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**The role of Journalism in the Digital Age
*Being a superhero or Clark Kent: Do journalists think that
Networked Journalism is an appropriate tool to work with
(in the future)?***

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One of the first sentences I heard at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism was: "Reflect on what journalism is." It was a crucial one. Journalists nowadays are so busy dealing with deadline pressure, declining revenues and the ongoing and unpredictable development of social media, that they tend to forget to reflect.

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1. Introduction

“We are the independent observers of the world, who go places our audience can't go, dig where our audiences can't dig, study and interpret what our audiences do not have time to study and interpret, so that our audiences can better understand the world.”¹

Most traditional journalists would probably agree with Michael Oreskes' description of journalism. Why? Because journalists like to believe that they are important. Let's get this straight: They are! Journalism (still) matters. Even today, and despite the fact that thousands of journalists all around the world are losing their jobs and traditional media like newspapers, radio or television are struggling with loss of audience, revenue and attention. A quick look at France shows the difficult times for traditional media: According to an OECD study, between 1945 and 2004 the number of regional titles went down from 153 to 56 and national titles from 26 to 10.²

To agree with Professor Charlie Beckett, the director of POLIS, a media think-tank at the Lodon School of Economics: “Journalism is being turned upside down. It is on a roller-coaster ride that can be exhilarating but rather scary.”³ The reasons are obvious: The impact of new media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or WhatsApp; the emergence of new devices like smartphones or tablets, the growth of easy to use digital publishing technology and perhaps most crucial – changing audience behaviour.

In the middle of all these changes and challenges we find traditional journalists who were trained in the past as gatekeepers or watchdogs, trained to verify stories, analyze and comment on them – the core values of journalism. They also grew up believing that journalism is some kind of „cult, a fraternity, a guild.“⁴. Frankly,

¹ Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia: saving Journalism so it can save the world*, West Sussex, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, p. 72

² OECD, *News in the Internet age: new trends in publishing*, OECD Publishing, 2010, p. 36.

³ Charlie Beckett, *ibid.*, p.9

⁴ Charlie Beckett, *ibid.*, p.43

„Journalism likes to think it is a superhero when it is really Clark Kent.“⁵

But a superhero for whom? A so-called audience that is equipped to do the same journalistic work or possibly even better than journalists themselves. An audience who have instant access to news, who can report news straight from the scene and share it multifold via social media. An audience, who wants to be a superhero too.

To emphasis this point further: In summer 2013 almost 55 percent of all new mobile phones handsets sold were smartphones. “By definition a smartphone has a high-quality camera with video capability, and it allows the user to easily connect to the web to disseminate the pictures. As a result, more and more people have the technology in their pockets to very quickly film events they see around them, and share them directly with people who might be interested, as well as more widely via social networks.“⁶

More and more consumers of news are becoming contributors to and creators of news. Nic Newman, digital strategist and research associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in Oxford, speaks of an “era of active citizen“⁷. According to the Reuters Digital News Report “Facebook is becoming increasingly dominant, with 41% (plus 6 per cent) using the network to find, read, watch, share, or comment on the news each week.⁸ “ Also Twitter plays an increasingly more important role as “an active destination for news by an audience that is deeply interested in latest developments.”⁹

Dan Gillmor goes even one step further, when he says: “We used to say that journalists write the first draft of history. Not so, not any longer. The people on the ground at these events write the first draft.”¹⁰ For journalists this means that their traditional role is changing towards a “democratisation of the news process”¹¹. Not

⁵ Charlie Beckett, *ibid.*, p.44

⁶ <http://verificationhandbook.com/book/chapter3.php>

⁷ Nic Newman: *How journalism faces a second wave of disruption from technology and changing audience behaviour*. Lecture at Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, 14/10/2015.

⁸ <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2015/executive-summary-and-key-findings-2015/>

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Charlie Beckett *ibid.*, p.154

¹¹ Peter Lee-Wright, Angela Phillips, Tamara Witschge, *Changing Journalism*, Oxon, Routledge, 2012, p. 107

only do they need to understand the new public and their newly adopted behaviour as contributors, they need to understand the audiences` desire to participate. “We won’t understand the future of journalism without realizing that this is more than a change in gadgets and gizmos.”¹². Does this herald the end of professional journalism? Will amateurs replace the role of traditional journalists? No, but journalists will need to find a way to get closer to the audience, to collaborate and co-create with them. The public has more instant access to information and is closer to the actual event than journalists are. This fact „changes the creation of news from being linear and top-down to a collaborative process“.¹³

This research paper will focus on one solution of how this collaboration could look like: Networked Journalism, a concept where „professionals and amateurs are working together to get the real story, linking to each other accross brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives“¹⁴- all this enabled by „Web 2.0 technologies such as mobile phones, email, websites, blogs, micro-blogging, and social networks“.¹⁵

The paper will first and foremost explore the following key research question: Do journalists think that Networked Journalism is an appropriate tool to work with (in the future)? In other words: Is the guild ready to open the gate? Or do journalists think this is the first step towards a „de-professionalisation“ and a „shift of power from the news producers to those traditionally known as consumers“?¹⁶

The first part of this research paper will examine the concept of Networked Journalism, and work with case studies to identify opportunities and risks associated with Networked Journalism. One of the more obvious risks is that journalists could publish inaccurate information they receive from the public. A journalist should always keep in mind that “in today's networked world, people also intentionally spread fake information and rumors as a joke, to drive "likes" and

¹² Charlie Beckett, *ibid.*, p.33

¹³ Charlie Beckett, “The value of networked journalism“, POLIS, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2010.

¹⁴ Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia: saving Journalism so it can save the world*, , p.46

¹⁵ Charlie Beckett, “The value of networked journalism“.

¹⁶ Peter Lee-Wright, et al’, p.33, p.117

followers, or simply to cause panic.”¹⁷ But there are models that help journalists to verify this information: Like the User Generated Content (UGC) hub at the BBC where a team of journalists verify all the data that is sent in by public.

On the other side Networked Journalism offers opportunities as well. Every year fewer journalists create more and more content, following the maxim of the management to “do more with less”. So perhaps journalists can benefit from the collaboration with amateurs to fill the editing gap.

Due to the lack of academic research on the topic the second chapter conducts interviews with British and Austrian journalists to explore answers to the key research question: Do journalists think Networked Journalism is an appropriate tool to work with (in the future)? Some of the threads emerging around this topic will be: What do journalists know of the concept of Networked Journalism? How do they see their role as a journalist nowadays? Are they willing to collaborate with the public? Do they think that journalists can still fulfill their role as gatekeepers? What is the value of user participation? Will there be a need of professional journalists in the future?

In addition to the interviews with British and Austrian Journalists, Professor Charlie Beckett will share his insights on this topic. Beckett is the founding Director of POLIS, the forum for research and debate into journalism and society at the London School of Economics (LSE). He also worked as a broadcast-journalist for the BBC and Channel 4 News. He is one of the leading experts when it comes to Networked Journalism. His book „*SuperMedia: saving Journalism so it can save the world*“ and his work at the LSE were an inspiration and form a centerpiece of this research paper.

The third and last chapter, the conclusion, will link and analyze the key findings from chapter one and two. It will also explain why the core values of journalism are still irreplaceable. It is vital for journalists to reconsider their role. To quote Dr. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Director of Research at the Reuters Institute for the Study

¹⁷ <http://verificationhandbook.com/book/chapter1.php>

of Journalism: “To say: You will miss us when we are gone is not a business model.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Rasmus Kleis Nielsen: *The Unfinished Media Revolution*. Fellows Seminar at Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, 14/10/2015.

2. Networked Journalism: A risk or an opportunity?

Before we focus on the main research question, it is important to define Networked Journalism and understand why this concept is needed in today's newsworld. Using case studies, the first chapter will examine the opportunities and challenges of this concept and propose solutions how journalists can verify the massive amounts of data coming from the audience.

2.1. **Definition:** To explain it in one sentence Networked Journalism is: „Journalists working with the participation of the public.“¹⁹ This collaboration includes „citizen journalism, interactivity, open sourcing, wikis, blogging, and social networking, not as add-ons, but as an essential part of news production and distribution itself.“²⁰

Or as blogger Jeff Jarvis puts it: „Networked Journalism takes into account the collaborative nature of journalism now: professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each other accross brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives. It recognizes the complex relationship that will make news. (...) I believe that the more that journalists behave like citizens, the stronger their journalism will be. In networked journalism, the public can get involved in a story before it is reported, contributing facts, questions, and suggestions. The journalist can rely on the public to help report the story.“²¹

Why has this concept emerged? Because the audience behaviour has changed. Through the impact of new media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or WhatsApp, new devices like smartphones and the growth of easy to use digital publishing technology, the audience no longer wants to sit at home and wait for news to arrive, they want to play an active role and participate in the creation and sharing of news . “News is no longer a product that flops onto your doormat or springs into life at the flick of a remote control. It is now a non-linear process, a multi-directional interaction. And journalism is no longer a

¹⁹ <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2015/03/31/but-how-do-you-know-that-its-true-notes-from-nishbr-verification-workshop/>

²⁰ Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia*, p.4

²¹ Charlie Beckett, *ibid.*, p.46

self-contained manufacturing industry.”²²

Nic Newman speaks of an “era of active citizen”²³. To share some figures that emphasizes this point: In 2015 all in all 4.9 billion connected devices were registered.²⁴ According to the 2015 Digital News Report, two years ago around 18 per cent of people living in the UK used Facebook to find news. In 2015 the figure rose to almost 30 percent.²⁵ Around the globe one billion people use the social network every day. To contrast, Twitter has 300 million users every day. What is really interesting, when it comes to Facebook and Twitter, is that people look for news on Twitter, but they bump into stories on Facebook and THEN share them. As one Fellow put it: “People of my generation aren’t reading a full newspaper - they are looking what their friends are reading, what’s trending.”²⁶

What does this mean for journalists? To quote Newman: “As journalists, we cannot ignore them (the audience) any longer.”²⁷ So the collaboration with the audience is not only necessary, it is inevitable, because „we can do more together than we can apart.”²⁸

Sounds like a match made in heaven but will they live happily ever after? It depends.

Perhaps „newsrooms are no longer fortresses for the Fourth Estate, they are hubs at the centre of endless networks.”²⁹ However, these endless networks and the massive amount of data journalists are receiving from the public also present challenges.

What happens when journalists are facing an information-overload, when the

²² Charlie Beckett, “The value of networked journalism”.

²³ Nic Newman, *ibid.*

²⁴ Klaus Miller: *Can Data save Journalism? How Analytics change the newsroom and beyond*, Seminar at the Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, 28/10/2015.

²⁵ <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2015/pathways-to-news-2015/>

²⁶ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/how-journalism-faces-second-wave-disruption-technology-and-changing-audience-behaviour-0>

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Charlie Beckett, *„Supermedia’*, Foreword.

²⁹ Charlie Beckett, “The value of networked journalism”.

audience spreads fake information to gather likes and clicks or when the increasing demand for fast turnaround affects accuracy? The following case study demonstrates what can happen when journalists don't verify the data.

2.2. Risks

The Germanwings case: On March 24th Germanwings Flight 4U9525 crashed in the French Alps. A few days later the world knew who was responsible for this tragic incident: Andreas Lubitz, the co-pilot who committed suicide and killed 149 people and himself when he smashed the jet into the mountains. Within moments the world also knew the face of Lubitz, which was published on covers and broadcasted on TV. Not all media outlets showed the right picture though. The confusion originated in a tweet that accidentally aired the wrong image. Journalists the world over, even highly regarded professionals, treated this tweet – under deadline pressure of breaking news - as a reliable source of information without checking its validity. As a consequence an innocent man, Andreas G., was labelled a mass murderer.



Figure 1: <https://www.facebook.com/kobuk/photos/pb.282064592970.-2207520000.1446453266./10153687703872971/?type=3&theater>, 2. November 2015.

In an interview with the „Salzburger Nachrichten“ Maria Windhager, the lawyer of Andreas G. doesn't blame new media for this incident. “The Internet enables journalists to get more information in a faster way. In theory a good journalist could benefit from this and gets better. But the problem is that there

are so many doubtful sources that journalists use thoughtlessly. The biggest temptation is speed. Journalists find an image on the internet and use it immediately. Without verifying the source because that would take time.“³⁰

I would see two things emerging from this case: First of all, discussions about new digital ethics to help journalists face the ethical dilemmas that come with the growth of easy digital publishing technology. “Even as the press write scare stories that Facebook can give you cancer, sex diseases and is a danger to your children, newspapers use it as a valuable research tool.“³¹ Secondly: Newsrooms should have clear guidelines and procedures on how to handle information from the public BEFORE a disaster or breaking news strike. Craig Silverman emphasizes this point: “A disaster is no time to try to verify on the fly. It's not the moment to figure out what your standards and practices are for handling crowdsourced information. Yet it's what many - too many - newsrooms and other organizations do.“³² Charlie Beckett agrees and adds another important aspect: „Craig Silverman is right – you can't compete with the bullsh*t, clickbait, aggregation merchants – so for 'real' journalists good verification and curation is your business model not an add-on option.“³³

What does good verification look like? One solution is described by Richard Sambrook in a report. „Some newsrooms provide the audience with available information before they verify it. They say how they obtained information – for example a video clip – and warn that the information may not be entirely reliable. They expect audience members to make up their own minds about the credibility of information. (...) It assumes that new consumers are media-savvy and it moves some of the burden of responsibility away from the journalists to the audience.“³⁴ Can this be a viable approach though? To shift the responsibility for credible sources from journalists to the audience? No, because journalists are working in an age, when according to the “Zeit“

³⁰ Anja Kröll, “Als Massenmörder abgestempelt”, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, September 8 – p.10.

³¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/help/insideguardian/2010/apr/14/journalism-trends-tools-technologies>

³² <http://verificationhandbook.com/book>

³³ <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2015/03/31/but-how-do-you-know-that-its-true-notes-from-nishbr-verification-workshop/>

³⁴ Richard Sambrook, “Delivering Trust: Impartiality and Objectivity in the Digital Age.”, Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2012.

credibility is more important than ever when it comes to communication. Because “credibility is the shortest good in an era of information-overload.”³⁵ So what should be done?

2.2.1. *User Generated Content*

This paper focus on one model that has become quiet famous in the United Kingdom: The User Generated Content (UGC) hub at BBC News. „Here a team of 15 journalists process the vast amount of material sent in by the public to the BBC. Most of it is filtered through the BBC *Have Your Say* website. (...) The Hub gathers the information and verifies it through standard journalistic practices like phoning and fact-checking. This approach produces reliable witness reports which are sometimes leveraged for additional BBC coverage. It also turns up new stories (...) The UGC hub allows the BBC to make contact with hard-to-reach groups.”³⁶

Some might argue that running their own UGC hub is not affordable for smaller news companies and that a lot of journalists are needed for fact-checking, ideally ones who are well trained and experienced. They have a point. And yet realizing the concept of Networked Journalism and co-creation with the public requires investment in setting up an infrastructure that enables the news outlet to maintain credibility. It is an investment in their brand as a news company. As a Sky News executive describes it: „At the same time we´ve to protect our brand and protect other people who use the site from some of the sick people that are out there.”³⁷

At the end of the day the brand can help traditional media to survive the competition with new media. „Trust is the glue that holds newsrooms together and ultimately binds readers to a specific newspaper and newspapers in general.”³⁸ And: “Getting the facts right is a cardinal

³⁵ Die Zeit, “Wer entscheidet über unsere Köpfe”, Hamburg, Zeitverlag Gerd Bucerius GmbH&Co.KG, October 1 – p. 11.

³⁶ Charlie Beckett, *„Supermedia“*, p. 81.

³⁷ Peter Lee-Wright et al.; p. 128.

³⁸ John V. Pavlik, *Journalism and new media*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 125.

principle of journalism.³⁹ Especially at a time when not only journalists are facing an information overload but also the audience. People have no time to verify all the stories they find online and for that reason they still need journalists and a brand they can rely on. “They are going back to brands they trust.”⁴⁰ They long for brands with credibility, as described in the “Zeit”. Maybe people love to use social media but they don’t necessarily trust social media. According to the Digital News Report TV comes out strongest for accuracy and reliability.⁴¹ Journalists need to be aware of these dynamics, and the importance of fact- and source checking as it relates to the brand they are producing content for. Otherwise the brand might suffer, and the readership might move on.

At the end of this chapter let us return to the case study of Germanwings. What would have been the right approach for those journalists who published the wrong picture and labelled an innocent man as a mass murder?

Trushar Barot, assistant editor at the BBC UGC explains it like this. „Most importantly, remember that if you’ve gone through the above checks and processes and you’re still in doubt — don’t use the image!”⁴²

³⁹ <http://verificationhandbook.com/book>

⁴⁰ Nic Newman: *How journalism faces a second wave of disruption from technology and changing audience behaviour.*

⁴¹ <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org>

⁴² <http://verificationhandbook.com/book/chapter4.php>

2.3. Opportunities

After a look on the risks of Networked Journalism, let`s now turn to the opportunities as well. What happens when the collaboration between journalists and the public works well? When the concept of Networked Journalism becomes reality?

The Miracle on the Hudson River: On January 15 an Airbus A320 ditched in the Hudson river. The incident made heroes of the captain and the first officer after the jet lost both engines from goose strikes. All 155 passengers and crew members were rescued and one picture became famous. It was not taken from a journalist, it was taken from a man who was accidentally on a ferry and aired it via Twitter. Almost every TV-Station in the USA used it and newspapers printed it on their front pages the next day.

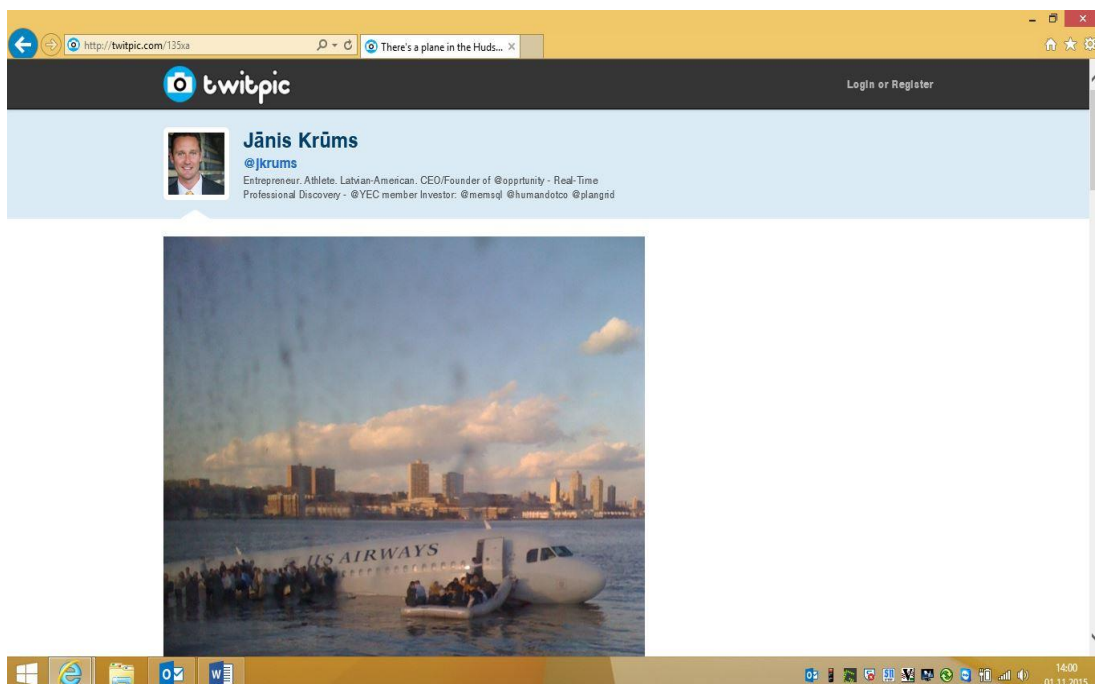


Figure 2: <http://twitpic.com/135xa> - There's a plane in the Hudson. I'm on the ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy. Jānis Krūms (@jkrums), November, 2, 2015.

Krums „was the source of an urgent, eye-opening image that only a bystander could have captured at that moment: People on the ground are even more valuable in places where journalists have little or no access (...). Today, these witnesses and participants often reach for a phone to document and share

what they see.⁴³ This case study shows that in the news-gathering-phase UGC can give journalists one essential advantage: speed. “If you want speed of reaction, then of course the first people, they are the public, if you can get them to send you their video or stills or whatever, then that gives you competitive advantage as a 24/7 news provider.”⁴⁴

Also two other opportunities should be examined in this chapter as a kind of thought-provoking impulse.

Getting the audience back: It is a fact that revenues for traditional media are declining. The audience doesn't spend much of their attention on traditional media and in a worst-case scenario the audience simply disappears. “Not all people who stop buying newspapers, for example, transfer their attention to the newspaper's online version”⁴⁵ explains Beckett and even goes one step further: “The audience of yesterday is thinning while tomorrow's audience is simply not turning up. So this is not just about the numbers. It is about losing a whole culture of paying attention to conventional news.”⁴⁶ Networked Journalism could be an opportunity to bring the audience back to the process. With the process of collaboration the audience has the chance to create news in a way they want to consume it, they are interested in and „if you are part of a process, you will inevitably feel ownership.”⁴⁷

⁴³ <http://verificationhandbook.com/book>

⁴⁴ Peter Lee-Wright et al., p.125.

⁴⁵ Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia*, p.20.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

The audience fills the editing gap: As mentioned in the Introduction journalism faces tough times. Every year fewer journalists create more and more content. One maxim of the management is to “do more with less“. Sibylle Hamann, an Austrian freelancer journalist uses an excellent metaphor to explain the current situation of journalists. She compares them with bees. Bees which are living in a relatively empty beehive because most of them got sacked. There are only some high-performance-bees left, which hectically fly around and try to fulfill all the duties like nightshifts and working the weekends. They are so busy protecting and maintaining the structure of the beehive that they cannot focus on their core work. They cannot leave the hive to collect honey.⁴⁸ And yes, honey stands for stories. Maybe journalists can benefit from the collaboration with “amateur-bees“ to help them fill the editing gap?

To quote Beckett again: “Every year there have been fewer journalists creating more product. The managers would argue that it is a result of the efficiencies of new technology. They are right. But there does come a point where journalists are so efficient that they do not have time for the kind of networking, background research, and speculative effort that brings long-term rewards in terms of editorial quality.”⁴⁹ Here the audience can help out. As Jeff Jarvis explains it:

„Try this on as a new rule for newspapers: Cover what you do best. Link to the rest. That’s not how newspapers work now. They try to cover everything because they used to have to be all things to all people in their markets. They took wire-service copy and reedit it so they could give their audiences the world. But in the age of the link, this is clearly inefficient and unnecessary. You can link to the stories that someone else did and to the rest of the world. And if you do that, it allows you to reallocate your dwindling resources to what matters.“⁵⁰

⁴⁸ <http://derstandard.at/2000023787011/Hamann-Eine-neue-Geschichte-werde-ich-im-Internet-nicht-finden?ref=article>

⁴⁹ Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia*, p.29.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia*, , p. 150.

This thought of Jarvis is crucial for the future of journalism. Just imagine that: if journalists stick to the core values of journalism, and are able to work closely with the people on the ground, develop techniques and tools to verify the information and cover what they do best and link the rest – we would have reached perfection.

However this scenario will only become a reality if journalists and editors buy into the concept of Networked Journalism and rethink their collaborative approach. The aim of the next chapter is to explore the question: do journalists think that Networked journalism is an appropriate tool to work with (in the future)?

3. Journalists and Networked Journalism

How does it feel to be a journalist in the year 2015? Frankly, it could be better. Thousands of journalists have lost their jobs, the revenues for newspapers are still declining, the audience is disappearing and new tools and competition are emerging: New media. Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and WhatsApp... Tools which enable news consumers to become news contributors. As Andreas Koller from the *Salzburger Nachrichten* describes it: "My role as journalist in the digital age has definitely changed. Due to the new technology there is now a multitude of information sources. And there are millions of new players in the field of information: all the people that use social media (and even the hundreds of people that share their information via old fashioned e-mail etc.) How has that changed my role? For a journalist it is more important than ever to fulfil his or her role as a gate keeper. Each information that comes my way has to be checked and rechecked. That's not new: The new thing is that there is a lot more information to deal with than in pre-digital-age. And that information is less reliable than before. As everyone knows who has ever tried to confirm information sourced via Twitter or Facebook."

That can be very challenging for professional journalists. Especially when at once people understand the concept of Networked Journalism in this vein: Everybody can be a journalist, everybody can do the job. – That's not quite true. "No one says amateurs will or should replace professional journalists."⁵¹ Also when going back to the definition of journalism it becomes clear that the public is not a threat. "Journalism is defined by Denis McQuail as "paid writing (and the audiovisual equivalent) for public media with reference to actual and ongoing events of public relevance"⁵². Amateurs normally don't get paid for their collaboration with professional journalists.

At the same time we cannot deny the fact that, "we (journalists) need to compete in a way we have never done before. We need to remember our role. The task is no longer being first to break a story. The task is to verify, to analyze and to explain a story. Because if you want to be first, you will lose - Facebook or Twitter

⁵¹ Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia*, Foreword.

⁵² Tony Harcup, *Journalism principles & practice*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2004, p. 3.

will always be one step ahead.”⁵³ Journalists need to realize that amateurs will not replace them, and that it is the audience behaviour that has changed. Journalists should consider two facts. First: „The consumer was always king, but now they can choose their kingdom.“⁵⁴ Second: “Networked journalists need to be better journalists than ever, because they are working with people who think they know better – the public.”⁵⁵

Are journalists aware of these dynamics? Do they think that Networked Journalism is an appropriate instrument to work with in the future?

To give an answer to the main research question Austrian journalists from the *Austrian Press Agency*, *Kurier* and *Salzburger Nachrichten* as well as British Journalists working for *Reuters*, *The Times*, and *Sky News* were interviewed.

Although only a few of them are familiar with the term Networked Journalism, all of them are already working more or less as networked journalists. As Greg Milam from *Sky News* explains it: “As a formal concept with a name, I know little of 'Networked Journalism' but as a day to day reality of working as a journalist, I believe it is a fact of life we have all become used to. It is nearly impossible to function as a news reporter in the modern media age without being fully immersed in the practices of networked journalism. In fact, I think it is now almost an instinctive way of working for most (certainly speaking from the perspective of a 24-hour TV news channel).“

In trying to find an answer to the main research question the interviews also revealed that guidelines for Networked Journalism, from management or other sources, are largely missing. As Andreas Koller from the *Salzburger Nachrichten* explains it: “Some of us journalists interact with the internet-community, some don't.“ And Greg Milam from *Sky News* says: “I think the concept arrived in our newsroom some time ago although I think newsrooms including ours are still working out how best to accommodate it – how to reap the benefits, mitigate the mistakes and tell stories in the best way. The pace of technological advances and

⁵³ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/how-journalism-faces-second-wave-disruption-technology-and-changing-audience-behaviour-0>

⁵⁴ Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia*., p. 77.

⁵⁵ Charlie Beckett, *ibid.*, p. 146.

the speed with which new platforms gain public currency (ie Periscope, Whatsapp) will mean how newsrooms adapt and become flexible will remain the biggest challenge.“

Beckett explains in his interview that the most important key skill for journalists in the future is to “learn adaptability. It is not about people teaching how we did it last year because we are such in a transitional phase.“

Even though news organisations are still struggling to find a good way of dealing with the issue, the will to collaborate with the public is obviously there. As John Ludlam from *Reuters* describes it: “I think all sensible journalists realise that our profession is evolving and that we have to evolve with it.“

David Charter from *The Times*, reflecting on collaborating with the public, argues that: “Journalists have always collaborated with the public to some extent, depending on the type of story. I don’t think it is often appropriate for matters of international relations or high politics, for example, but can be useful when exploring the impact of political decisions, such as in the refugee crisis. When writing for a national newspaper, the input of individual people can often be too parochial or frankly too ill-informed to add anything meaningful to the story.”

Most of the interviewed journalists see a strong benefit in user generated content and value audience participation. As Koller from the *Salzburger Nachrichten* puts it: “It can widen one’s professional view, it’s a way to learn what the public think – and in any case it’s a way to get to know one’s audience. That is one of the most important factors of successful journalism.“ Milam from *Sky News* reminds journalists about another fact: “There is value in user participation of a diversity of voices, raw and real nature of opinion or material, instant insight and feedback, a more relatable news experience for the audience – after all, we are supposed to be doing it for them.“ And Ludlam from *Reuters* points out the advantages for the audience too : “It is easier for people who did not have a voice in the past to express their views. In a world in which governments and large corporations are trying harder than ever to stifle dissent, the Internet allows free speech to survive – just.“

David Charter from *The Times* is more critical : “It can be a very useful tool to help improve accuracy and discover new themes and angles, but the newspaper is still a product that needs to be professionally written and edited so there is a limit to the amount of user participation which is truly helpful. The collaborator has to have something relevant and incisive to add or they are just time-wasting.”

All these shared opinions and diverse insights reveal a clear trend on the key research question of the paper: Do journalists think that Networked Journalism is an appropriate tool to work with (in the future)? The answer is: Yes, not only in the future but also right now. To quote Sky News`Milam: “I think it is an appropriate tool for the present and future in newsrooms. The availability of voices at the heart of any given story, in real time, is hugely valuable, as is the opportunity to engage directly and immediately with the audience. I think recognising that we are part of a conversation about a story – and no longer some sort of patrician commentator – makes for a better and more relatable product too.”

It seems that Beckett’s wish has come true that the culture of journalism has changed and “journalism becomes more open, transparent, inclusive, flexible.”⁵⁶ Beckett also confirmed this in an interview for this paper: “ But it happened much more rapidly than I thought. The time I wrote the book in 2008 it was difficult to convince journalists that it is not a bad thing to be networked. I was really surprised when we did a report in 2010 on Networked Journalism and it was just accepted because the advantages were so obvious. I think that is obviously one of the qualifiers: journalists won’t do anything unless there is an advantage for them.”

Charter from *The Times* argues: “I’ve always worked like this and the more connected world is a fact of life now, so it is not a case of being appropriate, it is just our normal environment now. Technology and social media have made it easier to connect, find people and receive their input.” Ludlam from *Reuters* puts it in a similar way: “Why not? Our practices are constantly evolving.”

⁵⁶ Charlie Beckett, *Supermedia*, p. viii.

Andreas Koller from the *Salzburger Nachrichten* also believes that Networked Journalism is an appropriate tool but is hesitant about the associated risks: “Yes I think so. We have to take that tool for what it is: A big heap of information that we know nothing about: Not its sources, not its relevance, not its truth. We can't give these pieces of information to our readers without checking and rechecking. We have to spread facts, not rumours.”

Kollers` citation reflects a major concern of all interviewees which should not be ignored at the end of this chapter: the role as a gatekeeper. Beckett explains the new role of journalists „becoming the facilitator rather than gatekeeper“⁵⁷. But for all interviewees this is not an option as Dominik Schreiber from *Kurier* puts it: “Journalists have to fulfill their role as gatekeepers. Otherwise readers will believe all the disinformation that is aired on Twitter or Facebook as you can see in the refugees crisis at the moment. And Greg Milam from *Sky News* adds: “I think the position of gatekeeper is one of the most interesting aspects of this whole discussion. Does society still view journalists as having that role in selecting or filtering, do they believe anyone else should have it and, if not journalists, then who? I think the rise of citizen journalism, for all its value, means this question needs to be answered. At the very least, in a world awash with voices and content, how does a news narrative develop?”

Let`s summarize the key findings of the research interviews:

- Yes, journalists think that Networked Journalism is an appropriate tool to work with right now AND in the future.
- Networked Journalism has already become a day to day reality of their work. It is no longer a tool one may choose to use, but it has become their normal work environment.
- Although guidelines are largely missing, the will to collaborate with the public is strong.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

- The value of co-creating and collaborating with the audience on news is that their voices are becoming part the story, and the journalist is no longer some sort of patrician commentator.
- A risk is an information-overload for journalists.
- The values of user participation are: to get to know the audience in a better way, to widen the view of journalists, to provide the audience with more and better information and to give the public an opportunity to express their views and follow the principles of free speech.
- The role as a gatekeeper remains vital.

4. Conclusion

“We are the independent observers of the world, who go places our audience can't go, dig where our audiences can't dig, study and interpret what our audiences do not have time to study and interpret, so that our audiences can better understand the world.”

This research paper opened with a quote from Michael Oreskes on journalism and its purpose, and it will end with it. For good reason. By adding one word, it perfectly reflects what Network Journalism is about, and captures the continued importance of the profession and what is needed to ensure that the core values of journalism are not compromised. According to the findings and the conclusion of this research paper, Oreskes' citation must be transformed into:

*“We are the independent observers of the world, who go places **WITH** our audience, dig **WITH** our audience, study and interpret what our audiences do not have time to study and interpret, so that our audiences can better understand the world.”*

If journalists work as networked journalists it is crucial that they collaborate WITH their audience. Journalists are ready and willing to do so, as was revealed in the interviews. What is needed now is the support from management, the investment to create an infrastructure, and guidelines to enable effective collaboration and co-creation with the public in newsrooms, applying techniques and tools to manage and verify the data. And of course new digital ethics. But are these ethics really new?

Is it indeed new ethics for a journalist not to use an image if he hasn't verified its authenticity, as described in the Germanwings case? To recheck information that was provided by a stranger? No, it is not. As one journalist describes it: “It's nothing new. We've always had reliable eyewitnesses and unreliable eyewitnesses. It's part of a journalist's role to pull the facts from the

fiction and make a judgement what they believe is right and true."⁵⁸

These are the core values of journalism and the reason why I have not changed the second part of Oreskes`description: "...*study and interpret what our audiences do not have time to study and interpret, so that our audiences can better understand the world.*"

The role of a good journalist has always been to filter, edit, check, pack, analyze and comment – fundamentals of verification that have existed for decades and won`t become obsolete⁵⁹. Not even in the Digital Age.

What has changed is the speed, the methods, the fact that economic pressures force an increasing information and work load on fewer journalists and that journalism is no longer about being the first to break a story, because you can never beat Facebook nor Twitter. As Greg Milam from *Sky News* describes it: "I don't see a great difference, in some ways, to how I began as a local news reporter – you went to the scene of a story and asked the people there what was happening, aware that without them the story was impossible to tell. Obviously the methods and speed have changed but the principle remains the same. Equally, the responsibility to fact-check, seek balance and report a range of voices remains vital and a greater challenge in the current media environment." And even Beckett points up in his interview: „Journalism is not like silicon valley starts up. You can`t re invent yourself everyday. You can`t say: ‚Hey man, let us try everything.´ There has to be adaptability in focus.“

An example from the Associated Press (AP) also underlines the core-value-theory. When AP promoted Fergus Bell to take the lead on creating and implementing processes for verifying user-generated video content, he first turned to the organization's longstanding guidance on verification, rather than to new tools and technology. "AP has always had its standards and those really haven't changed, and it was working with those standards that we were able to specifically set up workflows and best practices for dealing with social media," Bell said. "So AP has always strived to find the original source so that

⁵⁸ Peter Lee-Wright et al, p. 128.

⁵⁹ <http://verificationhandbook.com/book>

we can do the reporting around it. And that's always the way that we go about verifying UGC. We can't verify something unless we speak to the person that created it, in most cases."⁶⁰

If journalist stick to these rules and editors provide them with the appropriate tools, guidance and education, there will be place for “good journalism“ in the Digital Age. A kind of journalism that is still needed. Sometimes in the shape of a superhero but nowadays more often in the shape of Clark Kent. As Charlie Beckett explained in his interview “allow yourself (as a journalist) to go away from your superhero image and act more like Clark Kent because it brings your audience closer to you. And most journalist see themselves as Clark Kent because they know it is a job they are doing.“

And it is an important job to quote David Charter from *The Times*: “I believe there is in fact a greater need for professional journalists just as internet medical sites won't put doctors out of business – in fact they might be driving confused people to go to the doctor more. In a world with ever more sources of information, people are increasingly suspicious of the agenda behind any presentation of news which is why journalists and professional media organisations must strive to be careful to make every effort to be fair and accurate, and to establish themselves as trustworthy.” And to add another thought from the interview with Charlie Beckett: “The end of my thesis is, that in a world of open networks and no doors or gates the people want even more someone to show them what is most interesting, what is most relevant to them and to organise it in a way that they can access.“

When Newman talks in this paper several times about an “era of active citizen“ we should reflect at the same time on an “era of explainer journalism“. Distinctive content, great ideas and strong messages will remain at a premium.⁶¹ Or as David Charter from *The Times* describes it: “Who has the time themselves to check things thoroughly to make sure what they just read

⁶⁰ <http://verificationhandbook.com/book>

⁶¹ Nic Newman: *How journalism faces a second wave of disruption from technology and changing audience behaviour*.

is true? It is why trusted brands like the BBC, Economist, Guardian and The Times continue to do well despite the general difficulties faced by conventional media. These brands have been around for many years and will be around for a lot longer than individual 'citizen journalists' such as bloggers who dip in and out of journalism."

In talking about Networked Journalism one aspect should also be considered: Not everyone wants to play an active part in the process of creating news. There are still a lot of "typical news consumers" out there. "Most people still consume news via a one-way relationship with a few main providers, whether through television (the majority), newspaper or online. According to an OECD survey of users of UGC sites, only 13 per cent are active creators and produce online material."⁶² These people are still depending on the every-day routine work of journalists. As John Ludlam from *Reuters* explains it in his interview: "I have observed that few people in the end are actually that bothered about going the extra distance to turn the raw material they have into something more considered. And that is absolutely fine. Why should they? That's what journalists are for."

At the end of the day journalists face, like many other professions and industries, a digitalization of their business, and with it comes a reflection on their importance and role. Networked Journalism is just one aspect of it. What remains vital, no matter to what degree the news business might change, are the core values of journalism. One of the most important principles is mentioned by David Charter of *The Times*: "As I see it, Networked Journalism is a modern articulation of the fundamental principle I was taught at journalism school in the days before the internet, as summed up by Harold Evans: 'News is people.' Always has been, always will be."

⁶² Peter Lee-Wright et al. , p. 119.

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