewhere as well, as a recent report on the state of European multimedia news shows in detail (Stone and Bierhoff, 2002). Research among reporters in various converging newsrooms in the US by [Singer \(2004\)](#) and [Boczkowski \(2004\)](#) shows similar experiences, citing turf wars and a general reluctance of journalists to innovate, share knowledge, embrace the new technology – even though those that do reportedly think they are better for it. A survey by multimedia consulting firm *Innovation* – commissioned by the World Association of Newspapers and conducted in 2001 among media executives worldwide – cited as the biggest obstacle to media convergence ‘the individualistic nature of journalists’ (mentioned by 31% of all respondents). On the basis of these studies and considerations one may argue that the shift from individualistic, ‘top-down’ mono-media journalism to team-based, ‘participatory’ multimedia journalism creates particular tensions in the industry and among journalists, and potentially challenges the ideal-typical values in journalism’s ideology (Bowman and Willis, 2003).

### **Journalism and society: multiculturalism**

Recognition of cultural diversity is generally seen as a function of multiculturalism, even though the normative implications for thinking about societies consisting of a plurality of cultures vary in different parts of the world (Parekh, 1997). Whether it functions as a celebration of migrant communities and thus challenges journalism in a particular country to become more international in its outlook, or whether it operates as an acknowledgement of the rural in an otherwise rather urban program of journalism, multiculturalism impacts upon all levels of editorial decision-making processes – and particularly challenges a notion of journalism as if it could or would operate outside society ([Cottle, 2000](#)). Multiculturalism can therefore be seen as one of the foremost issues in journalism where media professionals are confronted by their real or perceived responsibilities in contemporary society. This consideration is independent of whether such a society is seen as a melting pot of supposedly inherently different cultures, or as a society where culture is understood as actively and continuously negotiated over time (Baumann, 1999: 81ff). The multicultural society indeed shifts the focus and news values of today’s media professionals:

[o]rientation points for journalists are now the multicultural society, in which the position of minorities will have to be redefined. Race, language, ethnic

background, religion, all these factors are present and potential battlegrounds and generate a constant stream of events. (Bierhoff, 1999)

In many Western democracies, such as Australia, the USA, Great Britain and the Netherlands, several organizations, universities, scholars and media groups have put discussions on the role of the media in a multicultural society on top of the professional agenda in the last decade or so (see for example: [Jakubowicz et al. 1994](#); [Cottle, 2000](#)). Discussions are framed according to specific contexts and histories of the countries involved. In the Netherlands and Great Britain, for example, multiculturalism is related to discussions of the different histories of slave trade and colonialism as well as to preoccupations with Eurocentrism and nationalism or regionalism in the context of the European Union. Multiculturalism therefore assumes a variety of forms and meanings. Issues regarding the relevance of media and multiculturalism to journalism can be framed in terms of three central issues: knowledge of journalists about different cultures and ethnicities, issues of representation (pluriformity or diversity), and perceived social responsibilities of journalists in a democratic and multicultural society.

Knowledge can be seen as a resource of information, sources, experiences and contacts journalist may (or may not) have regarding different and overlapping cultures. A core aspect of professional knowledge is sourcing: who are included or excluded as news actors in the media. Knowledge also relates to a journalist's awareness of different modes of intercultural communication when working in a culturally diverse society. Knowledge in the context of the impact it may have on journalism can therefore be seen as an inventory and discussion of one's frames of reference, one's resources of information and life experiences when it comes to multicultural issues.

It can be argued in the context of the media that resources of information and experience (cf. knowledge), interpretation and explanation (cf. responsibilities of journalists), and social delegation are in fact all questions of representation. In an educational course or curriculum in journalism, issues of representation can be isolated to the ways in which journalists reflect ethnic and cultural diversity in terms of the labor force, the construction of their networks, and in the portrayal of minorities in still and moving images, spoken and written word. This may oversimplify the complex nature of representation, as it has different meanings in various disciplines such as art (cf. ways to depict and portray), or politics (cf. representing constituencies). However, in journalism studies, this has been an effective way to address the issue as in, for example, the multicultural hiring practices of news media organizations (see [Becker et al., 1999](#); [Ouaj, 1999](#)), and content analyses of the way news media write about or depict minorities (see for example [Van Dijk, 1991](#); [Entman and Rojecki, 2000](#)).

The social responsibilities of news media have been well documented and established as the public service doctrine in contemporary journalism. Costera Meijer (2001: 13) summarizes this responsibility as: 'informing citizens in a way that enables them to act as citizens'. As modern democracies have developed in the context of increased globalization and corresponding migration and the emergence of diasporic communities, the notion of cultural or multicultural citizenship has become a central consideration in today's social-political formation of society (Kymlicka, 1995). One may therefore expect today's journalism to develop equivalent cultural or multicultural sensibilities. This in turn problematizes journalists' role perceptions in contemporary society: an active awareness of multicultural sensibility contradicts a cherished independence of special interests. A valued detachment of society, however, may result in disconnections with certain publics and oversimplified representations of social complexity. Multiculturalism is a felt responsibility among media professionals everywhere – whether they like it or are opposed to it – and thus forces them to face their ideology and rethink their value system.

## **Discussion**

If news organizations opt for convergence or are striving to be more inclusive they also invite changes beyond hiring a couple of 'backpack' journalists or 'non-white' reporters. As shown in the admittedly brief discussions of the impact multimedia and multiculturalism have on the attributes, organization, culture and practices of journalists, there is more to these developments than issues of technology and representation alone. Such changes have also to do with editorial organization patterns, and challenges to established journalistic ways, norms and values of storytelling. Living up to the characteristics and potential added value of multimedia and multiculturalism challenges perceptions of the roles and functions of journalism as a whole.

Although an expanding body of scholarly work addresses technological and cultural issues regarding journalism, few authors combine such insights and research into a broader framework of thinking about journalism and media production processes as a whole. The literature on media and multiculturalism generally assumes more civic engagement or involvement by journalists and media organizations, seeking a reconnection of (predominantly white, both in terms of news coverage and news people) media with society (see Cottle, 2000; Wilson and Gutierrez, 2003). Similarly, work on new media and journalism signals increased interactivity and a further blurring of the hierarchical relationships between producers and users of news as the main

characteristics of the changes digitalization and convergence bring to conceptualizing journalism ([Löffelholz, 2000](#); [Hall, 2001](#); [Pavlik, 2001](#)).

What sets the sketched developments in society and technology apart in their impact upon contemporary journalism are related issues of control and transparency. Control as in initiatives to remove primacy of authority over the news agenda or even the storytelling experience from the hands of (professional) journalists in favor of more responsive, interactive and inclusive journalistic practices. Transparency, as in the increasing ways in which people both inside and external to journalism are given a chance to monitor, check, criticize and even intervene in the journalistic process. One element enables and follows the other, of course: more shared control over newsgathering and storytelling increases opportunities for surveillance and processual criticism. The point here is that a rethinking of journalism and the professional identity of journalists is necessary not so much because there is something wrong with the profession, but rather because it is essential in order to maintain a conceptually coherent understanding of what journalism is in an increasingly complex and liquid modern society ([Bauman, 2001](#)). It is my contention that ideology in this process of change and adaptation serves as the social cement of the professional group of journalists – following [Carey \(1989\)](#) and [Zelizer \(2004a: 101\)](#) where she writes how journalists use it ‘to become members of the group and maintain membership over time’. In the concluding section of this article I therefore explore how multiculturalism and multimedia potentially challenge historically embedded views in journalism.

### **Public service**

Providing a service to publics in a multimedia and multicultural environment is not the same safe value to hide behind like it used to be in the days of print and broadcast mass media. After all this is the age of individualization, audience fragmentation and attention spans ranging from minutes while watching to seconds while surfing. Some early consequences for newswork have been documented. For instance, the practice of multimedia journalism presupposes teamwork and sharing expertise to produce story packages that can be delivered across media, including (but not limited to) interactive components ([Deuze, 2004a](#)). Multicultural journalism suggests actively seeking out new angles and voices from undercovered communities, engaging actively in public life among diverse peoples – whether some authors like it ([Wilson, Gutierrez and Chao, 2003](#)) or not ([McGowan, 2001](#)). A slow and subtle shift occurs in the consensual notion of serving the public, as it moves from a primary top-down meaning to an increasingly bottom-up application. It is a move from ‘telling people what they need to know’ to [Carey’s \(1989\[1975\]\)](#) ideal of amplifying conversations society has with itself. In this

context the public journalism movement can be understood as a way to bridge the gap between these oppositional expectations of reporters and editors: it maintains its primacy on storytelling while cautiously embracing the wants and needs of an audience.

### ***Objectivity***

The strategic ritual of 'objective' detachment has been described in much of the (critical) literature as one of the causes for the divide between journalism and its publics (Schudson, 2001). Interestingly, studies in new media newsrooms as well as on multicultural reporting offer an alternate interpretation of objectivity. The discourse of professional distance clearly stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric of inclusivity (regarding diverse media and minorities). A multicultural sensitivity challenges objectivity as it is commonly understood, and supposedly offers a way out of the binary paradigm of 'getting both sides of the story' in favor of a more complex or multi-perspectival reading of events. Multimedia's careful embrace of interactivity as well as a merging of different cultures (print, broadcast, online; 'hard' and 'soft' news, marketing and editorial) within the news organization – a perceived necessary byproduct of convergence – confronts the individual professional with multiple interpretations of objectivity. It is therefore not surprising that journalists' main response to such changes and challenges is nostalgia (and stress). Yet at the same time reporters involved in the frontlines claim to have gained a new appreciation of different ways to do things, reaching out to different communities (and colleagues), enacting their agency in the process of change. In other words: an active awareness of (the potential added value of) new media technologies and cultural plurality makes the core value of objectivity more complex.

### ***Autonomy***

Journalists all over the world voice concerns regarding their freedom to work as they please. Editorial autonomy is invoked in the face of any extra-journalistic or management-driven force. In an increasingly transparent and sometimes even participatory news ecology, 'autonomy' as an individual-level concept is quite problematic. Working in multimedia news teams, journalists have to at least learn to share autonomy. Engaging people with ethnicities, religious beliefs or nationalities assumed to be different than one's own challenges the age-old ways of doing things in many newsrooms where only peers tend to be seen as legitimate sparring partners for creating credible newswork. The literature addressing multiculturalism calls for more community-based reporting, signals the need for journalists to become much

more aware of entrenched inequalities in society, and expects media professionals to become active agents in reversing these (Cottle, 2000). Journalistic autonomy in this context is collaborative (with colleagues and publics) in its implications, and thus begets a distinctly different understanding.

### ***Immediacy***

The 'right here, right now' credo of journalism is challenged by normative claims made by advocates of both multicultural and multimedia journalism: these styles of reporting apparently bring more depth to journalistic storytelling by packaging news and information across media and throughout diverse communities. As mentioned before, this potential of multi-perspective news narratives adds more complexity to journalistic storytelling. According to some critics, investing time to get to know different communities (networking without necessarily pursuing a news story), or cross-platform storytelling (without the depth provided by specialization in a single medium) is a luxury not available when practicing, studying or researching journalism (Campbell, 1998; Castaneda, 2003). The question becomes, what *kind* of immediacy are we talking about. The digital media environment allows reporters to constantly edit and update their story packages, and even to include end-users in this process (for example by offering options for feedback, postings to discussion platforms, uploading files). On the other hand, studies of organizational journalistic cultures suggest that it is exactly the predisposition to fast work according to set ways of doing things (like the day-to-day deadline schedule of programming and printing) that effectively prevents journalism from becoming more open to diversity – both in terms of newsroom diversity (including and accommodating different voices like younger, female, disabled, and ethnic minority colleagues), and sourcing (allowing different languages, grassroots spokesperson, seeking alternate interpretations) (Cottle, 2000). In short, immediacy in a multimedia and multicultural environment entails the sense of speed inherent in the 24/7 deadline structure of online publishing to a potential worldwide audience. Yet it also means exactly the opposite in that it offers depth, inclusiveness and more than two polarized perspectives.

### ***Ethics***

Of all these values, a sense of ethics is probably the most researched – even though scholars like Starck (2001) criticize the expanding volume of journalism ethics research, in particular for its lack of cross-cultural perspectives, and lament the apparent gap between theory and practice in the field. Ethics, however situational, based on casuistry, or principled, can and have been used by journalists and scholars alike to claim higher moral ground when judging the quality of reporting (Iggers, 1999; Ryan, 2001: 18). Indeed, scholars and



media professionals in both fields tend to advocate a turn to ideal journalistic values that supposedly supersede medium-specific particularities or cultural complexities. It is important to note how ethics can be both a flag behind which to rally the journalistic troops in defense of commercial, audience-driven or managerial encroachments, as well as an emblem of newswriters' legitimacy when reporting on complex events involving the wants and needs of different media, different people and different ways to be inclusive.

## **Conclusion**

The argument as outlined in this article builds on similar arguments in the contemporary literature in favor of a 'catholic' (Sparks, 1992), or 'comprehensive' (Morgan, 1998) and 'holistic' (Skinner et al., 2001) understanding of journalism. I deliberately ignored real or perceived differences between mainstream and alternative news media, between serious and popular journalism or between hard and soft news. For one, the cultural inquiry of journalism suggests such distinctions to be part of journalists' 'modernist bias of its official self-presentation' (Zelizer, 2004a: 112). On the other hand, if one chooses to accept for a moment that this representation is very real to a lot of journalists across the globe, I would perceive these and other binary oppositions increasingly untenable in our liquid modern news times. The analyses of the ideal-typical values of journalism, and how these vary and get meanings in different circumstances, have shown that any definition of journalism as a profession working truthfully, operating as a watchdog for the good of society as a whole and enabling citizens to be self-governing is not only naïve, but also one-dimensional and sometimes nostalgic for perhaps the wrong reasons. It is by studying how journalists from all walks of their professional life negotiate the core values that one can see the occupational ideology of journalism at work.

In this article I hope to have shown how revisiting an 'old' concept can provide added value to a more comprehensive theorizing of what journalism is, or could be. The key to this attempt has been to make explicit what the literature too often takes for granted – as in the operationalization of the values that journalism's ideology consists of – and to update this in terms of the immediate. The significance of this contribution also lies in its rejection of utopian or anti-utopian discourses when analyzing the impact of emerging sociocultural and socioeconomic issues on journalism. Instead I have pushed for a more holistic argument based on the assumption that multimedia developments and multiculturalism are indeed similar forces of change when seen through the lens of journalists' perceptions of themselves. Ultimately this

combination of insights may prove helpful both to the education and practice as well as the academic discipline of journalism.

## Notes

- 1 Key international journals: *Journalism Quarterly*, *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, *Journalism Studies*. Some examples of national journals devoted to journalism: *Australian Journalism Review*, *British Journalism Review*, *Ecquid Novi* (South Africa), *Brazilian Journalism Research*.
- 2 A similar conclusion formed the basis of the Journalism Studies Interest Group (JSIG), started in Summer 2004 as part of the International Communication Association. The JSIG manifesto for example states: 'The Interest Group is intended to facilitate empirical research and to bring more coherence to research paradigms, and in so doing, to further support the professionalization of journalism studies and journalism education. Furthermore, while journalism is presently studied across the field, often the individuals behind these different research endeavors do not have a place to speak with each other.'
- 3 See [Hall \(2001\)](#) and [Pavlik \(2001\)](#) for an international appreciation of new media and journalism; [Cottle \(2000\)](#) is a similar global overview regarding news media and multiculturalism.
- 4 I refer to two case studies I did that show how 'alternative' reporters for Indymedia websites ([Platon and Deuze, 2003](#)) as well as journalists working for Dutch tabloids ([Deuze, 2002b: 156ff](#)) indeed use the same values in their work as mainstream 'hard' news journalists. For a similar argument see [Eliasoph \(1988\)](#).
- 5 For a classic reference in this respect see the work of [Herbert Gans \(1979: 183\)](#). [Carey \(1989 \[1975\]: 47–8\)](#) suggests – following the work of [Clifford Geertz](#) – that ideology should be seen as providing answers to the invariably contradictory and inconsistent situations one finds oneself in as an individual between the 'chronic malintegration' of the personality and society. This interpretation of ideology – called strain theory – seems to be most fruitful for the argument at hand.
- 6 I argue that these values can indeed be seen as ideal-typical in the Weberian sense, in that they involve an accentuation of (arche-)typical courses of conduct for the professional group of journalists – one might say serving as a yardstick or measuring rod to ascertain similarities as well as deviations in concrete cases – and thus contributing to the exclusory potential of ideology – without necessarily being 'real'.
- 7 Indeed this function goes for all ideal-typical values in the ideology of journalism.

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