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# **How do social media build the professional identity of journalists?**

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## Abstract

Social media platforms are becoming increasingly important in enabling journalists to reach audiences and find ideas for stories. At the same time, the number of different social media platforms has grown. This research examines which platforms journalists use, whether they separate public and private life on social media, and what they think about objectivity on social media. Based on these three aspects, the aim is to find out *how social media build the professional identity of journalists*.

This research was conducted by interviewing journalists from Finland and the UK (all of them active on social media). Most interviewees tend to use only one or two social media platforms. The reasons for not using more are a lack of time and uncertainty how some platforms could be used for journalism. For work and leisure, some journalists have separate platforms, while others do not. There exists some tension between public and private life on social media. Tension arises when journalists wonder whether they should start using some private platforms also for work or engage in a whole new platform. The interviewees argue that objectivity is not threatened on social media if a journalist remembers to be transparent and fair.

This research indicates that professional identity on social media is formed of four points:

1. Expertise on specific topics (e.g., the Middle East, technology, education)
2. Media outlets' social media guidelines
3. Freedom (i.e. journalists know the guidelines but, after that, they basically do whatever they want, whenever they want)
4. Spontaneity (i.e. journalists have started using social media on their own initiative and do not engage in any specific social media routines)

Social media platforms are probably here to stay which, for journalists, means that negotiations between public and private life will continue. To solve these tensions, journalists need to make a considered decision about which platform is for work and which for leisure, because changing style can be hard. Twitter is the most important platform for many journalists, but it seems inevitable that journalists should also engage in other platforms to reach more diverse audiences. Generally, journalists are eager to try out new platforms, if only they had time to do so and an idea about how these platforms would benefit their work.

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## 1. Tweets, snaps and likes - Introduction and importance of this research

Several years ago, social media meant predominantly Facebook and Twitter but, as we all know, currently, many social media platforms exist. For journalists, this means that there are more possible ways to find ideas and contacts, reach audiences and distribute stories. For that reason, many journalists wonder which social media platforms they should use, what they should do on the different platforms, and whether they can (or should) share matters related to their private life or just those concerning their working life.

For example, one day, at work, I talked about Twitter with my colleagues. We were discussing whether we should use it to promote our stories and find ideas and interviewees. Some of us were already on Twitter, some on Instagram, and nearly all of us used Facebook. “And then, there’s this Snapchat”, said one of my colleagues.

How journalists use social media is worth researching because, for the audience, social media are an important source of news. According to the Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report 2016,<sup>1</sup> 51 percent of people use social media as a source of news each week. In the UK, 28% use Facebook weekly for news and 12% use Twitter. Correspondingly, in Finland, 34% use Facebook weekly for news and only 6% use Twitter.<sup>2</sup> In other countries, the proportion is even higher. For example, in Greece, Turkey and Brazil, over 70 percent of people use social media as a source of news.

Media outlets know the importance of social media platforms and therefore naturally want to be a part of the social media networks. Also, many media outlets are constantly looking for the most popular and the most effective social media platforms for reaching audiences. It is no longer just Facebook; there are, for example, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. For individual journalists, social media nowadays form a crucial part of their daily routines: globally, as many as two thirds of journalists use social media every day (Cision 2015).

Because there are many different social media platforms, this forces journalists to seek various ways to be present on them. Some social media platforms are based on pictures, while others are

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<sup>1</sup> Digital News Report is a comparative international survey of new consumption habits. The latest report includes 26 countries.

<sup>2</sup> Social media were a general source of news for 35% in the UK and 45 % in Finland in 2016 (Digital News Report 2016).

based on longer or shorter text updates or short video clips. A good question is: who can manage this variety of different forms of platforms?

Previous researches indicate that people can change their behaviour depending on their use of different social media platforms (Kuznekoff 2013, 27, McEvan & Mease 2013, 90). A comparative study of behaviour on Facebook, social support sites and multi-player games shows that behaviour varies according to the goals or atmosphere of the platform: on a different platform, the same person can intimidate, ingratiate or exemplify (Kuznekoff 2013, 30).

It is also relevant to find an answer to what happens to objectivity and impartiality if journalists are active on various social media networks. As we all know, social media are largely concerned with sharing opinions and feelings. Traditionally, journalism is often the opposite of this: keeping feelings and opinions separate from facts and remaining objective. For a journalist, however, is it difficult to find a balance between feelings and objectivity when using social media?

There is not only one definition of objectivity in journalism (Maras 2013, 8). What is understood as objectivity has changed over time, and this phenomenon is not defined in the same way all over the world (Maras 2013, 5). For example, Hackett and Zhao (1998) introduced four meanings of objectivity. Objectivity can be understood as a set of desired goals that journalists should aim at, a set of assumptions about knowledge and reality, a set of practices, and an institutionalized regime within social structures (Hackett & Zhao 1998, 82-83, 85-86). Objectivity can also be described by words like impartiality, neutrality, accuracy and fairness (Maras 2013, 8). Objectivity in journalism has also been criticized: some critics say that objectivity is inseparable from choice, values and procedures (Hackett & Zhao 1998, 111-112, 223, Maras 2013, 9).

Another thing which journalists may find hard related to social media is the line between private and public life. As Richardson states, on social media, all communication is, in some sense, public and, from time to time, we all say there something that is unsuitable for public consumption – often something spontaneous and unplanned (Richardson 2013, 10).

All of these thoughts and questions lead us to the main research question of this research paper. The aim is to find out *how social media build the professional identity of journalists*, as well as which social media platforms journalists use and why. It is also important to establish whether social media are a part of journalists' professional life, private life or both. The third area to explore is

what kind of incongruity may exist between objective journalism and a subjective social media presence among journalists.

This research is based on interviews with journalists from Finland and the UK. All interviewees are active on social media, at least on some platforms.

During the past few years, there has been a wide range of academic research about journalists on social media (e.g. Hedman & Djerf-Pierre 2014, Hedman 2015, Canter 2015, Lee, Kim & Sang 2016). The reason for this seems obvious: in general, the number of social media users continues to rise. Worldwide, Facebook has about 1.7 billion users, Instagram 500 million and Twitter 317 million. On Twitter, the number of users is growing more slowly than before.<sup>3</sup> The popularity of Snapchat is harder to estimate because it is still a fairly new platform. Snapchat itself has said that 158 million people use their service every day, and create 2.5 billion snaps between them.<sup>4</sup>

In Finland, Facebook is the most popular social media platform.<sup>5</sup> According to previous research, about 70 percent of Finns use Facebook at least sometimes, 16 percent use Twitter and 15 percent Instagram. The number of Instagram users has risen rapidly, whereas the number of Twitter users has remained constant. Also, in the UK, Facebook is the leading social media platform.<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that over 60 percent of the population has a Facebook account. Twitter and Instagram have both about 15 million users in the UK.

For journalists, engaging in social media can be risky for many reasons. One reason is that neither journalists nor media outlets know which platforms will be popular. In October 2016, we saw an example of the harsh competition between different platforms: Twitter announced that it was going to close its video sharing social network, Vine. Twitter did not state a reason for this, but it has been facing stagnant user growth and harsh competition from the other social media platforms.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (page visited 3 Nov 2016)

<sup>4</sup> The Guardian: Snapchat shares soar 44% to value loss-making company at 28 bn dollars: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/02/snapchat-ipo-valuation-evan-spiegel-bobby-murphy-snap-inc> (page visited 3 March 2017)

<sup>5</sup> DNA Viihde- ja digitaalisten sisältöjen tutkimus 2015: <https://www.dna.fi/documents/15219/157828/Some-tutkimus+medialle/831dcf41-a593-432c-90a5-6cc6952db05c> (page visited 3 Nov 2016)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.thinkdigitalfirst.com/2016/01/04/the-demographics-of-social-media-users-in-2016/> (page visited 5 Nov 2016)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-37788052> (page visited 3 Nov 2016)

Another reason – as mentioned before – is the difficulty of deciding how to behave on social media, including drawing lines between professional and private life, and not sharing something that might be regretted later. This is particularly challenging when a big news event (such as the US presidential election) is happening on, writes Sonia Ottovordemgentschenfelde (2016).

So far, the academic research about journalists and social media has mainly concentrated on Twitter, examining journalists' use of Twitter and exploring why some journalists are more active on Twitter than others (e.g. Hedman 2015, Canter 2015, Weaver & Willnat 2016, Ottovordemgentschenfelde 2016). This research paper attempts to expand the social media research from Twitter to other platforms too: the goal is to explore how many different social media platforms journalists use and what differences exist regarding using the different platforms. It is also interesting to explore how much journalists think about their behaviour related to using social media and what they think about the question of objectivity on social media.

The theoretical perspective of this research draws on the theories of identity and objectivity. In chapter 2, we review some of these theories as well as some of the previous research about journalists' use of social media.

In chapter 3, the research method is introduced: semi-structured interviews with journalists from Finland and the UK. The next chapters will concentrate on analysing the research findings. After that, there will be a discussion of the findings, and some conclusions and suggestions will be offered regarding what journalists may have to consider when using social media.



## 2. Previous research

### 2.1. Who am I? Theories of identity and the professional identity of journalists

*We are, not what we are, but what we make ourselves.*

The quote above is from sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991, 75) and it offers a description of identity: identity defines who we are but, at the same time, we can control identity – but not entirely. Identity is something that one thinks about at regular intervals (Giddens 1991, 76). Giddens notes that “the search for self-identity is a modern problem, perhaps having its origins in Western individualism” (1991, 74).

Another explanation of identity – possibly the most classic one – is provided by the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1990, 26),<sup>8</sup> who argues that, when an individual is among others, he tries in many ways to control the impressions they gain of him.

Goffman uses the theatre stage as a metaphor for identity. One of the most frequently cited parts of Goffman’s theory is the concept of front stage and backstage. The front stage is the place where an actor is in front of an audience and performs for them. This motivates the actor to control his activities. Backstage, the audience cannot see the actors, which allows them to relax and step out of character (Goffman 1990, 110-114).

Goffman notes that the theatre stage is not the only place where the line between front stage and backstage can be drawn. This line is everywhere in our society, such as in restaurants. For example, when a waiter is in a kitchen, he is backstage but, when he brings the food to the customers, he enters the front stage. This means that he cannot behave in a same way in both places (Goffman 1990, 124).

Throughout Goffman and Giddens’ theories, one thing is fundamental: our identity, the way we behave, is connected to others. For example, in the theatre, there is the audience and, for journalists, there is the audience, too: someone who watches or reads news stories.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’ was first published by Anchor Books in 1959.

The rise of social media has inspired many researchers to explore what social media do to our identity. For example, Pavica Sheldon (2015) focuses on the personality psychology of social media users and non-users. Sheldon's research is about all people, not only journalists. In general, many researchers argue that the personal traits that are theoretically linked to self-presentation on social media are narcissism and extroversion (Sheldon 2015, 37). Distinctive to the narcissism on social media is the importance of one's profile picture and the feedback that it attracts. Extroversion is defined as being outgoing and engaging in social activities (Sheldon 2015, 39).

When it comes to the professional identity of journalists, this debate began long before the advent of things like Instagram and Twitter. Lauk (2009) explores how the collapse of communism affected the role of journalists and their identity. Lauk argues that the former Communist bloc countries do not automatically adopt a Western professional identity. Each country and its journalists created their own journalism culture based on their specific history and cultural traditions. Identity is affected by the media's self-regulation mechanisms or lack thereof: self-regulation mechanisms have been established but not all news organizations follow them.

As Wiik (2014) argues, the professional identity of journalists is 'a process of ongoing negotiation'. Journalists' professional identity changes when society and the news industry around journalists change (Wiik 2014). The widely-used term to describe journalists is 'watchdogs'. However, the era of the internet has forced journalists to re-think what they do; are they still watchdogs (Grubenmann & Meckel 2015, 3) or gatekeepers? In general, professional identity is something that requires certain knowledge, skills and values for its foundation.

Deuze (2005) analysed the changes in professional identity long before the social media platforms became a part of everyday life. Deuze links the meaning of the professional identity of journalists to the concept of ideology. He argues that an ideology is like glue: it keeps the pieces of identity together (Deuze 2005, 442). For Deuze, journalism as an ideology means how journalists give meaning to their work. The ideology consists of several traits or values, including for example the public service ideal ('doing it for the public'), neutrality, objectivity, editorial autonomy and a sense of ethics (Deuze 2005, 447-450). These traits and values are challenged by the changes both in the newsrooms (e.g. the importance of online news) and society (e.g. multiculturalism), but ideology can be defined as 'the social cement of the professional group of journalists' (Deuze 2005, 452, 455).

Bryan Pirolli (2016) studies the professional identity of travel journalists: travel journalism has changed because there are now more non-professional online sources about travel, so travel journalists are competing especially against travel bloggers. Pirolli's findings argue that travel journalists still differentiate themselves from bloggers. There are two main reasons for this: travel journalists are paid for their work (whereas bloggers are not always paid) and travel journalists have undergone some sort of training.

As the aim of this research is to discover what type of professional identity journalists build when using social media, it is crucial to define the concept of professionalism in journalism. In professional journalism, the core ideal is autonomy: remaining independent and free from political or economic pressure. However, nowadays, autonomy is being challenged by these forces (Weisbord 2013, 43-44, 223). The professional identity of journalists who use social media can be explained as a representation of their professional activities; for example, promoting their own journalistic work, participating in current debates, or keeping in touch with their audiences (e.g. Grubenmann & Meckel 2015).

## 2.2. Strategic ritual or something else? Theories of objectivity

Objectivity in journalism is regarded as one of the key values of the profession. However, defining the meaning of objectivity is a more complex issue. There are many definitions, which have changed over time (Allan 1997, 298-299), and objectivity is not understood in the same way all over the world (Donsbach & Klett 1993, 78). It appears that almost the only thing that scholars can agree about when defining objectivity is the idea that it has multiple definitions.

As Maras (2013, 82) writes, "At the core of objectivity in journalism is the concept of reporting the facts". Objectivity can be understood as a set of desired goals at which journalists should aim, a set of assumptions about knowledge and reality, a set of practices, an institutionalized regime within social structures (Hackett & Zhao 1998, 82-83, 85-86), or an honest attempt to tell a journalistic story in a way that it can be trusted as accurate information (McNair 2013, 84). Sometimes, objectivity is referred to as a strategic ritual, which aims to guarantee that journalistic work is based on qualities like fairness, factuality and non-partisanship (McNair 2013, 84).

As mentioned before, objectivity is not a universal concept which has the same meaning everywhere. A previous study (Donsbach & Klett 1993) shows that, in the UK and USA, objectivity means that the news media are a common carrier between the public and interest groups. In Italy and Germany, objectivity is described as an investigation of interest groups' arguments, and the notion of objectivity can vary according to the journalist's age and political stance (Donsbach & Klett 1993, 78). Objectivity is understood differently because the press did not develop simultaneously and from the same starting point everywhere (Donsbach & Klett 1993, 80).

Traditionally, objectivity in journalism has been understood as a passive process: a journalist merely recorded events (Ward 2010, 93) and described "things as they are" (McNair 2013, 84). Later, these views have been replaced by the concept of pragmatic objectivity, which means that journalists play an active role while reporting, and this includes also interpretation (Ward 2010, 92-93). At present, it is understood that absolute objectivity cannot exist (McNair 2013, 84; Marsh 2014, 221). Additionally, objectivity can be defined by words like impartiality, neutrality, accuracy and fairness (Maras 2013, 8).

On the other hand, some scholars argue that objectivity and impartiality mean different things (Sambrook 2012, 5). Objectivity can be characterised as identifying facts and evidence, while impartiality is the removal of bias (Sambrook 2012, 5). However, it is very common to use these two terms interchangeably (Marsh 2014, 219). Impartiality is often very strongly linked to the journalistic tradition in the UK, especially to the BBC (e.g. Marsh 2014, 214; Belair-Gagnon 2013). Objectivity is more often linked to journalism in the USA, and the concept of objective journalism was probably created there (Donsbach & Klett 1993, 54).

According to Marsh, impartiality is both a process and a mind-set: impartiality means searching for and gathering facts and opinions, then considering and weighing those elements to create a story (Marsh 2014, 219).

Some scholars are asking whether objectivity is changing in our era of 24/7 news production (Maras 2013, 200) or, in the BBC's case, whether impartiality is changing. Belair-Gagnon (2013) argues that the emergence of social media raises new questions about impartiality. Belair-Gagnon explores how the BBC uses social media within its international journalism. Her findings suggest that social media have contributed to the new enhanced features of impartiality, which include verification, contextualization and openness.

Some critics even claim that objectivity is obsolete. Poniewozik argues, in an article published in Time magazine (Poniewozik 2010), that:

*Real objectivity does not mean having no opinion or voicing no point of view. It means seeking, recognizing and interpreting facts even when they conflict with one's preconceptions or desires. What journalists and the people who talk about them call objectivity is more like neutrality.*

Poniewozik sees that neutrality helps to keep both audiences and advertisers happy. Instead of objectivity, we should talk about openness, claims Poniewozik: openness is a method for gaining audiences' trust. Maras (2013, 177, 200) sees the fast flow of information as a threat to objectivity. To combat this threat, journalists need to be transparent, participate and become involved (Maras 2013, 200).

Sambrook (2012, 39-40) suggests three steps for ensuring objectivity and impartiality in today's media environment. In the digital era, Sambrook sees that transparency is not enough. Along with transparency, evidence and diversity are also needed. Evidence means finding resources and verifying facts, not just expressing opinions. Diversity stands for a multiplicity of opinions and views. Lastly, transparency means being open about all aspects of journalism: about sources, interests, intent, methods and affiliations (Sambrook 2012, 39-40).

For individual journalists, transparency and openness mean different things: some are ready to be more open on social media, and some less (Vainikka, Noppari, Heinonen & Huhtamäki 2013: 63-64). Publisher Melissa Bell from Vox Media has a more radical suggestion: objectivity should be replaced by advocacy. Bell argues that no one can be objective, as our stories are always influenced by our gender, race, socio-economic background and where we live.<sup>9</sup>

To summarise these theories, it can be concluded that objectivity and impartiality are different concepts but are closely linked together. Objectivity facilitates impartiality and vice versa. To promote objectivity, many media outlets promulgate social media guidelines or rules for journalists. The first social media guidelines were introduced in 2009, by media outlets including The Wall Street Journal, The Associated Press and The Washington Post (Kirtley 2013, 83).

In mainstream news organizations in the UK and USA, the guidelines on the use of social media concentrate predominantly on the associated risks and challenges rather than opportunities and

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<sup>9</sup> Melissa Bell presented these thoughts during the Reuters Memorial Lecture presented in Oxford on 10 February 2017.

advantages (Lee 2016). News organizations are especially concerned about three things when journalists use social media: accuracy, the risk of breaking objectivity by revealing personal opinions, and the risk of causing problems by engaging in inappropriate online behaviour (Lee 2016). Another study, which is based on interviews with Australian journalists, found that social media guidelines are focused on protecting the reputation of the journalist or the media organization (Sacco & Bossio 2016). Most journalists find guidelines important, but at the same time some of the guidelines are described as simply 'common sense' (Sacco & Bossio 2016).

Some news organizations, for example the BBC in the UK and YLE in Finland, publish their social media guidelines on their website. The BBC's latest update on social media guidance for BBC News Group staff was created in March 2015. Guidelines are divided into three parts: personal social media use, official social media activity of editors, presenters and correspondents, and social media activity in the name of BBC's programmes, teams or brands.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding personal social media use, the BBC says that staff should not do anything stupid. Members of staff should not state their political preferences or spread rumours, and should always be aware that any shared information can spread to wider audiences than was originally intended.

YLE's latest update on the social media guidance for YLE staff was added in May 2015. Social media guidelines include three points: always think how your social media presence affects your credibility, think about how you express your opinions, and don't say negative things about your colleagues.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3. What do they do there? Journalists on social media

In recent years, there has been a wide range of research about journalists' use of social media, especially Facebook and Twitter (e.g. Hedman 2015, Canter 2015, Weaver & Willnat 2016).

Research about journalists' use of Instagram or Snapchat is rare, even though Instagram has more users than Twitter<sup>12</sup> and Snapchat is growing fast, which makes these potential platforms for journalists to use. From an academic perspective, the constant changes in the social media

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<sup>10</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/26\\_03\\_15\\_bbc\\_news\\_group\\_social\\_media\\_guidance.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/26_03_15_bbc_news_group_social_media_guidance.pdf) (page visited 6 Dec 2016)

<sup>11</sup> <http://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2015/01/11/sosiaalisien-median-toimintalinjaukset> (page visited 6 Dec 2016)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> (page visited 3 Nov 2016)

landscape can be seen as problematic, and some of the research tends to go out of date very quickly.

Hedman (2015) examines Swedish journalists' use of Twitter, who the active journalist-tweeters are, and how they use Twitter. The key findings suggest that Twitter changes how journalists do their job but not their core professional values, and that active journalists on Twitter are not keen on audience orientation but keener than other journalists in general. This study argues that personal branding is not a common practice among the journalists who use Twitter.

One way of studying journalists' use of Twitter is to draw a distinction between journalism as a product and journalism as a service for citizens (Artwick 2013). Journalists' use of Twitter, which is considered as product, means sharing links to their own newsroom content and quoting mainly official sources. Service, on the other hand, includes live tweeting about news events and retweeting tweets from the audience (Artwick 2013).

Another study shows that, in the USA, social media have changed journalistic work: social media provide an environment in which to find ideas and information about stories, see what other media outlets are doing, and check for breaking news (Weaver & Willnat 2016). The data for this study were collected with the help of an online survey that was conducted in 2013. At that time, 40 percent of US journalists stated that social media is very important to their work, and this proportion may have now increased: for example, during the US presidential election, a record-breaking number of tweets were posted<sup>13</sup> and, as Sonia Ottovordemgentschenfelde (2016) writes, "naturally, journalists are drawn to spaces where news events are unfolding".

In the UK, for example, the role of Twitter within the editorial team of a regional news outlet (Bournemouth Daily Echo) has been explored (Canter 2015). What is interesting about the main findings is that the Echo's general Twitter account had more followers than most of the journalists there, even though it was latent for most of the year. The conclusion is that many people automatically follow brand extensions, even though sometimes there are a low number of tweets. At the same time, to achieve a lot of followers, individual journalists must tweet frequently.

Another study claims that using social media can be seen as a "double-edged sword" (Lee 2015). Journalists who actively interact with audiences via social media are personally likable but, from a

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<sup>13</sup> According to Twitter Government @gov

professional perspective, appear less professional than those journalists who are less active on social media.

In this research paper, the goal is to examine journalists' professional identity on social media in Finland and the UK. Bossio and Sacco (2016) and Hanusch and Bruns (2016) conducted a similar type of research on the other side of the world: both explore how Australian journalists negotiate their personal and professional identities when using social media.

Hanusch and Bruns state that most journalists who use Twitter tend to provide information about themselves on their Twitter profile. Also, about a third of journalists use the common disclaimer "views my own" on their profile, and mixing professional and personal life is significantly common. According to the study, this reflects journalists' aspiration "to appear to be more than just a journalist, or at least letting audiences gain a glimpse of their private lives" (Hanusch & Bruns 2016).

The other researchers (Bossio & Sacco 2016) divide journalists into three different groups according to how they present their professional and personal identity on social media. These different categories are:

- 1) creating separate personal and professional social media accounts or using different platforms for personal and professional purposes ("transitional identity")
- 2) using social media only for professional life, not personal life at all ("branded identity")
- 3) blending professional and personal identities, i.e. using the same platforms for personal and professional purposes ("social identity")

According to Bossio and Sacco, most of the interviewees belong to the second group, and some of them stated that they use social media only because their media organisation wants them to. A minority of the journalists was in group three (blending professional and personal identities).



### 3. Introducing the research questions and methods

This research is based on interviews with journalists from Finland and the UK. It is worth comparing these two countries, because the UK belongs to a large language area, whereas Finland is a small language area, which seems to affect the number of social media followers. In English-speaking countries, journalists tend to have many more Twitter followers than do journalists in other countries (Cision 2015). This is due to the role of English as the lingua franca of social media and the eagerness of English-speaking journalists to use social media (Cision 2015). In the UK, having over 100,000 Twitter-followers (or even 500,000 plus) is not uncommon whereas, in Finland, 10,000 followers is a large number.

The aim of this research is not to find generalized patterns of journalists and social media which could be applied to all the journalists around the world; for example, in some Middle Eastern countries social media is for journalists even more important than in many European countries.

A previous study compares (Gulyas 2013) journalists' use of social media in various countries, including the UK and Finland. The findings indicate that journalists in the UK are the most enthusiastic social media users and have the most positive attitude towards using social media. In a typical working week, most UK journalists use 3-4 types of social media tools, whereas most Finnish journalists use 1-2 types of tools. Gulyas also asked if the journalists had preferences regarding social media tools. For the UK journalists, the most popular tools were microblogs; for the Finnish journalists, these were social networking sites.

The initial aim of this research was to interview journalists from public broadcasting companies, i.e. the BBC and YLE. A Report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Sehl, Cornia, Kleis Nielsen 2016) shows that the BBC and YLE are ahead of most other public service media organisations in Europe in terms of social media use. There are both external and internal reasons for this. The external reasons include the technologically-advanced environment, adequate funding, integrated and centrally organised organisation, and freedom from direct political influence. The internal factors include a pro-digital culture and understanding the demand for constant change (Sehl, Cornia, Kleis Nielsen 2016, 5, 36).

However, the interviewed journalists in the UK were not all the BBC due to difficulties associated with recruiting interviewees. Because the number of journalists from the UK would have been too small, journalists from other UK-based media organisations were also interviewed.

In total, 12 journalists were interviewed for this research, seven of whom from were Finland and five from the UK. In this research, all the interviewees are quoted anonymously. There are two reasons for that: firstly, some questions are personal but when speaking anonymously, interviewees feel they could answer more openly and honestly. Secondly, the aim of this research is not to point out some journalists with names, rather finding examples of social media users.

Some of the interviews were conducted in person, and others by email. The preference was for face-to-face interviews but some of the interviewees were extremely busy or lived overseas. Twelve interviews can be considered an adequate number: there were differences but also many similarities between the interviewees. More interviews would be unlikely to produce any new viewpoints. As one of the interviewees said, "I'm sure they're going to tell you more or less the same story".<sup>14</sup>

The aim of this research is to understand journalists' social media usage by interviewing journalists. The interviewees were chosen selectively: all of them were already active users of social media. In other words, this research paper does not try to draw conclusions which would apply to each journalist or provide statistically approved results. The face-to-face interviews took about 30 minutes each. They were recorded and transcribed. Conducting the interviews in person allowed more opportunities to elaborate on the questions than would have been possible via email.

Semi-structured interviews served as the method for this research. These are used when a researcher knows enough about the topic to identify the main questions but does not know and cannot anticipate all of the answers. During semi-structured interviews, there is a question stem and all the interviewees are asked the same questions in the same order. Semi-structured interviews may be conducted face-to-face, in written format (e.g. by e-mail) or by internet survey (Morse 2012, 197).

For this research, several questions were asked but the three most important ones were:

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with a journalist from the UK, interviewed 19 December 2016.

1. Which social media platforms do you use and why?
2. How much do you think about how you behave when using social media?
3. What happens to objectivity when using social media?

It is worth mentioning that this research concentrates only on social media networking sites:

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. Much previous research concerning social media have included social media networking sites as well as blogs, crowdsourcing sites and Wikipedia.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. “The information I want to know is still on Twitter” - which platforms journalists use

The journalists interviewed for this research find Twitter to be the most important platform regarding their work. For many of the interviewees, Facebook is also important, but it is more common to keep Facebook as part of their private life. Twitter, instead, mainly forms part of their public journalistic life. However, there are slight differences between Finland and the UK: for the Finnish journalists, Twitter is almost entirely a professional platform whereas, in the UK, journalists can also blend their private life with their professional life on Twitter. The interviewees commonly use only one or two platforms, and these are usually Facebook and Twitter.

The reason for using only one or two platforms tends to be the same for all interviewees: a lack of time. Using more platforms would require more time, which would detract from their other journalistic work. It was also described as “ambitious” to try to use many platforms and some interviewees mentioned that using social media is a full-time job for some of the people in their news organisation.

*I think it is quite ambitious for an individual to think they can make four, five, six social media presences. Or if they can, that is pretty impressive. There is a risk that you can spend time, saying same things in six different places. And if you spend too much time doing that, perhaps you are not spending enough time for what is actually generating your journalism. (News anchor, UK)*

Some scholars argue that it is not important to engage in as many social media platforms as possible. Instead it is better *to choose* which platforms everyone finds the most beneficial for work. One colleague may find a different platform better than another colleague: for some journalists Facebook suits best, for others it is Twitter. (Vainikka, Noppari, Heinonen & Huhtamäki 2013, 100.) As some interviewees mentioned, another reason for using only a few platforms is that many media outlets have social media teams, in other words people whose full-time job is to take care of social media.

The reasons for having Twitter as the most important social media platform are similar for all the interviewees: Twitter is full of information and debate, from Twitter one can see very quickly what

is happening around the world, even quicker than from online news. Also from Twitter one can search information about issues of own specific interest.

*Twitter - the information and debate I want to know is still on Twitter. And then I have Facebook-page but I am not very active on it because it seems very time-consuming and I am busy. (Foreign correspondent, UK)*

Almost all the interviewees note that people on Twitter don't represent the whole variety of society. Some of them told me that they have sensed signs of journalists moving away from Twitter. However, if there were signals like that, now the situation may have changed. As one of the interviewees said, the most powerful person on Earth, the president of the United States of America is active on Twitter. If Donald Trump keeps on tweeting for the next four years as much as in the beginning of his incumbency, journalists cannot really be away from Twitter.

Even though Twitter and Facebook are the dominant platforms, there are exceptions: some journalists at least try to use other platforms. One interviewee says that different platforms help to reach people from different age groups. Multiple platforms allow them to have different types of conversations with audiences: shorter or longer discussions.

*It's hard to say which one is the primary social media platform because you reach different people. Twitter is very good for serious discussions. On the other hand, on Facebook – because there the length of the comments is not restricted – you can have other types of discussion. And Snapchat is important in the sense that a younger audience is clearly there. Middle-aged and older people easily use Facebook, so younger people have slightly rejected it. (Producer, Finland)*

When the interviews for this research were conducted, only a couple of interviewees used Instagram and Snapchat. Most of them thought that they should use Snapchat because it might be a good way to engage younger audiences with news.

One interviewee, who specializes in technology issues, says that, even though he does not use Snapchat, he is interested in it as a company: Snapchat is growing and investors are growing more interested in it<sup>15</sup> — and in that sense journalists should also perhaps become more involved with it.

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<sup>15</sup> Snapchat was listed on the New York Stock exchange in March 2017. After the first trading day, Snapchat was valued at almost 30 billion dollars, although it has never made a profit.

For some interviewees, using Snapchat is regarded as more complicated than other social media platforms, which is why they do not use it actively. Also, there is often a big question about whether Snapchat or some other, newer platform would benefit their journalistic work.

*I've tried Snapchat but, to be honest, I really didn't understand how to use it. I didn't have time to learn to use it, so it's a mysterious platform to me. I don't know how Snapchat would best serve my job.*

*(Investigative reporter, Finland)*

Instagram is considered somewhat similar to Snapchat, because the interviewees find it challenging to work out how to use Instagram for their work. For many, Instagram is a platform for interesting and beautiful pictures. As one interviewee says, "I don't want to post pictures on Instagram where I'm shaking hands with my interviewees, I want to post beautiful pictures there". One interviewee says that she used to use Instagram more for work when she was a foreign correspondent.

Along with the aforementioned social media platforms, several other platforms were mentioned during the interviews. As a part of private life, almost everyone uses messaging apps like WhatsApp and Messenger. No one mentioned LinkedIn, although some media companies use it as a channel to reach people.

What is common among the interviewees is the understanding of the 24/7-style of social media. Most of the interviewees use social media outside working hours, though these may be different platforms compared to the ones they use at work. For example, Twitter is often used at work whereas Instagram is associated with free time. Because of the 24/7 environment, it is uncommon for the interviewees to have "social media routines"; for instance, using social media at a certain time of the day. Some of them admit that social media takes up a lot of their time. Most of the interviewees check Twitter first thing in the morning – if this habit can be regarded as a routine.

*Being on social media requires that you do it and don't mind about working hours. Even following up what somebody has said takes time. More time than 10 years ago, or even five years. Very often, in the evening, I read something and then tweet something about it. But this is my life.*

*(Political correspondent, Finland)*

What the interviewees share in common is how they started using social media: everybody started it on their own initiative. Their employers neither told them to use social media nor to use a greater variety of social media platforms.

This research paper reinforces the image of journalists' social media usage: Twitter is still the most important social media platform, even though only a small part of the audience uses Twitter as a source of news. In the UK, 12% of people use Twitter weekly as a source of news, but in Finland only 6% do so (Digital News Report 2016). The big question is how to use other platforms for journalistic work.

#### 4.2. "I've been lucky that I haven't made any mistakes" - Thinking about what to do on social media

The various social media platforms have been with us for so many years that, in our everyday life, most of us have found our own "social media style", and social media have become an indispensable part of life. This applies also to the journalists interviewed for this research.

For many journalists, there seems to be an in-built instinct regarding what one can do on social media. When the in-built instinct is strong, one does not need to think very much about one's social media behaviour as a journalist, the interviewees say. For media companies, it is natural to have a social media strategy but this changes constantly because social media are evolving.

Individual journalists do not have strategies like companies do. If a journalist starts using a new social media platform (for many journalists, this is often Snapchat nowadays), then he/she might need to think about his/her behaviour more.

*I think my social media is quite stable now. I know what I want to do there, so it's easy. But if I started using Snapchat more actively again, I'd have to think about what I'd do there. What'd be my primary goal there, what kind of platform it would be for me. (Political correspondent, Finland)*

Of course, there are differences regarding how much the journalists consider how they behave on social media, with some doing so more than others. One interviewee has a total of about 100,000 followers, due to which she describes herself as "a small media outlet", which forces her to think about her social media behaviour. On the other hand, other journalists mentioned that, if one thinks too much, there is a risk that the person on social media may become too boring to follow. Also, the fast pace of the social media poses a challenge: if one thinks about the content too much, then the situation which provokes comment will already have passed by.

Among the interviewees, the sense of knowing what is appropriate behaviour regarding social media is based on three different points: a long working history for a media outlet, aiming to behave on social media in a similar way to on radio or television, and social media guidelines.

*I was quite old when I started (using social media). I was experimental. I've been lucky that I haven't made a mistake, and I've been asked to advise others on how to use Twitter. I think I developed rules for myself that work, so I think it's something that happens to a lot of journalists: that they've learnt from others how to blend their professional and personal life (on social media). (Technology correspondent, UK)*

Regarding behaviour on social media, what is in common is the aim to be genuine. One interviewee describes this by saying that he thinks that authenticity is a valuable asset for journalists and therefore he does not engage in social media. The interviewees seldom try to create a special social media image. For them, social media are not separate from the traditional media platforms (television, radio, online), which is why they behave on social media in a similar way to how they behave on television, radio, online or in newspapers.

The interviewees in this research fall into two groups when it comes to the question of separating their professional and private life on social media: for some, social media are strictly work-related, while others blend their professional and private life. As mentioned previously in chapter 4.1., usually Twitter is a part of working life, and Facebook is used for private life.

*For me, Twitter is related to work, and I'll try to keep it like that. I'd never tweet something like "hello from my holiday". If I want to say something about my holiday, I'll do it on Facebook. But on Twitter, your followers can be anyone. (Foreign correspondent A, Finland)*

As some of the interviewees note, journalists are human beings after all and people much prefer following other people than following institutions. When people follow other people, they do not wish to receive only marketing content. They want to know something about the journalist, but of course the journalist can decide exactly what he/she wishes to share.

*If someone wants to follow me, I think he doesn't want to get only marketing stuff about my work. I think you have to offer an illusion of privacy. Of course, I consider what to share but, on the other hand, I offer some kind of view to myself as a persona. (Producer, Finland)*



*People much prefer following personalities than following institutions. We actually think it's helpful when we have these correspondents who go out, share their stories and say "I wrote this".*  
(Social media editor, UK)

Slight tension between their private and public identity on social media can be found among the interviewees. Usually, this tension is related to Facebook and the new platforms. Originally, Facebook was *only* linked to private life but some journalists have considered using it also for their work. Potentially, this could mean that they should reconsider their Facebook behaviour, i.e. decide whether to share personal matters still on Facebook. Regarding the new social media platforms, the journalists should simply decide beforehand what they are going to share there. As one interviewee says,

*About Snapchat, I'd say that, if I started using it again, I should consider: what's my role there? What am I going to snap? Only work stuff or also something more personal? I think I should just make that decision.* (Political correspondent, Finland)

An earlier study shows that, for journalists, it is hard to be successful and credible on social media if one completely separates one's professional and private content there. According to this study, journalists tend to consider thoroughly what to share on Facebook and with whom. For example, political thoughts are not shared but funny links are (Vainikka, Noppari, Heinonen & Huhtamäki 2013, 16-17). Many interviewees say they use social media during their free time. This does not mean, however, that they post about their free time: they can be away from the office but still do something work-related on social media.

Some of the interviewees say that being on social media has made them think about their work outside their working hours. One interviewee says that, if he comes across something work-related during his free time, he feels that he should react to it in some way.

*At weekends, I'd still use social media but only about subjects that are connected to my work. I think some journalists have been more successful on social media by saying more about their life, sharing a lot more about their family, hobbies, what they like about x, what they don't like about x, whatever it might be. I'm not criticising that, but I've never felt comfortable sharing that much about my life.* (News anchor, UK)

While some of the interviewees find it difficult to refrain from tweeting when not at work, a previous study indicates that journalists tweet mostly *during* their working hours. According to

Artwick (2013), only 4 percent of tweets were posted on Saturday, and 4 percent on Sunday. Artwick's analysis is based on more than 2,700 tweets by reporters from US newspapers.

All the interviewees have a positive attitude regarding how social media have changed their journalistic work. The interviewees state that, through the help of social media, one can find contacts and interviewees for stories more easily than before.

*You can reach almost anyone, like some Syrian cartoonist. Thanks to Twitter, something that was previously impossible is now possible. For example, try to find phone numbers to the Middle East, you can't, but on Twitter, you find people. (Foreign correspondent B, Finland)*

Along with finding contacts, social media have changed journalistic work also by providing platforms for spreading stories after they are published. For the interviewees, it was less common to use social media while creating a story, e.g. during the process of putting together a story.

Social media have also brought a time-saving aspect to journalistic work. Through following specific, trustworthy people on Twitter, journalists can quickly obtain updates about what is happening in the world or in an area that interests them. However, sometimes, social media can have the opposite effect: they do not save time, but consume a lot of time, because one can spend a long time, for example, reading Twitter debates.

#### 4.3. "I always think it's not only this moment" - Staying objective on social media

Objectivity can survive on social media provided that journalists remember to cherish it, the interviewees say. To cherish objectivity on social media, the interviewees claim that one must be transparent and fair; some use the word 'impartial' instead of fair. By being fair, journalists mean that they listen to different viewpoints. On the other hand, this is what they do already on the traditional platforms (television, radio, online). The interviewees say that they have absorbed objectivity and behave in the same way when using social media.

*I think nothing has happened (to objectivity on social media). I consider Facebook and TV just different kinds of broadcasting: I apply all the same rules, I won't say anything on Twitter I wouldn't say on TV. I won't say anything on Facebook I wouldn't say on radio. The only problem for journalists is when they forget that social media are just a different type of broadcasting. As*

*long as they remember that, they shouldn't have any more problems than when they work on TV or radio. (News anchor, UK)*

Being transparent on social media can, for instance, mean that journalist state openly from which angle he/she creates the story and what kind of relationship he/she may have with the issue.

Behaving in this way can be more honest than pretending to be perfectly objective.

*I think that social media don't threaten objectivity if you're transparent about what you think. We are living in an era when things are becoming increasingly transparent. It can even be more honest to state that my orientation regarding this story is this and that I'm coming from this angle because, when you do so, then your audience can consider your story in this light. (Reporter, Finland)*

By saying that someone is pretending to be objective, some of the interviewees mean that a journalist has interviewed people about a topic, but then has not really listened to them. The interviewees, on the other hand, say that taking a stance is part of the nature of social media. It depends how strongly one can take a stance and express one's own views. For columnists, it is more acceptable to take a stance. Also, if some media outlets in general are known for taking a stance, it is acceptable to adopt this style when using social media as well.

*Twitter isn't really a forum for calm impartiality. (Political correspondent, UK)*

*I think it's a part of social media that, in some way, you take a stance, you give opinions and you discuss things, because everyone understands that it's not a news channel in that sense. I think you have to take a stance (on social media) but you have to draw the line in the right place to avoid misunderstandings. (Foreign correspondent B, Finland)*

Many of the interviewees point out that taking a stance does not mean that a journalist states what is right or wrong. Taking a stance is, rather, seen as delivering different viewpoints. Sometimes, in order to remain objective and impartial, the interviewees say that one must count to ten before doing anything on social media. Some interviewees also say that they do not always get involved with (angry) discussions on social media because that could jeopardise their objectivity.

When considering how to behave when using social media, the interviewees mentioned the nature of the online environment: if one posts something there, it will stay there forever. To protect their objectivity, some interviewees note that it is inadvisable to take sides in stories which they are currently working on or take a stance in a way which may prove harmful to them in the future.

*It is evident that it's a question of credibility that you don't make public you own opinions related to the stories you're covering, unless you're a columnist or something like that (Foreign correspondent A, Finland).*

*I always think: it's not only this moment. If I tie down my views now, it might make my future projects more difficult, especially on political issues but other issues as well. (Investigative reporter, Finland)*

One interviewee mentions that objectivity is challenged by circumstances. By this, she means that for example in the USA, some journalists may have to work hard to remain objective, impartial and calm when reporting about the current president, even though they personally dislike him.

## 5. Discussion

This research paper has viewed three dimensions of journalists' use of social media: which platforms they use, whether they separate their private and public life on social media, and what they think about objectivity on social media. Based on these aspects, the aim is to explore how social media build the professional identity of journalists.

Since the research involved interviewing journalists from Finland and the UK, it is interesting to see whether there were any differences between the two groups. As all the Finnish journalists are from YLE whereas the interviewed journalists from the UK represent a variety of media outlets, it is worth asking whether there are any social media practices among the British journalists from which YLE could learn.

The learning aspect will be discussed later in this chapter. When it comes to the differences between the journalists from Finland and the UK, nothing stood out. The only difference was that the journalists from the UK seem to regard Twitter as even more important than their Finnish colleagues. Based on these research interviews, Finnish journalists seem to be more eager to try new social media platforms.

For this research, 12 interviews were conducted. This is a small number for drawing generalized conclusions but, as a case study, it provides interesting findings. When devising the research questions, one aim was to find out how journalists can handle many different social media platforms, with many meaning more than two because nowadays there are various popular platforms in which journalists can engage. The outcome was, however, that it was rare for the interviewees to use more than two platforms. As a previous study shows, it is better for journalists to choose which platform is the most beneficial for their work (Vainikka, Noppari, Heinonen & Huhtamäki 2013, 100).

The use of one or two platforms may come as a relief to the journalists: individual journalists can feel assured that it is acceptable to pick only certain platforms, and there is no need to feel intimidated by the fact that their colleagues are using multiple platforms. On the other hand, the usage of one or two platforms indicates that social media teams (people whose main job is to take care of a media outlet's social media platforms) are important for media outlets. Several of the

interviewees mentioned this and said that for an individual, engaging in many platforms would be ambitious.

*You know, we're here in our newsroom, there're people down here whose full-time job is, on behalf of our news, to distribute our journalism across many different platforms, so it works for an organisation. I think it's quite ambitious for an individual to think they can have four, five, six social media presences. (News anchor, UK)*

Because it seems that Twitter and Facebook attract the older segment of the audience, while younger people may prefer the newer social media platforms, inevitably, this can lead to a separation of the audiences: younger people are interested in younger journalists and older people in older ones. This is not necessarily a harmful trend but it may require journalists and media outlets to consider what kind of people want to follow certain journalists. However, this means that audience is an important part of identity building (as mentioned in chapter 2.1., based on the theories on Goffman (1990) and Giddens (1991)).

Furthermore, it is obvious that, on social media, it is harder for an individual journalist to reach as large an audience as via the traditional platforms, like television, which used to reach “everybody”. This can test a journalist’s professional identity – and professional self-esteem: does attracting a big social media audience equate to being a successful journalist? On the other hand, in this digital era, we should redefine the term “mass” because of the increasing number of platforms:<sup>16</sup> if, on television, a mass audience is, for example, a million people, how big is a mass audience on social media? The difficulty of attracting mass audiences can be also explained by the concept of *scattered attention*:<sup>17</sup> audiences no longer tend to concentrate on one thing for very long.

As an outcome of this research, it is worth noticing that, for journalists, their primary purpose in using social media is not necessarily to promote their own content or professionalism: social media can be important for observing, monitoring and following other people and topics. This means that, for some journalists, their professional identity on social media is more passive than active in nature.

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<sup>16</sup> This idea was introduced by Lucy Küng, Research Fellow at Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Küng lectured 8 Feb 2017 under the title “Digital transformation and organisation challenges”.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with social media editor, YLE, 29 June 2016.

Regarding the second aspect of the research, the question about blending public and private life on social media, the journalists from the UK fall into two categories: those who use social media only for work and those who mix their work life with their private life. Both groups seem to enjoy equal success in gaining gain followers on social media so, at least among these interviewees, being popular on social media *does not require* one to reveal information related to their personal life. In Finland, blending private and public life seems to be rarer – at least among these interviewees. This can be explained by the use of Twitter. In Finland, it is common to use Twitter for work and Facebook for leisure; in the UK, people tend to use Twitter in both cases, which makes blending more natural.

As mentioned in chapter 4.2., some of the interviewees agree that tensions can exist between one's public and private identity on social media. To relieve this tension, the best way is to make a thoughtful decision beforehand regarding which platform is for work, which one for leisure, and which one for both, and to behave according to the decision. It is worth trying to make this decision in advance, because changing a style can be hard. However, many interviewees point out that, if a particular platform is used only for leisure, this does not mean that their behaviour would be very different from that regarding their work-related platforms. What is different is the amount of personal information shared. As one interviewee puts it: personal does not mean unprofessional.

The thinking about objectivity and impartiality was similar in both countries, although it was notable that the journalists in the UK preferred to talk about *impartiality* rather than objectivity. This is supposedly linked to the history of the press: the UK has a longer, stronger tradition of partisanship. For instance, the BBC names impartiality as their core value, while the word "objectivity" is not used.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of whether one is talking about objectivity or impartiality, the journalists in the UK emphasized that one must not act impulsively when using social media or become involved in angry debates. On the other hand, many interviewees said that giving an opinion is part of social media. The journalists from Finland also talked about being open and transparent when using social media to protect their objectivity.

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<sup>18</sup> About the BBC: Mission and values

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howweare/mission\\_and\\_values](http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howweare/mission_and_values) (page visited 24 March 2017)

Based on the above discussion, it is time to return to the main research question: what kind of professional identity do journalists build on social media? This research argues that professional identity is formed of four pillars:

1. expertise
2. guidelines
3. freedom
4. spontaneity

Expertise means that, if a journalist covers, for example, the Middle East, domestic policy or education issues, what he/she shares or posts on social media is frequently linked to this field of expertise. Some of the interviewees mention that, for example, if their followers are interested in the Middle East, by following their social media feed, they will find a picture of the current issues there. Professional identity on social media is also linked to the social media guidelines or social media stylebook provided by the employer. If guidelines exist, these forbid the insulting of colleagues and their stories, as well as their employer. On the other hand, it is worth noticing that the employers do not necessarily check that that employees have found or studied the guidelines.

Freedom means that, within the guidelines, journalists can basically behave on social media however they wish, whenever they wish. The interviewees say that their boss rarely asks them to produce any social media content, and the interviewees like it that way. Spontaneity is related to freedom but spontaneous means that the journalists interviewed for this research started using social media on their own initiative and because they were curious about doing so. The journalists have found their own style by trying different things. Spontaneity also means that the journalists do not usually have any specific social media routines, i.e. using social media at certain times of the day (except for the morning, when most journalists check Twitter immediately after waking up).

It can also be argued that these research interviews reveal that the journalists do consider their behaviour on social media *because they are journalists*. However, at the same time, they agree that one should not be *too stylish*. Social media are fast-paced and being genuine on social media is of great value, the interviewees say.



At the beginning of this paper, the question was whether the journalists at YLE could learn something about professional identity on social media from the journalists in the UK. The journalists in the UK tend to support the three following points:

1. Do not try to use too many social media platforms.
2. Do not spend too much time on social media.
3. Choose whether to blend your private and public life *or* to keep them separate: both approaches can be equally successful.

The first one is obvious: if a journalist uses one or two platforms, he/she has more time for them and so will be more active there and build a social media presence. The second point shows that it is all about time: social media can save time (i.e. following certain people is the quickest way to stay updated) but also waste time (i.e. getting involved in time-consuming debates). The last point states that, if a journalist fails to reveal any details about his/her personal life, this does not mean that he/she is too boring to follow. It is better to choose one's own style and stick to it.

## 6. Conclusions and suggestions

At the end of 2016/beginning of 2017, the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) was heavily criticized for restricting the freedom of speech.<sup>19</sup> The dispute arose after the Finnish Prime Minister, Juha Sipilä, reportedly pressured YLE to modify their coverage of a possible conflict of interest involving him. As a result, two journalists resigned.<sup>20</sup> Like many heated topics, this also sparked debate on social media. The main people involved in the debate were members of the public, politicians and journalists from other media outlets, but also some journalists from YLE.

In the aftermath, the CEO of YLE, Mr Lauri Kivinen, was interviewed by Finland's fifth biggest newspaper by circulation, *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*. During this interview, Kivinen said, "nowadays one of the problems is that at the same time, same people represent institutions and themselves for example on social media".<sup>21</sup> This quote reflects the starting point of this research: the complexity of being a journalist and using social media.

Facebook was launched over ten years ago, following which various other social media platforms have emerged. Now, as more mobile phone users have smartphones,<sup>22</sup> social media is becoming increasingly crucial for media companies and journalists who wish to reach audiences, make contacts, and find ideas. For journalists, this means that negotiations between public and private life as well as questions about objectivity and impartiality will continue. Furthermore, we cannot claim that the situation regarding the social media platforms is stable: it is not in the media companies' hands to prevent certain platforms from disappearing.

This research shows that journalists who engage with social media are very spontaneous there; meaning that no one asked them to get involved on social media or told them what to do there. The interviewed journalists started using social media on their own initiative. At YLE, the

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<sup>19</sup> BBC: Finnish PM Sipilä caught up in press freedom row <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-38155965> (page visited 20 Feb 2017)

<sup>20</sup> Two YLE journalists resign, citing limits on freedom of speech [http://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/two\\_yle\\_journalists\\_resign\\_citing\\_limits\\_on\\_freedom\\_of\\_speech/9351895](http://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/two_yle_journalists_resign_citing_limits_on_freedom_of_speech/9351895)

<sup>21</sup> Maaseudun Tulevaisuus: Ylen toimitusjohtaja Lauri Kivinen myöntää virheet johtamisessa, mutta ei ymmärrä ovet paukkuen lähteneitä toimittajia <http://www.maaseuduntulevaisuus.fi/i ihmiset-kulttuuri/ylen-toimitusjohtaja-lauri-kivinen-my%C3%B6nt%C3%A4%C3%A4-virheet-johtamisessa-mutta-ei-ymm%C3%A4rr%C3%A4-ovet-paukkuen-l%C3%A4hteneit%C3%A4-toimittajia-1.178973> (page visited 20 Feb 2017, translation my own)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Mobile-Phone-Smartphone-Usage-Varies-Globally/1014738>

company has clear strategies regarding how different programs or channels are presented on social media but, when it comes to individual journalists, YLE has offered less guidance.<sup>23</sup>

Twitter is the most important platform for many journalists, but it seems inevitable that journalists should also engage with other platforms in order to reach more diverse audiences. Generally, journalists would be eager to try new platforms if they had the time and an idea about how these would benefit their work. What emerged from these research interviews was a desire not necessarily to obtain more guidance about social media from employers but for more time and support to enable the journalists interviewed to explore the new social media platforms, and so build up their professional identity on social media.

However, some journalists are already engaged with newer platforms, like Instagram, so further research about this would be interesting. Questions worth researching would be: how they use, for example, Instagram for work; how it differs from other platforms; and how Instagram contributes to their everyday work as journalists.

Along with Facebook and Twitter, Instagram<sup>24</sup> and Snapchat are familiar to many media companies, which have an official account for the brand. However, usually, these accounts are administered by special social media teams. So far, there has been little research about this kind of social media team: what do they do; how they build the identity of their media outlet on social media; and what kind of collaboration they engage in with individual journalists.

After all this, one may wish to ask, once more, whether it is necessary for a journalist to use social media. The answer is yes – at least with regard to some platforms. Although Twitter, for example, is often regarded as a platform which reaches only a certain type of audience, social media at large form part of nearly everyone's life. As some interviewees mentioned, social media are like having an e-mail address or telephone number. It could even be said that, if a journalist does not use social media, he/she is invisible.

In this research, at the end of each interview, the interviewee was asked: are social media here to stay? No one knows the future, but all of the interviewees agreed that, in one form or another,

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with YLE social media editor 29 June 2016

<sup>24</sup> For example, BBC News has 3.1 million Instagram followers, BBC Breaking News 30.2 million Twitter followers and BBC News 36.3 Facebook followers. Respectively, Yle Uutiset (Yle News) has 24,800 Instagram followers, 172,000 Twitter followers and 155,000 Facebook followers.

social media will continue to be part of journalistic work. This may mean that, as a part of the professional identity of journalists on social media, exposure to interaction and feedback from the audience is becoming more important than ever. Also, using social media means that journalists must be ready to accept that being a journalist is a lifestyle: social media are there also after office hours.

## Appendix: Areas of questioning for interviewees

1. Which social media platforms do you use?

- Why these platforms?
- Which one is the most important for you?

2. Have you thought about using some other platforms?

- Why/why not?

3. Is social media a part of your public life, private life or both?

- What type of work-related content do you share?
- What type of content you share when not working?

4. Has social media changed something in your work (finding ideas, saving time etc.)

5. Do you have “social media routines” (using certain time of the day...)

6. Objectivity is one of the most important things in journalism. When being on social media, is objectivity relevant?

- What happens to objectivity on social media?

7. How much do you think about your role as journalist when you are on social media?

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## Interviews

29 June 2016

29 June 2016

6 July 2016

8 July 2016

13 July 2016

27 July 2016

8 August 2016

19 December 2016

19 January 2017

22 January 2017

8 February 2017

23 February 2017

Interviewees work for the following media outlets:

YLE

BBC

The Economist

The Sunday Times

The Daily Telegraph