

Media Accountability Today... and Tomorrow

Updating the Concept in Theory and Practice

Torbjörn von Krogh (ed.)



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Preface

Through a three-year grant from the Stiftelsen [Foundation] Barometern, the School of Communication and Design, IKD, was able to invite a visiting professor in journalism during the academic year 2006-2007. Torbjörn von Krogh, a journalist with a long, distinguished and varied career spent the year with us, exploring the implementation of Media Accountability Systems. MAS cover a wide variety of self-regulating methods by which the mass media can improve their publishing ethics in practice.

A symposium with the same title was held at Kalmar University on March 13-14, 2007. The event brought together practicing journalists, researchers primarily from the Scandinavian countries, and teachers from Kalmar University. Invited speakers came from Germany, UK and USA as well. Unfortunately, the leading person in global MAS research, late professor Claude-Jean Bertrand from Paris, could not attend due to his illness.

The School of Communication and Design wishes to express its thanks to those who attended the symposium and, in particular, to those whose contributions appear in this volume. On behalf of our School, I want to thank professor Torbjörn von Krogh for spending the academic year with us, helping us to convene the symposium and editing this volume.

The School of Communication and Design was joined by The Swedish Institute for Further Education of Journalists, FOJO, at Kalmar University, in the planning and execution of the symposium.

Finally, to the Stiftelsen Barometern, many thanks for your support of our School, and to Nordicom, for publishing this volume.

Kalmar in February, 2008

Olof Hultén

Head, School of Communication and Design
Kalmar University

Introduction

Media Accountability. A 60-year-old Compromise that Still Holds Promise for the Future

Torbjörn von Krogh

June 12, 2007, Prime Minister Tony Blair held a valedictory in which he expressed harsh criticism of British news media. The media, Blair said, “is a feral beast, just tearing people and reputations to bits”. He was clearly of the opinion that the beast should be tamed, but how to go about it when, just moments before, he had assured his listeners that “a free media is a vital part of a free society”?

“It is also a part of freedom”, he continued, “to be able to comment on the media”. He then went on to speak of the need for a new regulatory framework (in which he included institutions of self-regulation). It has to be possible to hold the media, like all other centers of power in society, accountable, Blair argued.

Many a prime minister – and others who don’t have Tony Blair’s access to the public – are critical of the media news reporting. Part of the friction has to do with the fact that the media highlight problems and criticize how powerful figures perform their duties. But there is also dissatisfaction among a broader circle of users of the media, who find fault with newsgathering practices and note errors in the reporting.

Holding media accountable for what they do – and don’t do – has become a means to tackle problems on several levels. To get an explanation, to get errors corrected, to receive an apology when it is called for. But also, to raise the overall level of quality in news reporting, according to the principle that a medium’s performance will be affected by knowing that it may be called to account and have to explain how it went about its work, i.e., a dynamic element of interactivity (see also the working definition of ‘accountability’ offered at the end of this chapter).

Launched in 1947 by the Hutchins Commission in the USA, the concept of media accountability was a solution to a conflict within the Commission between those who were willing to impose some form of government regulation on the media and those who wanted media to remain free of government influence. The Commission was of the opinion that American media were not fulfilling their proper role in a democracy, i.e., they were not providing the information citizens need, but the group shied away from the idea that legislators should

be able to prescribe media content. They arrived at a compromise: the media would be held accountable through criticism, debate, critical scrutiny and a non-governmental 'media inspectorate' that would be privately funded and hosted by an unspecified university.

The notion of 'accountability' in the abstract has been debated by media theorists ever since; meanwhile, in practice the concept has gained ever wider acceptance among media practitioners. Given the interactivity that both 'our times' and new communications technology make possible, the concept would appear to have bright prospects.

Some Examples of the Current Interest

Speaking at the inauguration of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University in November 2006, Geert Linnebank, then Editor-in-Chief for Reuters, concluded his remarks with the following words:

This brings me to the point I want to end on – accountability. While many in our trade are entirely, importantly, admirably committed to and supremely skilled at holding those in power to account, that same commitment and those same skills aren't always in evidence when it comes to looking at themselves, or at their own organisations, at their trade.

For all the reasons I mentioned before – the disintermediation, the trust deficit our industry is suffering, the rapidly increasing promiscuity of audiences – I believe it's imperative that journalism take stock. And that we do that honestly, openly, without defensiveness, with rigour, and with discipline.

This, perhaps, is the main role, the very reason of being for the Institute – as a place of accountability, one where solutions are found to the big new issues affecting journalism – solutions that are based on honest, open debate, verified fact, intelligent analysis, brought about through a combination of academic rigour and journalistic urgency and flair.

If – when – we achieve that, people will come to us. We'll be relevant. We will have succeeded (Reuters Institute 2006).

Shortly before he left office, Tony Blair spoke at the Reuters Institute on his experience of the media as a figure in "public life". He obviously wants some kind of sharper regulation of "the feral beast" and uses both technological and social arguments:

The regulatory framework at some point will need revision. (...) As the technology blurs the distinction between papers and television, it becomes increasingly irrational to have different sets of accountability based on technology that no longer can be differentiated in the old way. (...)

It is sometimes said that the media is accountable daily through the choice of readers and viewers. That is true up to a point. But the reality is that the

viewers or readers have no objective yardstick to measure what they are being told. In every other walk of life in our society that exercises power, there are external forms of accountability, not least through the media itself. (...)

I am not in a position to determine this one way or another. But a way needs to be found. I do believe this relationship between public life and media is now damaged in a manner that requires repair (Blair 2007).

In August 2007, Google News introduced a feature on its website, where people who are mentioned in Google News' articles can comment on them. Bloggers hail the innovation as a giant step forward for accountability. As Phil Shapiro, a librarian in Maryland, USA, put it (in Mark Glaser's blog, *Mediashift*):

I see this feature increasing the accountability of reporters. If they continuously steer off the path, then their editors and the public will know it. This also levels the playing field, allowing people to explain when a quote was taken out of context.

I say bravo to Google. You have empowered the little guy once again. The only people to be upset about this feature are old-school cigar chomping editors (Shapiro 2007).

Knowledgeable bloggers who follow other media find it much easier to communicate with editors and journalists about what they have put in print, on paper or the web, or on the air. Mark Liberman, a researcher in Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, USA, found a story about N'kisi, a telepathic parrot who had a vocabulary of 100 words. It was a remarkable story – and total fiction. In the Summer of 2007 he wrote in his own blog, *Language Log*, about his contacts with the BBC:

I don't especially enjoy playing "gotcha" with journalists, but there's some evidence that being held up to ridicule in the blogosphere has an impact on reporters and editors, not just in individual cases but cumulatively (Liberman 2007).

How should established media look upon the scrutiny and criticism bloggers subject them to? They should welcome it, says Martin Moore, a researcher and journalist who directs the Media Standards Trust, a new media accountability institute in London:

Although there is little substance in a lot of what the media monitors and the bloggers find, occasionally they turn up real howlers. Like the Reuters' photographs that had been deliberately photoshopped to make the Israeli bombing of Beirut look worse than it was.

But the answer is not to sink into some sort of metaphysical crisis. The answer is to become more transparent and more accountable. Pull back the curtain, show people what's happening backstage. Give them the raw

footage, tell them the standards by which programme makers expect the programme to be judged. And if it doesn't live up to those standards, accept the consequences.

Not only that but let people respond, give them the means to complain, to applaud, to critique, to vent. Hell, give them the tools to make it themselves.

The democratisation of media shouldn't be seen as some sort of barbarians at the gate moment, after which the old media giants get torn down and over-run. But it does signify a fundamental shift in power and responsibility, and those media organisations that don't recognise that, and react to it, will feel increasingly besieged (Moore 2007).

Today there is both an interest in, and a need for media accountability. The need is voiced within as well as outside the media branch. In the past, representatives of the media, particularly those in the USA, have regarded the idea of being held accountable for what they produce and how they go about it with extreme suspicion – is it not an infringement of freedom of the press?

What is media accountability, why is it on the agenda today, and how has the concept, and interest in it, grown over the years? These are the principal questions to be addressed in this introductory chapter.

Later chapters relate some media researchers' and practitioners' experience of studying and implementing various mechanisms designed to enhance accountability. The authors contributed in one way or another to a two-day symposium, "Media Accountability Today – and Tomorrow", held at Kalmar University, Sweden, in March 2007.

A Process

Neil Nemeth's (2000) starting point is that media accountability is essentially very simple, and it occurs all the time whether or not it is supported by theory or formalized systems: "Whenever someone asks a news organization to explain or justify one of its decisions, the media accountability process has been set into motion", he writes (p 42). Nemeth uses the phrase, "media accountability process", and that view of accountability imbues the anthology (Pritchard 2000) in which Nemeth's article appears. Editor Pritchard, for his part, defines media accountability as "the process by which media organizations may be expected or obliged to render an account of their activities to their constituents" (p 2).

The "constituents" are individuals, groups and organizations (readers, advertisers, news sources, media colleagues and regulatory agencies). Borrowing terminology from the Law, Pritchard refers to the stages in the process as *naming* (a constituent identifies a media problem), *blaming* (the constituent holds a media organization responsible for the problem), and *claiming* (the constituent demands some form of reaction on the part of the media organization; these may range from an explanation of the rationale behind a decision to publish to

economic compensation for the damage or trauma that publication caused).

Although Pritchard mentions several different kinds of constituents, it is clear that he mainly has the private citizen in mind. “Ultimately, media accountability depends on citizen participation. The same, of course, is true of democracy” (p 192).

The current interest in greater accountability is not confined to the media sector. It is prevalent in many different sectors of society. It may be seen as a function of globalization. As companies grow and consolidate on a global scale, we find that codes of conduct and ‘social governance’ become more common. Meanwhile, it has become easier to communicate and interact via the web, both for those who wish to exact an admission of responsibility from firms and organizations, and for firms and organizations who wish to respond and explain themselves.

The media landscape, too, has changed in a similar fashion. In a discussion of the heightened interest in media accountability, Bardoel and d’Haenens (2004) mention factors like competition, commercialization and globalization as causes of structural change in the sector. To this they add the uncertainty, not to say crisis, that public service broadcasting and responsible journalism face and the increasingly acute challenge to the culture of independent journalism posed by a more business-oriented management culture. Bardoel and d’Haenens note “a new increase in attention, including a new sense of urgency, for ‘social responsibility’ in the media” (p 5).

They, like many others, refer to the Hutchins Commission of 1947 in the USA, which is generally acknowledged as the originator of the ‘social responsibility theory of the press’ – in which media accountability is prominent. The next question that presents itself is: Out of what setting did the Hutchins inquiry and the social responsibility theory arise?

The Hutchins Commission

Clifford Christians (2000) points to the immediate situation during the second world war – the Commission was appointed in 1942 – with totalitarian regimes to both the Left (Stalin) and the Right (Hitler). Both regimes used the press as vehicles for their propaganda.

The initiative to form the Commission was taken by magazine magnate Henry Luce (owner-publisher of *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune* and others). Luce was hoping the Commission would come up with principles that supported ‘traditional free market media’. Any ambitions the Roosevelt administration might have had concerning greater influence over the media should be warded off. Luce turned to Robert Hutchins, his personal friend and President of the University of Chicago. Hutchins in turn gathered a group of prominent scholars to study the threats to a free press. The threats the Commission identified were not, however, those that Henry Luce had had in mind.

Before the war the press had been under attack (McChesney & Scott 2004), both from journalists (who were organizing) and in the Roosevelt cabinet (whose New Deal policies were opposed by a conservative press). These critical views persisted into the mid-1940s. Or, as media historian Victor Pickard summarizes the situation: “Concerns over propaganda, overt commercialism and concentrated ownership led to questions about the democratic role of the press” (cited in Bennet et al. 2007, p 181).

“The Commission believes that [the] failure of the press is the greatest danger to its freedom”, the Commission wrote (Leigh 1947, p 68). The principal failures were three:

1. The press had grown in numbers and importance, whereas citizens’ opportunities to make their views known via the press had shrunk.
2. The few who do have access to the press have not “provided a service adequate to the needs of society”.
3. “Third, those who direct the machinery of the press have engaged from time to time in practices which the society condemns and which, if continued, it will inevitably undertake to regulate or control” (Leigh 1947, p 1).

Pritchard characterizes the Commission’s views during the inquiry as “fairly radical”. Some members drafted plans for sweeping structural reforms based, for example, on a notion of the press as being analogous to public education, which therefore, it was argued, should not be steered by market forces. Another idea was to introduce public subsidies to stimulate the establishment of so-called second papers so as to (re-)introduce competition in communities having monopoly papers.

Media historian Marion Tuttle Marzoff (1991) relates that several members considered drafting protective legislation pertaining to media ownership (breaking up major conglomerates and banning cross-media groups), but refrained because they did not want to be lumped together with “crackpots and socialists” (p 170). The Commission sought to create a position or platform for socially responsible media between those that were totally commercially steered and those under government control.

Concerned as they were, the commissioners could not bring themselves to recommend licensing journalists, limiting the numbers of media units under any one ownership, or prohibiting cross-media ownerships, all ideas they had discussed. Instead, like many press critics before them, they called for enlightened owners, more citizen involvement, and higher professional standards by the practitioners. They crystallized decades of debate in a social responsibility concept for the modern press (Marzoff 1991, p 166).

In the end, however, the recommendations of the Hutchins Commission were fairly moderate. Their remedy featured (voluntary) acceptance of the responsibilities that being “common carriers of information and discussion” entails,

“self-control”, and “vigorous mutual criticism” as factors that would help the press to fulfill the social needs that it was not fulfilling at present.

Among the most controversial proposals was the idea of a non-governmental media inspectorate. “We recommend the establishment of a new and independent agency to appraise and report annually upon the performance of the press” (Leigh 1947, p 100). The institution was to be privately financed and attached to a university. The Commission presented ten points relating to quantitative measures, research and topics for discussion, and notes: “The above recommendations taken together give some indication of methods by which the press may become accountable and hence remain free” (Leigh 1947, p 102). Here they use the term ‘accountability’. Otherwise, ‘responsibility’ is much more common in the report. ‘Accountability’ tends to be used in connection with discussions of the fundamental problem of the press.

To sum up: The Hutchins Commission argues that due to “the complexity of modern society, the critical world situation and the new menaces to freedom which these imply” the press must “assume a new public responsibility”. Citizens need news reporting of good quality, not only for their own sakes, but also because citizens’ views influence the quality of government and, by extension, a country’s ability to survive in the community of nations. The nuclear bombs over imperial Japan, indirectly referred to by the Commission in its report, mark the beginning of a new epoch.

Freedom of the press must be conceived broadly, as encompassing citizens’ civil rights and the public interest. Furthermore, freedom of the press not only means *freedom from* external pressure and constraints (the conventional liberal conception of freedom), but also the *freedom to* develop, so as better to serve the common good (an expansion of the concept in the direction of communitarian ideals). “Positive freedom is the conceptual axis around which social responsibility revolves”, comments ethical philosopher Clifford Christians (cited in Nerone 1995, p 84).

Accountability, to the Commission’s way of thinking, is a means by which press freedom can be saved:

This implies that the press must also be accountable. It must be accountable to society for meeting the public need and for maintaining the rights of citizens and the almost forgotten rights of speakers who have no press. (...) Freedom of the press for the coming period can only continue as an accountable freedom. Its moral right will be conditioned on its acceptance of this accountability. Its legal right will stand unaltered as its moral duty is performed (Leigh 1947, p 18).

Accountability as Compromise

The idea of social responsibility of the press and criticism of sundry ‘sins of omission’ in this regard are nothing new. Media historian Marion Tuttle Mar-

zolf has studied the history of criticism of the press in the USA between 1880 and 1950. She stresses that the Hutchins Commission was hardly the first to formulate demands for social responsibility on the part of mass media. (See also Christians (2000), who points out that all of the Commission's doctrines were set out in William Gibbons' *Newspaper Ethics*, in 1926.)

Marzolf cites Delos F. Wilcox, a social psychologist who studied the contents of 147 major city newspapers in 1900, and who put forward the view that "newspapers should be responsible to society just as teachers must be" (Marzolf 1991, p 29). In the early years of the twentieth century public discussion revolved around the issue of external regulation versus self-regulation of the press. Privacy laws and licensing of journalists were also considered. The press was not insensitive to this discussion and drafted the industry's first code of ethics (1910) and established institutions known as "bureaus of accuracy" (1913). Marzolf writes of the terms 'responsibility' and 'accountability':

The debate over this issue from the late 1890s into the 1940s was always cast in terms of responsibility. The critics urged self-improvement and justified it by moral and social arguments. The responsibility was implied in the granting of free speech and press in the First Amendment. In using the word accountability, I am suggesting that these pressures toward legal restraints, such as privacy law and licensing, were attempts to force responsibility on a press that was not initiating it. The first critic I found using the term accountability was Archibald MacLeish in his 1946 draft of the Hutchins Commission report, and he said that he meant 'owner accountability' to the larger society (Marzolf 1991, p 73).

According to Marzolf, in the 1940s the concept of 'accountability' was perceived as more forceful and implied greater pressure on the media than did appeals to moral and social responsibility; it might, for example, imply a threat of legislation. As late as its final draft in October 1946, the Hutchins Commission report was entitled "A Free and Accountable Press", but only months before the book went to print this was changed to "A Free and Responsible Press". Marzolf summarizes the rationale behind the change: "Accountability implied some mechanism to enforce standards; responsibility was self-imposed" (Marzolf 1991, p 166).

Jerilyn McIntyre (1987) recounts that the Commission wrestled with the problem of how an "unenforceable right" – that is, "a moral duty to serve the collective good" – could be enforced (p 146). The trouble was more operational than theoretical. What policy solution should they recommend? The result was a compromise: the previously mentioned citizens' agency was proposed as a forum where the press could be brought to account. The Commission was anxious to remain on a good footing with the press in order to increase the chances that newspapers took their proposals to heart. McIntyre notes: "In order to gain public acceptance, they believed their ideas should not sound too revolutionary or hysterical" (p 153).

Even though the Commission did not propose any structural interventions such as limitation of ownership, and despite the fact that they were cautious in their wording, the Commission's financier, Henry Luce was not happy with the results (Christians 2000). The press was enraged. "A Free Press (Hitler Style) Sought for U.S.," read one headline in *Chicago Tribune* (Bennet et al. 2007, p 182).

Wilbur Forrest, chairman of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, commented that the Commission seemed to have let themselves be influenced by thinking that aimed to "undermine public confidence in the American press as an institution" (cited in Marzolf 1991, p 169). Forrest was engaged in spreading the American model of a free press in countries that had been under totalitarian rule. He was worried that the Hutchins report would make his work more difficult.

In a subsequent academic treatise, *Four Theories of the Press* (1956), Siebert, Peterson and Schramm note that the press was not so much antagonistic to the notion that newspapers had a social responsibility as they felt that the Commission had been too harsh in their characterization of newspapers' quality. The press was also upset by the fact that the Commission did not explicitly rule out government intervention as a last resort.

Louis Hodges, professor of media ethics, explains the press' anger, noting that the difference between 'media responsibility' and 'media accountability' was not crystal clear. The press was willing to shoulder its responsibility, but they were not prepared to be held accountable to anyone, and the two were confused:

The Commission addressed press responsibility, but the working press read accountability. Journalists and news organizations did not want to be accountable to a bunch of intellectuals on the Commission who would judge their performance. The confusion may also be one of the underlying reasons the National News Council folded (Hodges 2004, p 174).

Hodges makes the following distinction between the two:

The issue of responsibility is: To what social needs should we expect journalists to respond ably? The issue of accountability is: How might society call on journalists to explain and justify the ways they perform the responsibilities given them? Responsibility has to do with defining proper conduct, accountability with compelling it (Hodges 2004, p 173).

Forces for Change

In a somewhat longer perspective, both Christians and Marzolf are of the opinion that the Hutchins Commission prepared the ground for the idea that the press bears a social responsibility in public opinion and public policy. Nerone, however, disagrees. Granted, most of the Commission's ideas and recommendations are well-rooted among members of the press today, but is it because

of the Commission's idealistic campaign, or is it an adaptation on the part of media owners to new market conditions?

In an even longer perspective, Christians (2000) points out that the rights and responsibilities of mass media have been discussed in Western societies ever since the first daily newspapers were published in Germany in the early 1600s. And media criticism goes back even further, virtually as long as media have existed.

One reason for entrants into the newly started newspaper market (as opposed to occasional newsletters and the like) to be accountable was that they were anxious to keep their readers; their relation to their readers was more constant, trust had become important:

English newspapers were pouncing on the errors of their competitors as early as 1622, printing critical letters from readers as early as 1624 (debunking, for example, a report on "the strange birth of Antichrist" in Babylon) and perhaps most significantly, newspapers in England were correcting their own errors as early as 1626 (Stephens 1997, p 160).

Robert A. White (2000) describes how public communication has changed over time as the moral foundations of society have changed. Into the Middle Ages, a society in which everyone knew his place revered the age-old wisdom that King and clergy were thought to possess. Censorship was accepted as a legitimate means to protect reader and writer alike. Science, commerce and industry came to challenge this world-view, and in time the corporative social order was increasingly seen as an obstacle, as a means to defend existing power structures. "Development of society is achieved by allowing free individual initiative and free circulation of ideas" (White 2000, p 58). Thus, a libertarian philosophy that accommodated most interests in the new society, with free media, free enterprise and political parties, emerged.

With the industrial revolution and the start of production for mass markets in the nineteenth century, both manufacturing and the media underwent profound change, and the conditions for public communication changed once again. Public criticism of sensational, so-called 'yellow', journalism swelled, as the media became increasingly important to ordinary citizens as a means to orient themselves. A growing number of sectors underwent professionalization; in the case of the media, professionalization brought codes of ethics and the ideals of independence, accuracy and fairness.

Christians (2000) and McChesney and Scott (2004) identify different kinds of transitional crises in the media in the USA, around 1900 and again, in the 1930s. Marzolf (1991) describes a more gradual and steady transition. According to White, the transition was over and done with shortly after the Hutchins Commission had published their recommendations:

By mid-twentieth century the 'social responsibility' formula had negotiated a new respect for the moral claims of major actors. Media proprietors admitted

that freedom of the press had become an ideology to defend itself [the press] from public regulation and adopted a new policy of public service. Media workers, formed into professions, gained a new prestige. With its public service ideals, the press could present itself as the central institution defending democracy. In times of national crisis the public gained confidence in the media as social critics and as accurate objective reporters of events such as wars and catastrophes (White 2000, p 60).

Media Systems and Accountability

The theory of social responsibility in the sense of Hutchins and *Four Theories of the Press* is not the whole explanation of how the concept of media accountability has developed. The picture is filled out with the help of comparative studies of media systems and how they relate to different political systems (Hallin & Mancini 2004).

Hallin and Mancini take their point of departure in Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's four theories and the question, why the press is as it is, taking different forms in different countries, but they soon take a totally different approach to answering the question. On the basis of empirical data and previous media research they identify three models of media systems in Europe and North America: the Liberal Model in North America and the UK, with primarily commercial, market-steered media; the Democratic Corporatist Model in the countries of northern Europe, with active, but limited government involvement and with a mixture of market-steered and non-commercial media; and the Polarized Pluralist Model, typified by the countries of Mediterranean Europe, with a high degree of government intervention, less-developed commercial media and ties between media and partisan politics.

The interesting thing about the models in the present context is that they show how both the ability and the means to hold the media accountable have developed differently in different parts of the western world. It also becomes clear that the discussion of media accountability so far has largely revolved around conditions and trends in the USA.

The Liberal (Market) Model

There is a high degree of professionalization among editors and journalists; the self-formulated standards of the profession contain elements of a public service ideology. Journalists are not, however, organized to any greater extent, and there is no centralized national structure for media accountability in the USA. Government guarantees freedom of the press, but otherwise keeps its hands off the media. In the USA, Hallin and Mancini note, professional self-regulation is largely informal and takes place within different media organizations and in the broader peer culture of journalism.

In the UK the situation is somewhat different. In 1947, the same year as the Hutchins Commission published their report, the Cabinet appointed a Royal Commission on the Press. In 1949 the Commission proposed that the press should organize a national press council, and such a council was set up in 1953. In 1991, the council was replaced by a Press Complaints Commission, again on the advice of a government study.

The Polarized Pluralist Model

The practice of journalism is not particularly professionalized. Journalism has aimed less at investigative reporting, but had a stronger emphasis on literature, debate and politics. Newspapers were long elite media; only more recently have mass newspapers (other than sport sheets) appeared. Journalists are rather little organized; there is little agreement as to standards of excellence. In Italy, for example, formal training in journalism was introduced as recently as the 1980s.

"Formal accountability systems are essentially absent in the Mediterranean countries. ... The absence of such institutions reflects the general lack of consensus on ethical standards in the media of Southern Europe", write Hallin & Mancini (2004, p 112). Government plays a major and complex role in the media sectors of these countries; a mixture of authoritarian activism, democratic influences and personal alliances between media and parties are at play. In several of the countries the media are regulated by law, particularly in relation to libel and observance of the sanctity of individuals' private life.

The Democratic Corporatist Model

Hallin and Mancini summarize this category in terms of three 'coexistences'. Broad commercial media coexist with a politically partisan press; journalistic professionalism developed parallel with politically steered journalism, and Liberal freedom of the press developed parallel with government intervention in media operations.

The vast majority of journalists are organized in professional unions and can (at least in principle) expel members who violate established ethical norms. "The Democratic Corporatist countries also tend to have relatively strong, formalized systems of self-regulation of the press", Hallin and Mancini observe. The first press club was founded in Austria in 1859. The first national press council was established in Sweden in 1916. All the countries in this category have press councils.

In all these countries social organizations like unions, employers' interest groups and religious communities are very influential. They play an integral role in the maintenance of social institutions, including tasks and duties that in many countries are the province of government.

It is interesting to ponder the influence various factors exert on how media accountability systems have developed in countries having the respective models.

- *Tradition' and Prevailing Views of Government Regulation*
Has the principle of 'hands off' built a protective wall around the press in the USA (where broadcasting is regulated more than the press), a wall that neither the Hutchins Commission nor the National News Council could make a chink in? That is to say, when the press on the East Coast belittled the NNC (which withered and died), did it feel it could do so because editors could rest assured that the government would not intervene (as in northern Europe)?
- *The Presence of Nationally Distributed Sensationalist Newspapers*
Has widespread criticism of the 'yellow press' stimulated the development of comprehensive national accountability systems? Such papers exist in northern Europe and the UK, but not in southern Europe or the USA. Nationally distributed newspapers in the USA tend to be elite papers; they have not provoked the kind of criticism sensationalist papers (primarily New York-based in the USA) have. What is more, they themselves carry a good deal of media criticism.
- *Consensual Agreements of National Scope on Ethics*
Have branchwide national agreements on codes of conduct and national press councils effectively deterred or prevented regulatory legislation, or have these institutions served de facto as the extended arms of government? Have the agreements put a damper on local and regional accountability initiatives? Do editors and journalists simply shrug: "Ethics? Oh, that's for the Council to decide"?
- *Media Scandals*
Do severe ethical breaches have more impact in Liberal (market) Model settings? There, there are no buffering national institutions. Instead, the media company itself bears full responsibility for mending its ways. (For example: New York Times appointed a 'Public Editor' after the Jayson Blair scandal – an about-face from the company's previous rejection of the idea of readers' ombudsmen.) In Democratic Corporatist countries, scandals may provoke calls for stronger legislative constraints, but these demands may be countered by adopting stricter measures of self-regulation. Finally, in Polarized Pluralist media cultures public tolerance of transgressions would seem to be greater; or, is it rather that breaches are interpreted differently? Is criticism, for example, aimed at the groups and organizations that the media are affiliated with instead of at the media themselves?
- *Accountability as Compromise*
Do we find a pattern similar to that noted in the case of media scandals? Has the conflict between calls for restraining legislation and the principles of a free press been most charged in countries where the Liberal (market) Model predominates? While, at the same time, widespread media criticism has perhaps been less vehement due to the absence of popu-

lar nationally distributed sensationalist papers? Whereas in Democratic Corporatist northern Europe a compromise resolution of the conflict has been more readily accepted, which results in a climate that is better equipped to handle strong and widespread expressions of disgust? And in the Polarized Pluralist countries of southern Europe criticism may be less vehement and expectations regarding accountability not so great? Paolo Mancini notes that in Italy the notion of accountability is “an empty word” since the Italians have no expectations whatsoever that the press will offer “neutral” or “objective” information (comments to the author, September 6, 2007).

More comparative research is needed to answer these questions. But one thing is clear: the meaning of ‘media accountability’ is colored by the surrounding society.

Hallin and Mancini see signs of an emerging global media culture along the lines of the Liberal (market) Model. In the case of Europe, the ascendancy of market dominance will take place in environments where government has played a different role than it has in the USA. This will influence approaches to holding media accountable, as well. May it mean that the national systems in northern Europe will be supplemented with a variety of local, regional and web-based systems? While southern Europe turns to national regulation under national government auspices?

Other Research on Media Accountability

Research on media accountability has continued in the USA in the decades since Hutchins and *Four Theories of the Press*. There, Clifford Christians is one of the leading names. It has also continued in Europe with Denis McQuail and Claude-Jean Bertrand among others.

Christians, who specializes in media ethics, distinguishes three components of accountability: liability, moral sanctions and answerability (1989, p 40). He calls for a new “normative ethics with ‘giving an account’ as its focus” (1989, p 50) and urges a greater emphasis on communitarianism (“morally appropriate action intends community”) as the most fruitful approach (2000, p 39) for any academic scholar who, with input from media practitioners (2003, p 62), seeks to formulate such a normative ethic.

McQuail started his research in this area in the mid-1970s when he was asked to perform a content analysis of British newspapers for the 1974 Royal Commission on the Press. The lack of media theory in the area prompted the book, *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest* (1992). On the basis of his study, which combined social responsibility theory and empirical observations, he predicted that demands for media responsibility and accountability will increase when self-regulation replaces government regulation, particularly in broadcasting and telecommunications.

McQuail revisited and further developed the concept of accountability in a keynote lecture at a conference on broadcasting ethics (1997). Starting with Christians' distinction between liability and answerability, he has constructed a model that is further elaborated in the book, *Media Accountability and Freedom of Publication* (2003):

FREE MEDIA
have
RESPONSIBILITIES
in the form of obligations
which can be either
ASSIGNED or CONTRACTED or SELF-CHOSEN
for which they are held
ACCOUNTABLE
to individuals, organizations, or society
(legally, socially, or morally)
either in the sense of
LIABILITY or ANSWERABILITY
for harm caused for quality of performance.

Adopting Hodges' (1986, 2004) distinction between responsibility and accountability, McQuail opts for accountability via social and moral answerability, which, he finds, "meets criteria of voluntariness, normative richness, wide range and participative value". Albeit he is aware that claims to social responsibility can be self-serving and involve support for dominant values. McQuail cautions – in line with Pritchard, whose definition of accountability he cites – that much will depend on the degree of popular participation, a perspective that may also be applied to Hallin and Mancini's findings:

In the end, the effectiveness of the public trust model depends very much on the traditions of the particular media system and on there being an active participatory democracy already in place (McQuail 1997, p 525).

He concludes that media freedom and media accountability are mutually compatible. Nor is accountability synonymous with control:

At issue are two conceptually distinct phenomena. Control involves the use of power to achieve some desired outcome or behaviour on the part of another (or place limits of action). Accountability has to do with securing from an actor an explanation or justification of actions. Unlike control, it takes place after the event. Clearly the anticipation of accountability does potentially inhibit action and can be designed as a method of control, but the anticipation of consequences is intrinsic to rational, let alone responsible, action (2004, p 26).

One might say that Patrick Lee Plaisance (2000) reaches back to the balance that the Hutchins Commission struck between media and community. Plaisance envisions accountability as “a fluid dynamic of interaction”, where the fluidity consists of the media’s “degree of responsiveness to the values of media users” (p 258). What some researchers consider a failing of various accountability methods, Plaisance perceives to be “a healthy tension created by journalistic autonomy in relation to various community groups” (p 263). Many researchers have missed the dynamic aspect, Plaisance notes. We human beings behave differently when we know we are going to be held accountable for our actions; the same is true of organizations. Most research to date has concentrated on the one side of the equation (ombudsmen, press councils, corrections, etc.), but not really taken account of the interactional element of being accountable.

Much of the debate on media accountability has focused on the efforts to neutralize the tension between journalistic autonomy and the need for a responsible press. However, the nature of media accountability depends precisely on this conflict, which is not a dilemma to be solved but a healthy tension to be managed. Although codes of ethics and correction boxes have their places, the media are accountable when they never stop seeking that uncomfortable balance with audience values (p 266).

McQuail, agrees with Plaisance as to the importance of interactivity (2003, p 206) and argues for multiple forms and fora of accountability. Like Christians, Bardoel and d’Haenens, Keith – he is interested in practical formulas by which media accountability can be put into practice.

One of the pioneers when it comes to studying different practical ways of providing for accountability is the French researcher, Claude-Jean Bertrand. Bertrand began with studies of press councils in the 1970s and then went on to examine local journalism reviews in the USA, which at the time were published in eight of the country’s ten largest cities. He thereafter turned his attention to ombudsmen and, finally, to codes of media ethics. Gradually, he developed the concept of Media Accountability Systems, MAS, which he defined as:

... any non-state means of making media responsible towards the public. Because the concept is global, it is rather vague. It includes individuals and groups, regular meetings, written documents, small media or a long process or a particular approach. Normally, MAS act only by moral pressure (Bertrand 2000, p 107).

The word “systems” here does not refer to systems in any technical or scientific sense. One might rather use the words, “means” or “mechanisms”. In his choice of terminology Bertrand was playing with the name of the popular, long-running television series, *M*A*S*H*, and he actually started out by writing “MAS” in the same fashion: M*A*S. Bertrand’s first book on the subject, *Media Ethics & Accountability Systems* (2000), presented about forty examples of

MAS. Three years later, in his next book, *An Arsenal for Democracy*, the list had grown to sixty. Bertrand's catalogue (from 2006) in this volume lists over 110 examples.

Bertrand discusses MAS in terms of three categories: internal, external and cooperative. One example of the latter category is the press council, with representation of media owners, journalists and the public. In Bertrand's view, it is the systems in this category – when they work well – that are the most effective. Other ways of categorizing the various MAS are, for example, documents, individuals/groups, and processes; or, short- and long-term activities, respectively; or MAS at local, national and international levels. The basic means are, according to Bertrand (2000, 2003):

- *training*: the education of citizens in the use of media and university education for professionals that can impart a) general culture b) specialized knowledge and c) ethical awareness plus shorter seminars and coaching;
- *monitoring*: from research laboratories, necessary for example to spot sins of omission;
- *evaluation*: positive and negative criticism from all corners of society including media professionals and media scholars; and
- *feedback*: from various sources, such as a complaints bureau, and by hiring journalists with different backgrounds.

Some researchers (McQuail 2004, Bardoel & d'Haenens 2004) point out the difficulties of calling ever-larger, ever-more commercial and increasingly global media corporations to account. But I, for my part, see signs that accountability systems, too, are evolving toward greater efficacy.

What it means to be accountable, and the steps in the process leading toward accountability, have gained wider acceptance in the media. After extensive debate in 1996, the Society of Professional Journalists in the USA introduced a new chapter in its code of ethics under the heading, "Be Accountable". Journalists should, for example, "clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct" and "expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media" (SPJ). The methods of the 'public journalism' movement that started in the USA in the 1980s have crossed the Atlantic and are now standard procedure at many European newsdesks. In Norway, media organizations have introduced a new clause in their code of ethics: "It is a press obligation to shed critical light on how media themselves exercise their role." The issue occupies an increasing number of organizations and institutes (e.g. Reuters Institute).

New technologies also hold promise. Extensive broadband and mobile networks make it easier for people both to partake of news media and to publicize their views on their content. The critique of media for inaccuracy, questionable news values and sensationalism that media always have provoked can now be expressed publicly with ease. Readers/listeners/viewers can rate media's

quality and share their comments in blogs (their own or others') and various web communities. They also have access to any number of alternative sources of information. People, formerly known as 'the audience', can contribute their own eye-witness accounts and experiences to news media through channels like "OhmyNews" (which originated in South Korea, but is spreading).

The media's growing awareness of the importance of dialogue, together with new technology, which is breaking the traditional monologue mode of news reporting, can strengthen the cooperative forms of accountability systems. Openness can be extended to new areas (see, for example, Steve Smith's chapter about innovations at *The Spokesman-Review*). Readers can contribute input to internal reviews of a paper's code of ethics. Listeners can demand more depth and better presentation of news stories, and the web can be used to collect support for demands (as occurred in Sweden in 2006, when a group of viewers collected 17 000 names on a web-petition to keep the public service broadcaster from reducing overseas news coverage). Viewers can be given access to raw footage and research material in cases where programs arouse controversy to allow them to make their own assessments and carry on a dialogue with producers. Websites can carry corrections – for all news media – and users of the web can make their own corrections, raise issues and publish comments, on their own or in various communities. The web has an immense, largely unproven, potential to strengthen the accountability process.

Several chapters in this volume discuss ways in which these cooperative forms might be developed: e.g., John McManus' model for 'grading the news' (gradethenews.org), Claude-Jean Bertrand's call for more active press councils, and my own survey of attitudes toward accountability in Sweden.

To Sum Up...

Media accountability fills a social need; it is the product of a friction that has become increasingly acute with the growth and increasing ubiquity of mass media. The term 'accountability' was a way out for reform-minded scholars in the USA who sought to avoid a confrontation that might render their proposals moot. Since then the concept has been pondered and analyzed and – in time – won ever-wider acceptance among the media, in different versions adapted to different media systems. The interest in accountability has become more pronounced as a consequence of globalization and technological advances that encourage public participation and interactivity. Thus, accountability can no longer be defined and discussed in terms of the media per se, as these developments combine to give what was once called 'the audience' and their views an active role in the process. There is still friction, unavoidable to some extent, but relations between media and society, the people who use them, can be made much more aware and more constructive.

Perhaps a good way of summing up the foregoing pages would be to offer a new working definition of media accountability that incorporates elements

from the various scholars – Pritchard, Plaisance, McQuail and Hallin & Mancini – whom I have cited:

Media accountability is the interactive process by which media organizations may be expected or obliged to render an account (and sometimes a correction and/or excuse) of their activities to their constituents. The values and relative strength of the constituents vary over time and are affected by media systems and media technologies.

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M*A*S in the Present World

An Overview of Media Accountability Systems

Claude-Jean Bertrand

In my view, “media accountability” must be considered as important nowadays as press freedom and State regulation of media, both of which are indispensable, but both of which can be dangerous and neither of which is capable of producing quality news media. I mean “news media that fulfil the needs of the population, the basic need being to participate in the management of public affairs”. No need to stress the crucial importance of such media in our present globalized society, almost entirely converted to the market economy – and threatened both by the short-sighted over-exploitation of resources and by totalitarian suicidal terrorism.

“Media accountability” is more than the ethics of the individual journalist, which is concerned with right and wrong, good and evil. It is also more than self-regulation, which is strictly internal to the industry – and usually limited to assuaging the authorities so as to avoid legal restrictions. Also more than “quality control”, which is what manufacturers exert to ensure that their products satisfy their customers.

As guides to good journalism, codes of ethics have been fashionable for some years. Can much guidance be expected from them? The first duty of news media is to provide a good information service. Unfortunately a major obstacle to quality lies within the journalistic tradition itself. Three examples will make that clear.

- *First*, what may be called “iceberg journalism”, which consists in covering only the small visible part of reality; in ignoring the much larger part that is under the surface, the quiet processes that are slowly transforming society or threatening it.
- *Second*, “infotainment”, the common confusion of information and entertainment, of what is interesting and what is important.
- *Third*, a regrettable attitude: “negativism”, which consists in judging most positive news as uninteresting, and in always showing the half-empty glass, focussing on decline, conflict, violence, suffering, disaster.

Codes deal not with basic journalistic policies, which can only be expected to change slowly – but with everyday behaviour. After reading dozens of media codes (over 400 from all over the planet are available on www.media-accountability.org), one concludes that they all basically agree. With a few exceptions, what is wrong and what is right is the same in every democracy. So the problem no longer consists in defining rules of conduct but in getting media and journalists to respect them. One is led to concentrate on the means to enforce the rules, and since history teaches us not to trust government, to concentrate on the non-State tools to get the rules respected: “media accountability systems” or M*A*S.

However, media accountability concerns far more than not violating the prohibitions listed in the codes. It aims at improving service to the public. It involves finding out what the public needs, then striving to satisfy those needs, then checking whether they have been satisfied. To do that too, tools are needed, again M*A*S. So, M*A*S should be considered to have a triple purpose: they improve the news service, but also they help journalists feel solidarity among themselves, and form a true independent profession around a common creed, that is to say a code of ethics. And lastly they restore citizens’ trust in the media. The profession needs public support, as all institutions do in a democracy. That is essential for the preservation of press freedom, because journalists are too few and too weak (as mere employees) to resist political, and nowadays mainly economic, pressure; only the public has the power to protect them.

Readers/ listeners/ viewers are also voters and consumers. They can wield a huge influence on and for media. They rarely do because the public consists of different groups with different agendas, and it is difficult to mobilise. Also, people feel that journalists and media do not pay attention to them – and they distrust news media.

The journalistic tradition needs to be changed: the Market cannot do it, or the Law. M*A*S could. A “new journalism” is emerging, very slowly – but even if the conversion had taken place, it would not be enough. Informing properly is not enough for the journalist. He/she must listen to the public and be accountable to it: two other conditions to recover trust and esteem. That is another, major, role of M*A*S.

The Concept

A “media accountability system” is any, let me stress ANY, *non-State* instrument (a person, a group, a text, a broadcast, a process, whatever) whose main purpose is to improve news media service, directly or indirectly. For instance, an ombudsman, a press council, a code of ethics or a book of media criticism – to mention some of the best known.

Some people think of M*A*S as being little more than press councils and ombudsmen. Admittedly, years ago, I myself started by studying press councils, then ombudsmen, then journalism reviews – and gradually grouped them into

a single concept, from the early 1990s. It expanded fast. My first list contained 40 items, the second 60, then 80, up to the present 110 [*see supplement*]. More are being conceived and tested all the time, many probably that I have never heard about.

Up to quite recently, I believed “media accountability systems” was a common notion – then one day I looked up the term on Google. I was amazed to find that most references included my name or the M*A*S acronym (as derived by me from the famous sitcom M*A*S*H).

One reason for the lack of attention paid to M*A*S, I guess, is that media observers find it hard mentally to herd such different items into one category – until they realize the logic and usefulness of it. Then, quite often, they turn into active advocates of the concept.

M*A*S are flexible. They can easily be adapted to circumstances. M*A*S complement each other. They can all function with one another, form a loose network for quality control. While none is sufficient, all are useful. While none is strikingly efficient, many can be: it is not a question of choosing one in the arsenal, when waging a war, one uses all weapons available.

The most striking feature of M*A*S is their diversity. They can be internal to media (like an in-house critic), or external to them (like a critical blog), or they involve co-operation of media people and non-media people (like an ombudsman). Basically, M*A*S participate in one or more of four means of action.

- Evaluation is one: criticism of media is the oldest M*A*S. Not liked but indispensable. It should come from all people involved in social communication.
- Another is education, that of both professionals and public, through schools, seminars, publications and advice – partly to make them more aware of media responsibilities.
- The third is monitoring: independent researchers can provide long-term surveillance of media, reliable in-depth analysis and scientific study of media effects.
- Public intervention is the fourth method, which follows many paths, like a ‘Letters to the editor’ section; an ‘op-ed page’ open to minority voices; meetings with representatives of professions often covered by the media to debate potential conflicts; questionnaires to people cited in news stories, etc.

Some M*A*S function at local level, some at regional or national or international level – or even at all four (like press councils). The effect they produce can be immediate (like an internal memo), or short term (like an awareness session) or long term (like communication research). Some are difficult to set up (long negotiations for a press council) but some are easy. Some require important funds (like a journalism school) but some are almost free-of-charge (like a correction box).

A crucial feature that all M*A*S share needs to be underlined: none is dangerous. That appears clearly from experience. Contrary to criticism often heard: their purpose is NOT to restrict press freedom but to protect it against both financial and political pressure by improving media service and restoring public trust

Opposition and Obstacles

Media people everywhere appreciate media ethics, as long as it remains the topic of workshops, books or seminars. The tune changes when the rules are to be enforced, when the focus turns to M*A*S. Basically, I guess, because media people don't like change. Also because M*A*S are about rendering accounts to clients, which no professional enjoys.

Generally speaking, what is said against them? M*A*S are accused of being purely cosmetic, of belonging with public relations. Or, paradoxically, they are denounced as dangerously radical, part of a conspiracy against freedom of expression and free enterprise: governments will use them to censor the news media, which has never happened.

M*A*S are said to be unacceptable by professionals, on principle. According to the code of the International Federation of Journalists (1954), "the journalist recognizes, in professional matters, the jurisdiction of his colleagues only; he excludes every kind of interference by governments *or others*" [*my emphasis*]. This ignores the fact that these days, journalists need "others" to protect them.

Cynics judge that M*A*S are unrealistic, inefficient, for good media do not need quality control and the bad ones will never accept it unless the Law forces it upon them. Real power is in the hands of media owners: for them sales suffice to evaluate public satisfaction. If the public is truly angry, let them go to court. What journalists can afford to antagonize their employers by insisting on respect of ethical rules. Can a reporter afford to lose his job for the sake of ethics?

Lastly, and undeniably, some M*A*S are costly, if they are to do their job well, meaning quickly and visibly. An ombudsman, for instance, needs to be a journalist that is experienced and respected, hence entitled to a high salary. It seems prudent not to ask the State for funds (although that is how the Finnish press council gets half its budget); foundations are rare; journalists do not have money to spare and media owners are reluctant to pay to be criticized and give up some of their power.

The resistance and obstacles to M*A*S are such that, if you look down the list of 110 and seek each of them on the media landscape, you will see very few and may decide that they have failed to get a foothold. Actually, the general picture is not as bleak as it may seem. Many M*A*S have become such a normal part of the environment that they are not noticed anymore: the less spectacular, the less controversial M*A*S, like codes of ethics, letters to the editor, university-level journalism schools, correction boxes, regular pages or programs or blogs about media, critical books, readership surveys, associations

of media users, etc. It should be remembered that such acceptance in relatively recent, at least in some countries.

Progress remains slow but clearly more and more enlightened citizens in many countries are realizing that media accountability is a third force to be used together with press freedom and media regulation. As an illustration of this, take my short, practical book on “Media Ethics and Accountability Systems”: originally published in French, it has been published in countries as diverse as Armenia, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Japan, Korea, Poland, Portugal, Turkey and the USA – while Hindi, Nepalese, Serbian, Spanish translations are in progress.

Another example: out of some 70 press councils operating at present on the planet, 60% were born since 1990 and 35% since 2000. And that’s one of the most controversial M*A*S. M*A*S seem to attract more attention in parts of the planet where press freedom is new and threatened, like former soviet countries and black Africa.

World Survey

In 2005-2006, I used the internet for a world survey of M*A*S. Between 3 and 20 experts in each of 88 countries filled out my questionnaire (plus 2 experts in 14 more and just one expert in 14 others)¹. In other words, I obtained data on more than 100 nations. ALL countries reported at least some increased interest in media ethics over the past ten years, both among journalists and public. Among old-established democracies², more than half reported a much increased interest.

Can I present you with a world inventory of M*A*S, nation by nation? The answer is NO. For three reasons:

- For one thing, lung cancer has prevented me from doing a fine analysis of almost 50 000 items in 400 questionnaires, distinguishing between continents, political regimes and economic development.
- Secondly, a full panorama of M*A*S would be well nigh impossible because of the extreme diversity of M*A*S. The mere list is 9 pages long – and then some are internal to media, some external, some involving the cooperation of professionals and public; some are local, some regional, some national, some international.
- Some M*A*S are common: you find correction boxes in most newspapers: out of 114 nations reporting (and that is including Haïti, Kuweit and China), 82% state that some media publish corrections and 70% specify that most print media do. Others are relatively rare, and many extremely rare, in some cases unique, having been invented in one location and not been imitated elsewhere, if only because they have not been heard of elsewhere. That is a central point. On examining returned questionnaires, I quickly realized that the overall picture could not be full or accurate

because the so-called experts knew so little. When half the respondents say there are no press ombudsmen in the country and the other half say there are several, which should one believe?

Actually, what the respondents do NOT say is as important as what they say. It illustrates the crucial problem about M*A*S: even experts do not know much about them have never heard about many of them, have no idea whether any exist in their own country.

In two fields, this ignorance, or indifference, is particularly striking. One concerns the role of the public in “media accountability”, the other the role of education.

- The public – Asked if they knew of consumers’ associations that have an interest in media, or associations of media consumers, respondents from 87 countries (out of 114) replied they did not – 76%. The answer was clearly positive in only 12 countries (10%), including Finland, Italy, Korea, Spain and Taiwan.

Clearly, journalists and academics pay no attention to such NGOs as a M*A*S. It is as if the public was out of the picture. That’s a dramatic discovery, considering that media professionals, being few in number and merely employees of companies, cannot hope to stay autonomous without the public as an ally, without joining forces with media users.

- Education – Few developed nations do not nowadays have University-level schools of journalism: they have multiplied, even the UK. However, except in the US, experts seem not to care whether journalists are educated or not: half the 450 respondents to my survey, journalists, academics and other media observers, have no idea of the proportion of journalists in their country who received higher education or what proportion has attended a journalism-school.

Now for a few further observations.

- M*A*S are rare, generally speaking. What strikes whoever examines my questionnaires, is the general under-development of M*A*S. Most seem not to exist in most countries.
- M*A*S are little known. It is clear that media executives and professionals everywhere either do not know about M*A*S, or, if they have an idea, they are prejudiced against them, which they look upon as restrictions to their freedom to do their job, as unwarranted intrusions by ignorant or biased outsiders.
- M*A*S are not very attractive. Both media and journalism schools are not much attracted to self-regulation. They love “media accountability” even less and M*A*S least of all. So no effort has been made to publicize M*A*S and when the opportunity is offered, they tend to shoot them down in flames.

Those general observations being made, it being impossible to derive a reliable inventory from the survey of world M*A*S, let me examine a few particular cases.

The Case of Codes of Conduct

As regards codes of ethics, 89% of nations report that one or several are generally accepted (with only one major exception, Argentina). In 71% of countries, some individual newspapers have their own code, even many in Australia, Japan, Norway, South Africa, the US.

The Case of Press Councils

The press council is potentially the best M*A*S, if only because it gathers representatives of media owners, of journalists and of the public. But it is also one of the most difficult to set up. In 2007, the total number of national and regional councils in the world was between 68 (active, genuine press councils), 83 if African “media observatories” are included – 89, if you include similar accountability systems like “ethics commissions”.

The numbers are relatively small, considering democracies are more numerous than ever: there are none in the Arab world, only two in Latin America, only five state-wide PCs for 50 United States, two of them just starting operations. Almost half the nations belonging to the Council of Europe are without a PC, including France, Greece, Portugal and Hungary.

On the other hand, 13 out of 18 nations in Western-Northern Europe have a council and have set up an Alliance that started holding an annual conference in 1999. Every province in Canada but one has a PC, half the nations in black Africa have a PC or something like it.

The Case of Ombudsmen

News ombudsmen in the US (not the Swedish) sense of the word: a person paid by an individual newspaper or station to deal with complaints by readers, viewers or listeners, like a one-man press council – are rare too, if only because they are expensive. The international Organization of News Ombudsmen (ONO) gathers only 38 from the US and 24 from 13 other nations. Over 50% of countries, like Germany, report “no ombudsman here”. Britain only has a couple³.

As usual, respondents did not agree on the number of ombudsmen: the world total could be a minimum of 190 and a maximum of 267 (and that includes 50 in Japan only). Not many for tens of thousands of media outlets. Especially considering how easy it is to appoint one: it takes no more than a decision by an owner.

The Case of Journalism Reviews

A JR is not a scholarly journal but a periodical mainly devoted to the evaluation of media, one the best-known being the *Columbia JR* in the US. Out of 114 countries from which I received (valid) replies to my survey, typically, 20 sent perfectly contradictory data: 6 respondents from Britain said there were JRs and 6 said there were none. As for the rest, only 28% said there was a JR. The proportion rises to 37%, if you consider only developed democracies. This may seem low but then a number of countries are small or very poor – and the number of JRs now should include a multitude of blogs, cyber-JRs. Half the 114 countries report having at least one, 73% among industrialized nations – as opposed to 22% for the Third World.

Conclusion

My world survey, unsatisfactory as it is, points to a major problem. Non-State means of inducing journalists to serve the public well, hence to make democracy work, and, a crucial point, to keep their freedom by recovering public support, M*A*S are largely unknown and unused.

What is needed is that M*A*S be promoted. i.e. that their existence be made known, that they be explained, that their usefulness be documented, as also their harmlessness. Primarily, through articles, books, websites, lectures, courses, conferences by journalists, professors and researchers; through the action of international organizations, of NGOs, journalists' unions, media-oriented foundations.

All the protagonists in social communication should be involved. Politicians can help by pressuring reluctant media owners and journalists into setting up M*A*S, mainly by threatening to establish some by law: that is how most press councils got created. Also by giving M*A*S money with no strings attached (the Federal government provides one third of the German's press council's).

Media users are not stupid and not easily manipulated. But do not have the knowledge, the motivation, the time, the organisation to get involved – and they feel powerless; they need to be informed, stimulated, organised, made to trust and support the journalistic profession. They absolutely must be involved. Self-regulation cannot be depended upon.

Any fast success of M*A*S is predicated on the cooperation of media owners and managers, simply because they possess both authority and money. They can permit, encourage, publicize, fund, participate in as many M*A*S as possible. And they have legal, social, moral, and, let me stress economic reasons to support M*A*S, even though many may not be aware of it.

Lastly, journalists. They are the ones that can benefit most directly from M*A*S, which can provide them with credibility, influence and social prestige. Yet recent history shows that the staff is sometimes more opposed to M*A*S than management. Professionals argue that they are not independent, hence

they cannot be held responsible. True it is that “media ethics” focuses on journalists (inevitably since companies do not have a moral conscience) and turns them into scapegoats, although journalists commit only minor sins, while media companies commit the mortal sins. This is the reason why it is important that M*A*S should aim not just at the improvement of media quality, but also at restoring the bond of trust between journalists and public so that the public will support journalists in their fight for independence.

Generalizing the use of M*A*S, obviously, this is a long-term enterprise. Most M*A*S are relatively new elements on the media scene. So they must be introduced and expected to develop gradually. I believe M*A*S have played a great part in actually improving the news media, not just in signalling their progress.

The press, printed and electronic, may not be as good as it nowadays needs to be for the welfare of society, but it is far better than it used to be. Technology partly explains it, certainly, but also media are far more concerned with the public than they used to be and understand the need to forge closer links with their customers.

The big challenge in many countries is to start the ball rolling.

For more information, see:

- The M*A*S website: www.media-accountability.org
The website contains a bibliography of over 500 titles on ethics and M*A*S, together with 250 relevant links; a directory of world press councils; a list of almost 120 M*A*S and a thesaurus of documents and tables.
- Bertrand CJ (2000) *Media Ethics and Accountability Systems*, New Brunswick (NJ), Transaction, [Originally published in French]
- Bertrand CJ (ed.) (2003) *An Arsenal For Democracy: Media Accountability Systems*, Cresskill (NJ), Hampton Press, [Originally published in French] (Economica, 1999)

Notes

1. Leaving aside micro-countries (like Andorra) and 23 unresponsive Third World and dictatorships (like Belarus and North Korea).
2. Not former members of the communist block or parts of the Third World.
3. At the *Guardian* and the *Observer*. I am willingly ignoring those appointed by News Corp.

Appendix: Media Accountability Systems M*A*S

Internal M*A*S

Correction box, column	Code of ethics
Media page/ program	Ethics committee
Letter from the editor, sidebar	Disciplinary committee
Behind-the-scenes blog	Training to organize
Newsletter to subscribers	Whistle-blower
Media reporter	Newsroom committee
Consumer reporter	Media observatory
In-house critic	Order of journalists
Daily self-criticism report	Company of journalists
Investigative panel	Assoc. of specialized reporters
Media weblog by journalist	Assoc. of publishers & editors
Evaluation commission	International defense org.
Filtering agency	Publishing foreign material
Internal study of issues	Foreign views on own country
Readership survey	Non-profit newspaper
Ethical audit	
Ethics coach	[Public broadcasting]
Internal memo	[International broadcasting]
Awareness program	[Quality service-oriented media]

External M*A*S

Readers' info blogs	Public statement by VIP
Alternative media	Higher education
Satirical news show	Required ethics course
Daily report on media	Non-profit research
Journalism review	Opinion survey on media
"Darts and laurels"	Media literacy campaign
Critical blogs	Media literacy website
Media-related website	Media-at-school program
Blog by sources	Consumer group
Critical book / report / film	Association of militant citizens
Guides to influence	Monitors for profession. groups
Watchdog the watchdogs	Media-serving NGO
Petition to pressure media	Royal commission
Ad hoc federation	
	[Indep. regulatory agency]

Co-operative M*A*S

Letter to the editor	Citizen on board
On-line message board	Club of readers/ viewers
Outside media columnist	Local press council
Ombudsman	Annual conference
Complaints bureau	Seminar on media criticism
Listening session by editors	Training foreign bloggers
Accuracy & fairness question.	Yearbook on media crit.
Annual self-audit report	National press council
Grading the news	National ombudsman
Media barometer	Liaison committee
Paid advertisement	Occasional demonstration
Encounter with public	Media-related association
Website for public reaction	International cooperation
Panel of media users	Training NGO
Inviting in readers	Multi-purpose center
Readers chose Page One	Continuous education
Citizens journalism	Bridge institution
Radio clubs	Prize or other reward
Journalists' email and phone	

Media Accountability in the Era of Market-driven Journalism

John H. McManus

This brief essay will sketch answers to seven questions I was asked to address for the media accountability conference in Kalmar, Sweden. The questions are:

1. What is market-driven journalism and how do market pressures influence commercial journalism at the beginning of the 21st century?
2. How can one distinguish between market-driven and socially responsible journalism?
3. What does it mean for participatory government if journalism is becoming more market-oriented?
4. What is Grade the News?
5. Where has Grade the News succeeded and where failed in its mission?
6. What other media accountability systems operate in the US news media?
7. How promising is NewsTrust as a media accountability system?

What is Market-driven Journalism?

It is news-gathering and selection shaped by markets for 1) investors/owners, 2) advertisers, 3) audiences and 4) sources.

In most commercial U.S. news departments (the part of a larger media company that produces news), there is an organizational culture which combines the “shoulds” of socially responsible journalism with business, i.e., market, demands. Which set of norms prevail when the two conflict is determined not by journalists, but above the newsroom by owners/investors.

- Among these four markets, the market for investors is paramount. They trade capital in hopes of for maximizing return. Individual owners may also seek influence and prestige.

- The market for advertisers generates all or most of the income. Advertisers trade money for public attention to their goods and services.
- The market for sources generates the raw material of news. Sources trade information for public attention (which may yield influence) and for influence over content.
- The market for audiences generates that attention. Readers/viewers “pay” attention for information. They may also pay subscription fees.

I contend that news provided by commercial media is not based solely on the norms of journalism (as described by various codes of ethics – Society of Professional Journalists, Associated Press Managing Editors, Radio-Television News Directors, etc.) as these media tell the public and their own staffs, but on some type of compromise between these ethical values and market demands.

Since about 1985, American media have been undergoing economic rationalization – treating journalism more like any commodity and less like a public trust. My research and others indicates news is becoming more market-driven and less socially responsible.

To help disentangle market pressures from social responsibility norms, I created two theories of news selection, which conflict more than coincide. The first is based on a rough cost-benefit analysis at the level of the individual news story.

A Theory of News Selection Based on Market Logic

The probability of an event or issue being selected for the news is:

- Inversely proportional to the harm the information might cause owners, major advertisers or corporate siblings, and
- Inversely proportional to the cost of uncovering it, and
- Inversely proportional to the cost of reporting it, and
- Directly proportional to the expected breadth of appeal of the story to audiences advertisers will pay to reach.

Contrast this economic theory with a socially responsible one:

A Theory of News Selection Based on Journalism Norms

The probability of an event or issue being selected for the newscast or newspaper is:

- Proportional to the consequence of the information, and...
- The size of the audience for which it is important.

To the Extent the Market Model Dominates:

- News that displeases major advertisers, parent corporations and siblings is diminished. Yet this information may be of great public value.
- News that creates interest in advertised products will be covered out of proportion to its importance.
- Information that is costly to discover is diminished. But what the powerful hide is often the most important for the public to know.
- Information that consumes a lot of reporting resources is diminished.
- Information important to those with less customer potential for advertisers – older, poorer citizens – is diminished.
- Information with inherent audience appeal becomes more prevalent regardless of its consequence. Dull, but important news is diminished.

The bottom line: Information that maximizes return to shareholders in the short term tends to minimize the quality of news as a civic resource – its primary value in a democracy.

Remedies?

Ideally, news would be treated as a public trust or a hybrid between a profit-maximizing business and a public trust. But since the trend at least in the U.S., is toward treating news like any other commodity, there may be ways to minimize the harm.

News doesn't do well when left to markets primarily because the market that exists between news providers and consumers doesn't satisfy the conditions Adam Smith and his followers have set for the "invisible hand" of public benefit to operate.

Research shows that consumers are not particularly rational in their pursuit of self-interest. Nor are they good at distinguishing substance from schlock in news; repeated polls show the public puts greater trust in local TV news than elite national papers like the New York Times despite overwhelming evidence that local TV news provides very poor coverage. Finally, the alternatives for news at the local level are limited, even with the Internet.

But what if journalists help news consumers distinguish between high and low quality news by explaining the expectations of socially responsible journalism and rating news quality? They might be able to redistribute audience to higher quality news providers.

So, following in the footsteps of Consumer Reports magazine, which objectively evaluates all kinds of durable goods, GradeTheNews, GTN, tries to make substantive news more profitable and sensational content less so by rating the eight most popular San Francisco Bay Area newspapers and newscasts.

GTN (www.gradethenews.org) operates at the metropolitan level rather than national because that's where the worst problems in American journalism lie. At the national level, the market offers high quality providers like The New York Times, The Washington Post, National Public Radio, and various news and social issue magazines. None of these attempt to cover metropolitan news across the nation. Also there are national organs of media criticism such as American Journalism Review, Columbia Journalism Review and FAIR. None of these operate at the metro level. GTN hopes to create a template that could be replicated in other metro areas, rather than expand to a national consumer report on news.

HAS Grade The News worked?

In five years of operation, we've enjoyed a high success rate in getting news media to label as advertising ads presented in the guise of news. We've had some success in getting more campaign coverage on local TV. Nationwide, high schools and college classes are using our "Grade the news yourself" news scorecards. We've enjoyed less success in changing editors' preference for sensational over substantive. Newspapers have followed the lead of local TV newscasts to some degree, becoming more sensational and trivial, despite our best efforts.

Since our funding has lapsed, unethical behavior of all sorts is up again. We have not found a self-sustaining economic model. Many foundations are reluctant to fund criticism of so powerful a social institution as the media. They don't want to jeopardize the coverage they receive.

Media Accountability Systems in the US

Currently most news media are much more accountable to Wall Street or wealthy owners than to the public. Specifically:

- There are few ombudspersons; even fewer with independence. Most are older editors who serve at the pleasure of publishers and rarely critical of their news organization.
- News media are very rarely critical of each other. Those who live in glass houses discourage stone throwing.
- There is little evaluation of news other than CJR, AJR, FAIR and the Project for Excellence in Journalism. These operate at the national level.
- There are two new news councils that are regional or state-wide, but this makes a national total of only four. They are plagued by low funding levels and little support or cooperation from the media they try to monitor.
- The people formerly known as the audience are changing news from a lecture towards a conversation. Readers can respond more readily to reporters than before the Internet.

- The blogosphere provides critics with unprecedented ability to disseminate media criticism, but one has to find them in the vastness of the Web. Some bloggers try to hold the media to account, but most blogs operate at the level of invective rather than analysis.

Independent citizen journalists & bloggers may provide fresh perspectives free of corporate control. But they generally lack training, editing and resources for reporting in depth. They also may have hidden conflicts of interest. Finally they can't easily separate the news function from advertising because the individual is responsible for both (whereas in mainstream media the ad department is usually separate from the newsroom.)

NewsTrust.net

This new Web site based in Marin County, California, tries to help readers find reliable news online from the mainstream media and blogosphere by:

- Sending subscribers by email a list that links to stories vetted by other NewsTrust subscribers.
- Providing an automated system for subscribers to nominate and evaluate stories they find elsewhere on the Web.
- Aggregating subscriber ratings into an average evaluation presumably revealing the "wisdom of the crowd".
- Evaluating raters and weighting for greater expertise in the average evaluations of stories.

As this is being written, the future of NewsTrust is uncertain. Despite a large recent grant from the MacArthur Foundation, it lacks a business model to become self-sustaining. It's also difficult to recruit a large enough body of savvy volunteers to evaluate news comprehensively. The vetting process creates a delay in getting news that may frustrate some users. You can check it out at www.newstrust.net.

EXAMPLE OF
INTERNAL MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

“And the Walls Come Tumbling Down”

From Fortress Newsroom to the Transparent Newsroom

Steven A. Smith

First there was “fortress newsroom”.

That was the term I used in a series of speeches for the Pew Center for Civic Journalism in the early 1990s dealing with the perceived disconnect between citizens and their newspapers. Fortress newsroom, I argued, was the walled enclave where journalists practiced their craft in a “just the facts” environment, using selective notions of objectivity and balance to shield themselves from the consequences of their work.

In fortress newsroom, readers are something of a necessary inconvenience. We need their business, but not their interference. In fortress newsroom, objectivity means independence defined by separation. Journalists report on their communities but cannot be part of their communities. And listening to readers, trying to understand their interests and motivations, is the business of ad reps and circulation managers.

That the fortress newsroom model was failing newspaper journalism became apparent in the late 1980s and early ‘90s as all of us began, finally, to wage war against the double-whammy of declining readership and plummeting credibility. My first challenges to that limiting model came during early civic journalism experiments at The Wichita Eagle where I was managing editor. Those Eagle projects were built around the notion that newspaper journalists and citizens were active partners in the support of democratic institutions and that citizen voices were the bedrock of effective public service journalism.

But attacking fortress newsroom through the frame of civic journalism wasn’t easy or effective. Civic journalism was too great a flashpoint and its critics successfully derailed the conversation with red herring assertions that civic or public journalism was equivalent to community boosterism.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) credibility project of 1997-1999 refocused the conversation. In two far-ranging ASNE credibility surveys, one of the key findings suggested that newspapers could slowly rebuild citizen trust by better explaining news values and decision-making and by engaging in conversations with readers about journalism. “This research suggests that most of the public is fairly generous in giving us credit for trying

to explain ourselves to them”, Judy Pace Christie wrote in the overview to a report on the 1999 credibility survey. “The best outcome, of course, is that the education will be reciprocal.”

Therein lies the foundation for the “transparent newsroom”, the antithesis of the fortress model.

The Transparent Newsroom

In the transparent newsroom, citizens are partners in the news conversation, not just passive consumers of news and information. In fortress newsroom, where separation is a primary value, there are no mechanisms to foster conversations between journalists and citizens. In the transparent newsroom, the opposite should be true; connection becomes a primary value and journalists have multiple, programmatic ways to ensure that the education occurring through conversation is, as Christie suggested, fully reciprocal.

I’ve experimented with various transparency strategies through the years at four different newspapers. In Wichita, editors went to malls and recreation centers and set up tables inviting readers to discuss their newspaper concerns. In Colorado Springs, we invited various community groups into the newsroom to audit and critique the paper’s journalism. In Salem, Ore., open news meetings attracted community visitors almost daily.

Our work at *The Spokesman-Review* in Spokane incorporates many of those earlier experiments but is enhanced by aggressive exploitation of the Internet, an ideal medium for journalist-citizen interaction. As suggested by the ASNE studies, our goal is to improve the newspaper’s credibility in our communities by better explaining what we do and why, by soliciting and then listening to reader criticism, and by involving citizens, at some level, in news planning and decision making.

The Spokesman-Review is a family owned newspaper, established in the late 1880s by the great-great-great grandfather of our current publisher, W. Stacey Cowles. Daily circulation is somewhat less than 100,000. Sunday circulation is about 120,000. As with most midsize American newspapers, we’ve been dropping circulation for more than a decade, although penetration in our core communities remains far higher than the national norm. And our circulation declines appear to have been reversed in the last year or so. As a family owned paper, the financial pressures are somewhat less intense than those I’ve experienced in the corporate newspaper environment. As a result, I have a larger staff – about 137 FTE – than most papers of our size¹. And our reinvestment in the company’s infrastructure means we have technological resources that many papers would envy.

Of course, it is never enough. The transparent newsroom initiative must co-exist with a commitment to grow our sophisticated investigative and enterprise news report, to grow our groundbreaking online news operation and now, to

develop a continuous 24-hour news desk. The transparent newsroom can be accomplished without too great an investment in people, time or resources.

The transparent newsroom begins with a set of published news values against which readers can measure the newspaper's performance. If we're going to invite readers into the news process, they must have a starting point from which they can evaluate what they observe. At *The Spokesman-Review* we have written a simple values statement that responds to the question "what do you stand for?" The statement is posted around the newsroom, is posted online and is shared with readers at every opportunity. Here are the posted values:

- We reflect the life of our community every day in its wholeness and complexity.
- We tell people what we know, when we know it, without fear or favor.
- We watchdog government and other public institutions.
- We promote the free marketplace of ideas.
- We believe the public's business ought to be conducted in public – always.
- We give voice to the voiceless and defend the defenseless.
- We recognize the positive lives led by our community's young people every day.
- We help people become better citizens.
- We will do good ... not just good work

What We Have Done

In Spokane, key elements of the transparent newsroom include the following:

- All of our daily news meetings are webcast. We went live with this experiment last June (2006). The technology isn't expensive, we're not trying to produce broadcast-quality video. The morning meeting includes a critique of that day's paper and the first-cut conversation of content for the next day. The afternoon news meeting focuses on key content decisions for the next day. We have the technology, of course, but not the drama. Our meetings can be pretty dry. But when we have a hot story, they really sizzle. Readers can interact via a special e-mail address. Any staff member can participate. We average 15 to 20 viewers in the morning, maybe 10 to 15 in the afternoon.² But we know for a fact that the community's leaders often tune in, primarily to see what nasty thing we're going to say about them.
- Our meetings also are open to the public – and to the entire staff. We promote that opportunity on Page One several times each week. Outsid-

ers participating in morning critiques often remain afterward to talk with editors about issues that concern them. Invariably, we learn something worth knowing or get a tip on a story worth pursuing. Staff participation means staff that ordinarily doesn't have a voice in decisions is free to participate – young staffers, interns, young minority staffers with management aspirations. New faces bring new ideas.

- Editorial board political endorsements – at least those involving competitive races for major offices – are now webcast. Later this year, after we've wired yet another conference room, we will experiment with webcasting the weekly editorial board meetings where topics and positions are discussed.
- As many editors do, I periodically write about our journalism for the op-ed page. But the focus more often is on newsroom values, routines, reflexes and practices rather than particular stories or news decisions. One recent column articulated the core values (above) that underlie newsroom policies and practices.
- Too small to support a full-time ombudsman, we hired a local journalism professor with no connections to the paper to independently critique our work and respond to citizen complaints once or twice a month³. Sometimes Whitworth College professor Gordon Jackson tackled subjects of his choosing, sometimes he responded to reader questions. Gordon is returning to the classroom next fall following a sabbatical, so we're seeking a replacement⁴.
- Five editors participate in an online blog called "Ask the Editors", portions of which are repurposed for publication on the op-ed page each Friday. Questions tend to come in bunches and generally involve coverage decisions such as why the newspaper chose not to review a recent appearance of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir or why we run a column called "Sexcetera" in our weekend entertainment section.
- Several citizen bloggers representing a cross-section of political and social views, critique the paper daily in an online feature called "News is a Conversation". Staffers can respond to the citizen posts as can other readers, generating an ongoing discussion of coverage issues, news values and decisions. As with most of our transparent newsroom blogs, traffic comes in spurts depending on the run of news. But News is a Conversation has quickly become our third-most read blog, attracting wide readership that includes politicians, bureaucrats and public agency PIOs. Sometimes the criticism is pretty hot⁵.
- One of our online journalists produces a daily summary of our morning and afternoon news meetings posted online as "Daily Briefing". The report summarizes the daily staff critique and highlights the major stories being worked for the next day. We try to write with attitude and maybe a touch

of humor but this blog's success depends on the continuity of authorship. Readers can post comments to each entry and again, the discussion can be hot.

- Periodically, I host online chats about the newspaper. Chats dealing with our investigation of Spokane Mayor Jim West drew hundreds of participants. One lasted nearly three hours.
- As part of our work on a pending redesign, we sent editors into the field to interview citizens – readers and non-readers – about information needs, readership behavior and newspaper readership. "Project Insight" was so successful, we've decided to replicate it whenever we're ready to take on a new project or initiative. Currently we have a team meeting with citizens to discuss the possibility of an afternoon online PDF newspaper.
- One of our associate editors incorporates many of the above elements into his North Idaho blog, Huckleberries Online. Although he writes for the smallest subsection of our audience, Dave Oliveria's HBO is our best-read blog by the widest of margins and is a must-read for any public official in that part of the state. HBO debates on our journalism and values draw dozens of participants.
- Our photographers have a blog, "Finding the Frame", where they discuss the logistics and news judgments behind their photo and video journalism.
- Senior editor Carla Savalli has a blog, "The Future of the Newsroom", where she discusses her months-long study of ways the newspaper can adapt to the changing digital world.

Of course, *The Spokesman-Review* relies on traditional means of communicating with readers. We publish more than 5,000 letters-to-the-editor each year, far more than most newspapers our size. Editors, reporters and support staff handle countless e-mail and telephone doorways into the newsroom for people to voice compliments, complaints and concerns, all promoted in print and online. And through the energetic innovation of our online staff, particularly Online News Editor Ryan Pitts, we have initiated numerous staff-written blogs that have become lively topic-focused conversations between journalists and news consumers.

Newsroom Responses

Newsroom reaction to the transparent newsroom has been predictably mixed. Generally, as each initiative proves its value – or fails to damage the journalistic enterprise – staffers accept it. And some relatively bold experiments, such as "News is a Conversation" were suggested by staff.

The decision to webcast news meetings caused considerable heartburn in the newsroom. There were fears we would be tipping our hand to competitors, that we would be self-censoring our conversations, that we would be taking some of the fun out of our meetings by forced political correctness. Most of those fears have proven unfounded. But some staffers still prefer to sit outside the camera's range or wait until the camera is off before approaching the table.

Staff participation in the blogs is mixed. We've made it clear that discussions on News is a Conversation, Daily Briefing, Huckleberries Online and so forth are "no fault". Staffers can take issue with editorial decisions just as readers might. Some staffers are comfortable expressing a point of view, others weigh in only when their stories are being discussed and others simply stay away. Discussion can get pretty heated, and not all of us have developed skins thick enough to handle the negativity and occasional name calling. I urge participants to check their ego and defensiveness at the door, but occasionally find that I am the most defensive of all.

Above all, I try to maintain a willingness to experiment in this and other areas. There is almost nothing we can do on any given day that will seriously harm the enterprise. If we make a mistake today, we have tomorrow to try something else. I think we've succeeded in instilling that point of view as we try something different somewhere in the newsroom almost every day.

To date, I know of no statistically valid research showing that initiatives such as these actually move the needle on a newspaper's credibility. We're waiting for our latest readership research which includes the so-called Reader Behavior Score, a measure of readership developed by the National Readership Project. Our score has shown growth over four years and, I'm told, will show statistically meaningful growth in this latest research. But I haven't seen the numbers yet.

Anecdotal evidence in Spokane has been enormously positive, with readers telling us they appreciate the chance to interact with us. On the other hand, we have a few critics who believe we ought to leave the blogs to readers and not explain or defend ourselves when challenged. I reject that notion, of course. The transparent newsroom is not a passive newsroom. There is no rule that says we have to stand back and take unwarranted hits. In fact, that only contributes to our credibility problem. All newspapers need to be more aggressive defending themselves when they are in the right.

The transparent newsroom is not about conceding to readers the right to make our decisions for us. We still have the power and authority of our position and our craft. And sometimes it is our job to piss people off.

Unintended Consequences

The most interesting of unintended consequences is the way our transparency has opened us to criticism from within the profession. In this era of Romanesko, the industry has developed a tendency to self-righteous professional

flagellation. On occasion, a routine decision that never would have garnered attention anywhere outside our community will be picked up and carried, via Romanesko, to editors who have decided it is their job to watchdog all of newspapering by watchdogging us. Those little flaps really upset the staff though they have no impact on readers. There are times my staff would rather labor in professional anonymity.

Perhaps the greatest threat to transparency came after we were misrepresented by a Frontline documentary crew covering our investigation into Spokane Mayor Jim West. We were totally open with Frontline as we were with every news organization. We had posted on our website an unprecedented body of raw material relating to our investigation, including interview notes, online transcripts, taped interviews, and so on. Frontline had complete access to our newsroom and our staff, yet used that access to shamefully and inaccurately depict our newspaper, our journalism and our community.

After that program aired last fall, many in the newsroom said, "that's it, that's what happens when we open our doors". But my view, and the view that ultimately prevailed, is that you can't have it all your way. If you're going to promote transparency, you have to accept the consequences, good and bad.

We're also dealing with some legal consequences. Newspapers cannot, by law, be held accountable for the postings of readers on blogs and conversation threads. But we can be held accountable for what we post. Recently, in a hot discussion about our coverage of the city's deputy mayor, our editors had to drop off the blogs because our attorney was concerned the deputy mayor was laying the groundwork for a potential defamation suit. That put us in the position of listening to our lawyer and dropping out of an important transparent newsroom discussion or going ahead and potentially opening the company up to legal action. We have yet to reconcile all of the legal implications.

Similarly, we're still working on the ethical implications of the transparent newsroom. How far can staff posters go in expressing opinion on our transparent blogs. I know I've crossed the line on occasion, finding myself debating with readers on religion, politics, evolution and religious extremism. I imposed on myself a moratorium on posting on Huckleberries online. We have a newsroom committee working on a new revision to our ethics code⁶ that will address some of these concerns for the first time. In the meantime, my admonition to staff is "use common sense".

Conclusion

I think most journalists long-ago concluded that Fortress Newsroom was dead. But I don't see much progress in moving from the fortress model to the transparent model.

I can't tell you with certainty that transparency will grow circulation, readership, advertising revenue or even newsroom credibility. I think it can, but I can't prove it yet. But I can say it doesn't cost a lot of money to experiment, to

try for meaningful transparency. It doesn't take a great deal of staff time and it needn't interfere, at all, with regular newsroom operations.

I can say that these initiatives are, mostly, fun and engaging. And that they do have an impact on our daily journalism, making it, I think, more relevant and compelling than before.

Notes

1. In August 2007, Steve Smith told staff and readers that the staff would be reduced by about 10 FTE. The full memorandum (minus some advertising statistics) was published and debated on the SR website. It was also debated on national journalism sites.
2. Video clips with highlights of principal or agitated debates at the meetings are posted on the daily blog from the news meetings and reach more readers.
3. Steven Smith also commissioned the Washington News Council to scrutinize the paper's criticized coverage of a controversial local issue. The Riverpark Square development project involved the city and the Cowles family (the owners of the paper) and mainly took place before Steve Smith joined *The Spokesman-Review*. The Council report was critical of several aspects of the coverage. It was published in full in the paper May 6th 2007. It concludes:
"Editors should not feel stifled by competitive pressures, but rather their publishers should embolden them to fulfill their journalistic obligations to their readers. Publishers must recognize that their publications, as businesses, bring a special obligation to the marketplace. That obligation is to the communities they serve." See www.spokesmanreview.com/blogs/rps
The audit is the first of its kind in the U.S. according to the Washington News Council.
4. In September 2007, former journalism professor Stewe Blewett signed on as a part-time ombudsman. He left about a month later, after a dispute on reporting standards. He was replaced by Rebecca J. Tallent, a professor at University of Idaho.
5. Since the summer of 2007 Steve Smith has taken a more active role on "News is a conversation" and is almost daily initiating debates about the paper's coverage and direction. See www.spokesmanreview.com/blogs/conversation/
6. The plan is to post the newspaper's draft ethics policy online late 2007 and also present it at public meetings so that the public can comment and propose changes.

Appendix on Transparent News Meetings

Torbjörn von Krogh visited Spokane and *The Spokesman-Review* for a week in May 2007. In a sidebar to an article¹ he summarized the views and effects that he had come across concerning the web-casting of news meetings.

"Should news meetings be transparent?

NO, because:

- competitors get tips about news
- spindoctors get extra time to plan and react
- the editorial discussions become less spontaneous and less uninhibited
- a false sense of total openness is created
- decisions are moved away from a rather open forum
- arguments are presented for those who want to sue the paper
- a serious ambition gradually might transform into a PR-gimmick
- an image of the newsroom as self-obsessed evolves
- they only result in dull transmissions
- tensions between the day- and the night-shifts in the newsroom are strengthened

YES, because:

- the public gets deeper knowledge about how a newsroom actually works
- conditions for conspiracy theories are demystified
- the newsroom not just reacts "as usual" to news but reflects and reasons more
- the credibility of the newsroom is strengthened; it shows that it has nothing to hide
- the newsroom gets better access to "non-professional" reactions on the news
- the distance between the newsroom and the public is reduced
- it shows that a newsroom is doing what it demands of others; being transparent
- communication with the public on a higher level is made possible
- journalism education may profit from access to real life decision making
- it will be easier for the people on the night-shift to follow the discussions on the morning meeting (from their homes)."

Editor Steve Smith's Comments on the Yes/No sidebar:

This is correct.

That is my simple response to the Yes/No discussion of *The Spokesman-Review's* webcast news meetings. I say "correct" because all of the possibilities listed under "No" and all of the possibilities listed under "Yes" have occurred or can possibly occur since we began our experiment 16 months ago.

On any given day, the meeting might present itself as more PR gimmick than reality TV. On any given day, key decisions might actually occur outside the meeting, depriving viewers of the full newsroom experience. And so on.

But it is also true that on any given day the meeting can open a unique and valuable window into newsroom decision making. On any given day our credibility can be strengthened. And so on.

For now, I personally believe the positives outweigh the negatives. But this initiative is an experiment that I believe can be judged only over time and in context of our other "transparent newsroom" initiatives. Time will tell.

Note

1. Torbjörn von Krogh (2007): "Tidningsfästningen är intagen: Nyhetsmöten med full insyn" [The Fortress Newsroom is Occupied: News Meeting with Open View], *Medievärlden*, vol 2, no 7, pp 12-15.

EXAMPLES OF
EXTERNAL MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

Media Journalism ... and the Power of Blogging Citizens

Susanne Fengler

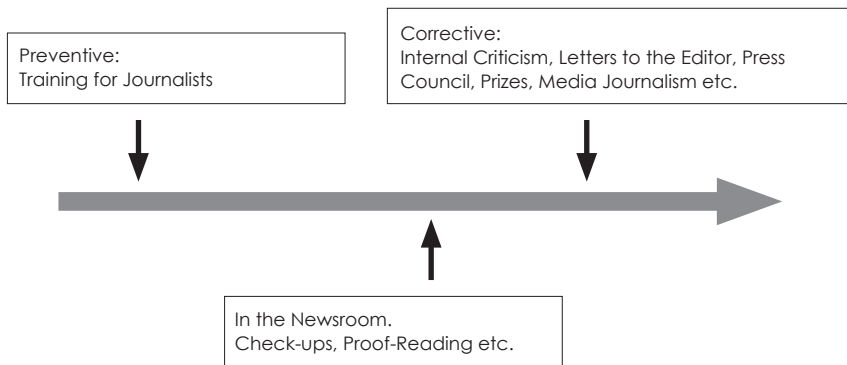
The media beat has undergone many ups and downs in recent years. In Europe, media reporting in the mass media was almost non-existent before the 1990s. Only a handful of – often specialized – media covered the media industry and the journalistic profession. In the United States, on the other hand, the media beat has flourished since the 1970s, when prestigious media like the Washington Post started to publish media criticism, and hired ombudsmen to serve as “readers’ advocates” within the newsroom. In the 1990s then, media journalism gained prominence in Europe as well. The media industry was highly profitable at that time, many new media projects were launched, and the “Internet gold rush years” created a specially stimulating atmosphere for media reporting, and for gossip about media people. Almost all prestigious print media regularly reported about media issues in the 1990s, and there have also been experiments with media journalism in the broadcast media.

Today, leading papers like the Washington Post and the New York Times, the Guardian, Le Monde, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Sueddeutsche Zeitung still cover the media industry as well as the journalistic profession. However, when stock markets collapsed and economic growth slowed down considerably in many European countries after 2000, conditions for media journalism and media criticism also became less hospitable. Media managers and editors-in-chief have been pressed to cut costs in newsrooms due to shrinking advertising volumes, and they often identified the small media beat as one of the first beats to be erased or downsized in order to save money. Also, many publishers have become increasingly unhappy with media reporting, since critical media journalism may interfere with the strategic intentions of media managers. The journalistic options of media journalists are often limited, because they often know that their publishers dislike certain stories; thus the danger of self-censorship is especially high in media journalism.

In recent years, conditions for media journalism have also changed in the United States. Like in Europe, newsrooms staffs have been reduced in order to save money, thus the chances to establish and maintain *infrastructures of media self-control* like ombudsmen, news councils and media criticism as well

as media journalism have been diminished in the United States as well. Both scholars and practitioners assume that infrastructures of media self-control can help secure quality in journalism; however, despite a growing body of literature on that issue, it remains difficult to exactly define “quality” in journalism. Scholars now widely agree that quality in journalism depends on the journalistic product one is about to judge: On the medium, the life-cycle and the genre of the journalistic piece, as well as on the target group the journalist seeks to reach, his role self-definition, and journalism’s function for society.

Figure 1. Infrastructures for Quality in Journalism



Source: Russ-Mohl.

It needs to be added that the intensity of media self-control practiced in a specific country also seems to depend on the “journalistic culture” (Kopper & Mancini 2003) the country belongs to: While Anglo-Saxon countries like Great Britain and the United States have a long tradition and well-developed instruments of media self-control, in Mediterranean countries like Italy and Spain media journalism, for example, is uncommon in many papers.

Media Criticism in the Blogosphere

While media journalism in the mainstream media faces tough conditions in the newsrooms, a new generation of media criticism in blogs has established itself on the Internet. The U.S. is probably the most interesting country to study in terms of media-critical blogs, since media “watchblogs” attract largest audiences here. Blogs like DailyKos, Michelle Malkin and Gawker all count daily visits between 100.000 and 500.000 per day, and in recent years, media-critical bloggers have celebrated spectacular triumphs when prominent journalists like Dan Rather (CBS) and Eason Jordan (CNN) were forced to quit their jobs after conservative bloggers mounted massive campaigns against them, accusing them of journalistic mistakes and “unpatriotic” statements.

As a comparison: In Germany, BildBlog, a watchblog for Germany's largest boulevard newspaper Bild, which is at the same time among Germany's most popular blogs, counts 40.000 visits per day.

Research about Media Journalism

Media journalism in the mass media has rarely been tackled by mass communication research until the 1990s. Since then, however, the then "booming" beat has attracted the attention of many scholars of journalism and mass communication. Several surveys of media journalists as well as content analyses of media journalism have been conducted (see for the most recent studies Malik 2004, Weiss et al. 2005 for Germany; Fengler 2002 for the U.S.). The result of these studies can be summarized as following:

- Media journalism in the mainstream media has a limited sanctioning potential. Surveys show that media journalists fear isolation among their colleagues, and they admit that it is hard for them to criticize their colleagues' mistakes because they have made the mistakes themselves. They also heavily depend on their colleagues as sources. Moreover, media journalists always risk conflicts with current or future employers.
- Media journalism in the mainstream media suffers from peer orientation. In survey, many media journalists expressed insecurity about their target groups. Is it only other journalists and "media people" that are following them, or is the large public similarly interested in media issues?
- Media journalism in the mainstream media suffers from being abused as a PR tool. A problem described especially by media journalists in German-speaking countries is that their publishers often expect them to act as "spokespersons" for them, and it is very hard for media journalists to publish critical stories about their own employer. The situation is somewhat different in the United States, where media journalists traditionally enjoy more editorial freedom, and it is less likely that their pieces are "checked" by the publisher prior to publication.
- Media journalists describe their role differently from what researchers expected them to. When scholars started their research about media journalism, they often assumed that media journalists would consider themselves as "media watchdogs" – that they intend to uncover scandals in the media and in journalism. In fact, surveys show that the majority of media journalists have no such role self-definition. Especially the younger media journalists rather consider themselves as "neutral providers of information" in media issues, instead of watchdogs.

In comparison, media blogs (as well as "media watchblogs") may have less limitations, and media bloggers may pursue a more adversarial approach towards the media:

- Media bloggers may have unlimited sanctioning potential, since bloggers – who are often individuals or groups of individuals without an affiliation with the mass media – do not need to pay attention to the interests of colleagues or employers.
- Media bloggers are often “citizen bloggers” and thus should have a better idea regarding the information demands of their publics.
- Media bloggers may not be expected to function as PR tools, again as the most popular media bloggers are not affiliated with a large media company.
- Media bloggers may indeed consider themselves as media watchdogs, since we can assume that their desire to criticize the mass media has been crucial for their decision to establish a blog.

Typology of Media Blogs in the U.S.

Media blogs in the United States differ with regards to authors, their intentions, and their focus. Since there is a vast amount of media blogs in the U.S., and since their life-cycle is sometimes short, I will focus here on the most popular and established media-critical blogs in the U.S.

Journalists as Media Bloggers

a) Organizations

- Mass media resp. media journalists from the mass media blogs about the media, example: Howard Kurtz’ Blog (Washington Post)
- Mass media have established “ombudsmen blogs”, example: Public Eye (CBS)
- Organizations in the field of journalism offer media blogs, example: editorsweblog.com, cjraily.org
- “Media magazines” come along in form of blogs, example: gawker.com

b) Individual bloggers

- Single journalists blog about the media, example: Jeff Jarvis, buzzmachine.com, Craig Silverman, Regret the error.com
- Single journalists blog about the media with a strong political motivation, example: Michelle Malkin

Non-journalistic Bloggers

a) Organizations

- Media watchdog organizations and media consumers’ organizations communicate via blogs, example: Newstrust

- Professional partisan organizations use blogs to criticize the media, example: Media Research Center, Blog Newsbusters

b) Single Bloggers:

- “Citizen bloggers” or loosely coupled groups of bloggers blog about the media, example: newshounds.org.
- “Citizen bloggers” or loosely coupled groups of bloggers with a strong political motivation blog about the media, example: Powerlineblog.com
- Media experts, i.e. scholars and teachers of journalism, blog about the media, example: Jay Rosen (pressthink.org)
- Celebrities use their blogs to fight back against journalists who misquoted them etc., example: Mark Cuban’s blog (www.blogmaverick.com)

Media Blogs: Analysis

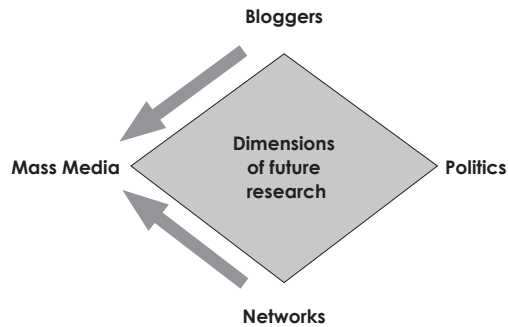
If we take a closer look at those blogs, some of our assumptions about bloggers prove to be right, others are apparently wrong. In fact, almost all bloggers consider themselves as media watchdogs, and have a strong motivation to criticize the mass media, as one can read in their self-descriptions on their websites.

There are a number of very successful “citizen bloggers” in the U.S., like the creators of Powerline or Newshounds, but they do not represent the “average American”, but obviously recruit themselves from educated spheres. At least most of the A-list bloggers analyzed here seem to value the “attention income” they can gain from their blogs high; some bloggers offer advertising space or ask for donations to finance their site; some seem to be interested in “cross-PR” effects for their offline activities.

Some media blogs have lively communities, with sometimes 200 comments for an entry, like in the DailyKos blogs. Other media blogs, however, regularly receive only a handful of responses for an entry, like in Jeff Jarvis’ blog Buzzmachine. Most media blogs focus on the prestige media in the U.S., so that the best newsrooms generate most criticism. Bloggers often criticize the research techniques in the mass media and adhere to “conspiracy theories” that journalists leave out certain bits and pieces of information due to their political bias.

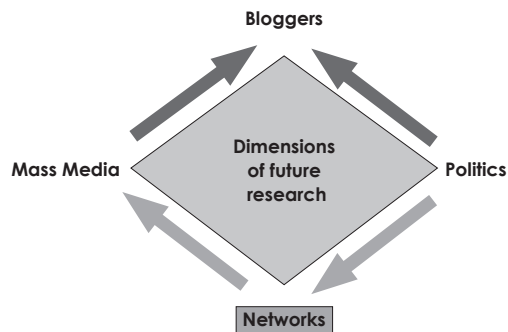
Can blogs help save quality in journalism? It is much too early for a definite answer, since research has only recently turned to the phenomenon of media criticism in form of blogs – but from the analysis of the A-list media blogs cited above, several assumptions can be made:

Figure 2. Blogs as an Instrument of Media Self-Control? Pro-Arguments



- Media bloggers intend to act as media watchdogs and to criticize the media.
- Media bloggers are highly educated and sometimes even have access to the same exclusive events otherwise limited to journalists.
- Via media blogs, large, but heterogeneous groups of unsatisfied media users can be activated to form successful networks (see conservative mail and telephone campaigns against CNN and CBS).
- Bloggers can pressure journalists to be more transparent about their newsgathering methods, since blogging sources can tell their version of the story or publish e-mail contacts with journalists.
- Media bloggers have already sought to create organizational structures and thus created “Mediabloggers” as an institution of self-governance for media bloggers.

Figure 3. Blogs as an Instrument of Media Self-Control? Contra-Arguments



- On the other hand, attention is scarce, and even media bloggers often depend on the mass media and other established gatekeepers to channel public attention towards their blogs.
- Also, the mass media tends to emphasize the lack of professionalism among media bloggers, maybe not at least because media journalists from the established media fear bloggers' competition.
- Media bloggers with a strong political motive risk being abused as PR tools for party professionals.

The effects of media blogs need to be studied more closely, but we may already say that they are a new and potentially powerful instrument of media self-control. The most interesting questions for future research are:

- Will media blogs substitute media journalism – or will they produce an even greater demand for media journalism by the “mainstream media”, because the mass media needs to explain themselves?
- Will media blogs substitute more expensive forms of media self-control (i.e. “online councils”, “online ombudsmen”)?

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Journalism After the Monopoly on Publishing Has Been Broken

Olav Anders Øvrebø

Most journalism that focuses on mass media in Norway has a business orientation. A broader media journalism with a more varied approach may make a decisive contribution to the re-definition of journalism and the role of journalists now that Internet, 'the Web', has broken established media's monopoly on the privilege to publish.

Can the press possibly compete with television, "a medium that, in a matter of speaking, lets its audience actually witness events as they happen"? The question was asked in a rhetorical vein by Norwegian editor Chr. A. R. Christensen in 1961, the year after television was introduced in Norway. Christensen was Editor-in-Chief of *Verdens Gang*, a post he held from the paper's start in 1945 until his death in 1967.¹

Among his many talents, Christensen was a shrewd media analyst, as Martin Eide writes in his biography of Christensen, published in 2006.² He went on to answer his question about the competitive strength of the press with an emphatic "Yes": Where television is clearly superior in its speed and ability to provide 'presence', the press is unsurpassed when it comes to analysis, interpretation and evaluation, Christensen declared.

A history of Norwegian journalism about the media has yet to be written, but when it is, Christensen's analyses will have a given place in it. Decisive junctures, such as when one or another new media technology appears on the scene, are probably the most interesting periods for historians looking for innovation and definitive steps in the development of journalism. The repercussions of contemporary innovations in information and communication technology ('ICT') are arguably even more radical than those of television, in terms of the impact on editors and journalists in any case. Television represented a new form of distribution, but it did not affect editors' and journalists' control over media content, the news and opinions accorded publicity. Internet, by contrast, has totally dismantled editors' monopoly privileges. The result is a dynamic development of new, Web-based genres such as blogs, 'wikis' and video on the web – all produced outside the realm of established media, primarily by individuals with no formal training in journalism, and

at least in part on the basis of totally new praxis with respect to editing and quality control.

Patterned after Business Media

There are no indications that the sudden demise of the monopoly on publishing has had any decisive impact on Norwegian journalism about the media – not yet in any case. The pattern for this kind of journalism was set some years before World Wide Web access was common. In March 1992, a Norwegian business newspaper, *Dagens Næringsliv*, launched a regular section of the paper that is tailored to appeal to readers involved in the Oslo Stock Exchange: “Etter Børs” [roughly: After the bell].³ In the sixteen years of its existence, Etter Børs has devoted several pages in each issue to the media and communication branches – media, advertising/marketing and public relations. In line with the paper’s overall profile, the focus rests primarily on financial/commercial aspects.

Etter Børs may not have been the first example of journalism about the media – witness the example of Chr. A. R. Christensen – but it is generally agreed that the section has established the pattern for journalistic coverage of the media in Norway. This is true both of editorial approaches to the subject and ideas about the target readership. Etter Børs was obviously created to appeal to professionals in the media, advertising and communication, or in closely related branches. The closest competitors to Etter Børsen are the web publication *Propaganda* and the web edition of *Kampanje* (a monthly). Both share Etter Børs’s approach to the media; they are even more target group-oriented.

Up until early 2006, *Propaganda* and web-*Kampanje* were both niche media with rather modest readerships, but in response to keener competition in journalism about the media on the web they are now distributed much more widely. *Propaganda* has been integrated into NA24, a business website, whereas *Kampanje* has a distribution agreement with a rival site, E24.

An important step in the direction of greater pluralism in journalism about the media came in 2006, when Norway’s fourth-largest newspaper, *Bergens Tidende*, converted to tabloid format. At the conversion, the paper launched a daily media section, where other perspectives than business coverage dominate.

Other vehicles for journalism about the media that should be mentioned are the web editions of *Journalisten*, the organ of the Norwegian Union of Journalists, and *Dagens Medier*, published by the Publishers’ Association. Whereas *Journalisten* has expanded its editorial production on the Web successively over the years, *Dagens Medier* has increased its web production markedly only very recently. Both papers’ websites carry original journalistic coverage of mass media that is updated daily. All four titles offer continuous coverage of the media branch.

A recent project at *Journalisten* gives us some idea of the potential for innovation in Norwegian journalism on the media: In early 2007 a panel organized by the paper presented a list of “the five most important stories *not* carried by the

media” in 2006.⁴ The panel looked for events and conditions of consequence to the public that media, for one reason or another, had neglected. The list aroused considerable attention in the media and was debated at a well-attended conference in March 2007.

That economic aspects have so dominated coverage of the media may in part have to do with certain features of business news journalism in Norway. Attempts to instill the standard professional ideology of journalism among business journalists may run into more resistance than elsewhere, inasmuch as many practitioners in the specialty have backgrounds in Economics and Business Administration, not Journalism. In the publications influenced by editor and media owner Trygve Hegnar (*Kapital, Finansavisen*), for example, one often hears the opinion that it is better to hire an economist and give him/her training in journalism than to hire a graduate of a School of Journalism, the rationale being that it is easier to teach an economist to write than it is to teach a journalist Economics. May a recruitment pattern like this explain why business journalists seem to find it easier to subject other media – their colleagues – to journalistic scrutiny? It is in any case an interesting hypothesis. In extension of this reasoning: Will a steadily higher level of education among editors and journalists give rise to a more multidisciplinary understanding of what being a journalist or editor is all about?

Commentators and Talking Heads

Alongside the coverage of media from a business angle the past couple of decades have seen several other approaches. In the case of reportage, we have continuous coverage of television, especially in the non-subscribed tabloids, *VG* and *Dagbladet*. This coverage has largely focused on TV ‘personalities’ and takes place in a kind of symbiosis between the papers and the channels. It is, for that matter, a kind of journalism Chr. A. R. Christensen foresaw quite precisely in 1961, according to Martin Eide: “People love to read about what they, themselves in one way or another have been a part of. You are never more eager to read an account of a sports event than when it is a match you have seen – at the stadium or on TV – or listened to on the radio.”⁵ Television has proven to be a reliable source of “familiar faces” for Page One of the non-subscribed tabloids. But the copy generally falls into the category of soft news (entertainment or human interest) rather than hard news coverage.

Regularly appearing columns of television criticism, offered in a number of media for some years, are another format that approaches journalistic coverage of mass media. Television critics, however, are frequently criticized for not understanding the industry.

Media commentary has become an established subdivision of op-ed journalism in some papers. In Norway many regard Markus Markussen at *Dagbladet* a pioneer. Markussen, a journalist noted for his stylistic gifts, developed the format for media columns in the 1990s. Both nationally distributed tabloids,

VG and *Dagbladet*, employ media commentators, but their columns do not appear daily.

Perhaps surprisingly, no regular program of media commentary has survived on Norwegian television, despite several attempts. One fairly long-lived attempt, – *Mediemenerne* [The Critics], aired on public service channel NRK2 from 2002 to 2004 – featured a panel of commentators recruited from the press, communication professions and the research community who offered their views on various media-related issues. Their views, however, were seldom based on particularly extensive journalistic research. Today, media issues are discussed on radio and television in other formats such as moderated studio debates. *Kurér* [Courier], a weekly program of “radio on radio” on national public radio, treats other media, too, from time to time. Otherwise, journalism about the media has no fixed place in NRK programming.

In our search for regular coverage of the media we should not forget that media performance can be subjected to extensive scrutiny in connection with special events or “affairs” of various kinds. In those cases the media and their *modus operandi* are the story itself. In Norway, “the Tønne affair” offers a classic example: Tore Tønne was Minister of Health in the first Stoltenberg Cabinet, 2000-2001. In Fall 2002, after the Stoltenberg government had resigned, he was harshly criticized in the media, and particularly *Dagbladet*, for consulting work he did for certain clients. Shortly before Christmas Tore Tønne committed suicide. This tragic turn of events elicited considerable public debate concerning the media’s role and ethics. A commission of inquiry appointed by the Norwegian Press Association (an umbrella organization of publishers, editors and journalists with a focus on ethics and integrity) concluded that the alleged impropriety of Mr. Tønne’s role as a consultant had been blown up out of proportion and that media coverage had focused excessively on the ex-minister’s person. The commission particularly criticized the editors of *Dagbladet* for not having troubled themselves to meet Mr. Tønne in person for comment in the course of their reporting about him.⁶

Ersatz Criticism? – More Diversity?

This past March and April (2007) I conducted an informal study. Over a period of three weeks I tried to make a total inventory of journalistic coverage of mass media in Norwegian media on the web, both web media and web editions of conventional media. I then published what I found on my own blog, “Undercurrent”.⁷ My intent was to register all coverage of the media viewed from other perspectives than the financial/business angle. Would I find many different angles – journalism that treat media ethics, media’s use of the language, their use of sources, use of genres, and so forth? A journalism characterized by systematics, continuity and a variety of methods?

As expected, I found embryos of these kinds of coverage, sometimes in the cultural sections, sometimes on pages devoted to politics, local news and, not

least, opinion. Surprisingly, I also found a tendency for the web media to publicize others' criticism of the media rather uncritically. Sources of different kinds were allowed to lash out at "the media" – often without any specific target – with little or no documentation. To take an example: "The media are to blame" for young girls' dreams of becoming a fashion model, wrote a researcher on sports and gender in *Bergens Tidende* (April 4, 2007). Might this kind of 'criticism' be a simple way for the media to impress the public with their broadness of mind? "Look, see how self-critical we are!" In their simplest forms such articles are not particularly good journalism. One would expect criticism of the media to be handled with as much discernment as criticism of other institutions.

Another tendency exhibited in the material is that the media readily accept media-critical contributions from external sources. In the weeks I studied there were several items in which church leaders criticized media's treatment of issues relating to the church and faith/religious beliefs. Media professionals' readiness to respond to the criticism or to participate in the discussions apparently varies, however.

This study, small as it may be, shows that Norwegian media are not totally silent on the topics of media and journalism. It is clearly possible for committed journalists to write about the media outside established media, as well. With few exceptions, however, their articles are not regular features of the paper or program line-up, as in the case of *Dagens Næringsliv*. Without continuity, it is difficult to build the competence needed to report about the media in a better, more engaging fashion.

Collegial Loyalty Comes First

Genuinely critical coverage of the media presumes that it is acceptable – if not desirable – for editors and journalists to scrutinize their professional colleagues. A recent controversial case in Norway suggests that neither the acceptance nor the will is in place today.

In February 2007 a book on the methods used by gossip magazine *Se og Hør* was published. The author was journalist Håvard Melnæs⁸, who was an ace reporter at *Se og Hør* for some years. *Se og Hør*, one of the most widely circulated magazines in Scandinavia, had a combined average weekly circulation of 453 000 in 2006. It appears twice weekly (267 000 Tuesday issue and 186 000 weekend issue).

In his book Melnæs revealed that the magazine pays Norwegian celebrities – including leading politicians – to allow themselves to be photographed and interviewed. The magazine has perfected the practice of rewarding sources with emoluments, sums of up to tens of thousands of euros. In the more forthright version of the practice, the person is photographed and interviewed in his/her home in return for a fee and, furthermore, the privilege of having a say about the angle of the reportage and phrasing of the text. More controversial is Melnæs' revelation that *Se og Hør* also pays travel agents, airlines, banks and

credit card companies for information about celebrities' – and particularly the Royal family's – travel routes and various transactions. Melnæs' exposé has elicited several inquiries.

Assuming that Melnæs is telling the truth, the practice has been going on for years. Although the magazine's ethics have been the subject of debate on previous occasions, Melnæs' revelations surprised many a seasoned professional in the Norwegian press. In the context of an assessment of journalism about the media, the question arises: Why has none of this been become public knowledge earlier? Naturally, *Se og Hør* is hardly likely to broadcast the information; still, it seems unlikely that such provocative methods could possibly be kept a secret if journalists in the magazine's surroundings had done some digging.

Why didn't they? It may be that scrutiny of popular weeklies simply lacks the professional prestige attached to exposés in the realms of business, finance and politics. Still, an alternative explanation seems closer to hand: journalists try to avoid stepping on their other journalists' toes. It is considered a breach of collegial loyalty.

This may reflect an attitude among journalists on a broader plane. In an article on his experience as a readers' ombudsman at *Bergens Tidende*, Terje Angelshaug writes:

Very few people outside the editorial staff have any insight into the values that underlie newspapers' handling of important issues. Editors seldom make themselves available to the public to field critical comments or explain the journalism they produce. Critical letters-to-the-Editor are seldom answered, and when they are, the response is generally dismissive, devoid of all admission of guilt. This inability to practice self-critique is rooted, I believe, in the fact that many editors and journalists see themselves as the sole protectors of freedom of expression and, indeed, of Truth. They tend to see their critics as opposing these values.⁹

Even today, in 2007, we journalists are extremely sensitive to criticism and very secretive about our methods. If we do what we can to hinder others' insight into our own methods, it follows that we will hesitate to scrutinize others. But editors and journalists who elect not to examine and expose their colleagues' professional behavior despite there being reason to do so are actually violating their own ethical code. The code of press ethics from 2003 includes the dictum: "It is a press obligation to shed critical light on how media themselves exercise their role."¹⁰

Reflection and Cynicism

Misguided loyalties and an indiscriminate view of the press as Defender of Truth are, in other words, still with us. Both pose effective hindrances to the further development of journalism about the media, but it is my belief that their days

are numbered. Simplistic conceptions of journalists' *modus operandi* and the societal role media play have an antiquated air about them.

Media researcher Philip Schlesinger studied the BBC of the 1970s from the inside and discusses the prevailing ideology of journalism and its precepts of impartiality and objectivity – i.e., the very fundamentals of the unique position the public service broadcaster enjoys – in a critical light. BBC News' credibility was based on journalists' presentation of themselves as a neutral, professional collective that had routines to guarantee a strict separation of fact from opinion. BBC News was produced by a brotherhood of impeccably honest and impartial empiricists.¹¹ This notion presumed some form of direct contact with reality. The task of the journalist was to serve as an eye-witness who relates facts – the Truth – about the world.

Such a notion of knowledge and such a self-image are hopelessly outdated. One scholar who shares this view is media researcher and anthropologist Georgina Born, who has studied journalism at the BBC in recent years. The BBC's journalists are well versed in critical works on the media, Born notes. Today's professionals look upon journalism as the outcome of a process of construction and interpretation. Basic to what media do is the notion that both practitioner and public realize that this is so. The media reflect on themselves. "Reflective realism" has succeeded the concept of naive empiricism, Born concludes.¹²

Many points of criticism of media and publicity are common knowledge among journalists, other media professionals, and the public. This mutual awareness can sometimes give rise to a certain cynicism. It is, for example, common practice to comment on and rate various actors' media strategies in connection with major events and initiatives. Håvard Melnæs' above-mentioned book is a case in point: marketing professionals applauded the publisher's and author's publicity strategy even as the book was being launched. An ability to generate favorable opinion through effective management – or manipulation, as the case may be – of the media is generally admired. This, too, is a consequence of the new reflectiveness.

Thus, journalists have updated their epistemological self-understanding. However they make use of it – or not – a simplistic view of the journalist as the sole Protector of Truth would not appear to have much of a future.

Blogging – Independence and An Alternative Public Sphere

I started this essay with the statement that journalists and editors had lost their monopoly on publishing.¹³ Two ideas that underlie expectations regarding the effects of blogging on media journalism should be mentioned: First is the notion that the public, by means of their own unedited publishing can serve as a 'fifth estate', a corrective to media that do not perform their duties well enough. Blogs represent a form of publishing about media that takes place outside the auspices of the media and forms a complement to the media's journalistic coverage of the media. A second, related, but more ambitious idea

is that bloggers have the potential to be an independent editorial and political power that can compete with established media.

Up to now, blogging has been discussed on the media's terms. The question generally asked is whether a blogger has managed to attract enough attention to make an impact on public awareness and public opinion. In Norway there have been very few instances in which bloggers have been able to influence the public agenda. Bloggers have not been very good at backing each other up to enhance their influence. Nor have they been good enough at 'digging' and checking their data. Opinion pieces predominate. Also, the media would appear to feel in a strong enough position to be able to ignore bloggers. Norwegian media have, namely, been quick to take to the web and are well-established there.

This situation can change. Many new and stimulating writers have started blogging. Media that 'discover' them and manage to recruit them will have a competitive edge. The reasons that blogs have not had much influence to date are essentially factors bloggers themselves can do something about.

The record to date suggests that blogging has had an additional consequence that is at least as important as the foregoing, namely, the establishment of small, critical alternative public spheres in the form of groups of bloggers and writers who focus on a small selection of themes and follow them over time. The blog, Document.no is a case in point. (I should mention that I was involved in founding Document.no in 2003, but I have not been a part of it since August of that year.) Much of the production lies in the hands of Hans Rustad, a former journalist. The blog discusses controversial issues: e.g., immigration and integration, Islamic terror, the crisis of the Left, global warming. In 2006, media started paying attention to Document.no; Rustad has been rather frequently interviewed, invited to take part in studio debates, etc. The establishment of a small, alternative public sphere or 'community' has aroused media interest. Thus, it appears that bloggers' influence can develop in phases.

Journalists Can Be so Many Things

After the monopoly privileges of established media have been broken, what does being a journalist actually amount to? How does the practice of journalism differ from other forms of publicity, like blogging? For a report (cf note 13) I asked bloggers, editors and journalists to point out the similarities and differences between blogging and journalism. Editors and journalists among the respondents saw some similarities between news commentary and blogging, but bloggers went further. Bjørn Stærk, a young computer programmer who has been blogging since 2001, commented that bloggers who concern themselves with news reporting and politics not only generate opinion, but also perform a filtering function. In that sense their work resembles that of news editors. The most distinct difference between bloggers and journalists is, very simply, their status: if you are paid for your work, you are a professional journalist; if you

are not paid, you are an amateur. In time we may see a successive blurring of the distinction between amateurs and professionals when newspapers have a broader selection of writers to choose from, Stærk surmised. The best of the 'semi-pros' will be inducted into the media.

Has the emergence of blogging and other user-steered publishing caused editors and journalists to reflect on their work? There are signs that it is beginning to. Blogging and 'citizen journalism' were debated at a conference arranged by the Norwegian Editors' Association in May 2007. When the web newspaper, *ABC Nyheter* was launched in February 2007, a special section devoted to citizen journalism was a highlighted feature. There, *ABC's* readers are invited to write their own articles on subjects of their own choosing. It is too early to say whether the concept will be successful.

Bjørn Stærk's idea about a successive transition from blogging to journalism is highly plausible. Bloggers – those who focus on social issues, in any case – gather, evaluate, process and communicate current information. They do it on a volunteer basis, but that does not necessarily mean the quality is poorer. Bloggers are often specialists on the subjects they write about. One of the most positive aspects of blogging – when it is good – is its commitment to openness as an unwritten norm: openness both as regards the sources used and regarding the writer's motives. At its best, blogging can be continuous knowledge production coupled with reflection on one's own motives and role.

As I see it, it is here that blogging and journalism should meet. In a time of transition like the present, when the roles of editors and journalists are being re-defined, journalism about the media can provide vital insights, the raw material for much-needed self-reflection. But it can only happen if journalism about the media expands beyond the confines of the business angle that has dominated to date. Journalism about the media should reflect the diversity of journalism that actually exists and include web publishing in its various guises. Provided that this media journalism represents the fruit of a broad array of methods – from investigating colleagues' methods, via participant observation in the 'blogosphere', to classic journalistic research and reportage, to name but a few – journalism focusing on the media can make important contributions to a better understanding of journalism as a special form of publication that will continue to exist, even without monopoly privileges.

Chr. A. R. Christensen was Norway's foremost ideologue of the press in the postwar period. His biographer, Martin Eide, describes the crucial role Christensen played in reinstating the public sector and formulating a code of ethics for reporters and editors. Christensen argued untiringly that the only way media could develop was through a commitment to quality. A successful response to the challenge television posed could only be based on "raising the standard of journalism, the knowledgeability and judgment and ability to write of members of the press".¹⁴ Those who feel a call to be the media ideologues of the digital age can make worse choices than Christensen as their source of inspiration.

Notes

1. *Verdens Gang*, VG, was founded in June 1945 by the Norwegian Resistance, in which Chr. A. R. Christensen was active. Some six months before Christensen died in 1967, the paper was taken over by Schibsted, who revamped it and gave it a new profile, which marked the start of a long period of steady growth. In 1981, VG, now a non-subscribed tabloid, had become Norway's largest daily paper in terms of circulation, a position it has kept to the present day.
 Martin Eide, a leading Norwegian media scholar, wrote a history of VG, published in 1995, which is regarded as a standard work: *Blod, sverte og gledesårer* [Blood, ink and tears of joy]. Oslo: Schibsted Forlag.
2. Martin Eide (2006) *Saklighetens lidenskap* [A passion for the dispassionate]. Oslo: Aschehoug.
3. About the launching of Etter Børs: private communication to the author from Hans Hjellemo, former editor of the section.
4. See further: www.journalisten.no/id/242.
5. Eide (2006), p. 229.
6. Svein Brurås, Guri Hjeltne & Henrik Syse (2003) *3 uker i desember: en kritisk gjennomgang av medienes rolle i den såkalte Tønne-saken* [3 weeks in december: a critical examination of the role of mass media in the 'Tønne affair']. Oslo: Norsk Presseforbund.
7. See www.oov.no/undercurrent/archives/undercurrent_nor/ medieneommediene.
8. Håvard Melnæs (2007) *En belt vanlig dag på jobben* [All in a day's work]. Oslo: Kagge.
9. Terje Angelshaug (2006) Et hull i BT-muren [A chink in the wall around BT], *Vox Publica*. (www.voxpublica.no/2006/11/et-hull-i-bt-muren/)
10. An English translation of the Code ('Vaer Varsom-plakaten') may be accessed at www.nj.no/English/.
11. Philip Schlesinger (1987): *Putting "Reality" Together: BBC News*. London: Sage.
12. Georgina Born, lecture at the University of Bergen, 27 April 2007.
13. I develop my observations on how blogging relates to journalism at greater length in "Under medienes overflate" [Media: Beneath the surface] (2006). The report (in Norwegian) is accessible at www.oov.no/prosjekter/undermedienesoverflaterapport.html.
14. Eide (2006), p. 229.

Media Journalism 2.0

Martin Jönsson

For years, Swedish journalism about the media has moved in a very confined universe: it has either discussed media professionals, for media professionals, in a strongly professionally self-interested vein, or it has viewed the media in a political-policy context. The advent of the 'blogosphere' has brought new perspectives and breaths of fresh air – which are not particularly welcome in some quarters.

One of the most threadbare clichés in the way of media criticism today goes like this: Who's watching the watchdogs? The question is raised frequently, the tone invariably indignant. As though the media were a power beyond all insight, above all criticism.

The answer, of course, is that many are watching, and more each day. In Sweden there are a good number of platforms for critical examination of the media. Some in the branch itself, like *Journalisten* (the journalists' union), *Medievärlden* (publishers), *Resumé* (advertising), *Dagens Media* (media choice), *Scoop* (investigative journalism), *Media i Fokus* (associated with the social democratic and labor movements), and debates arranged by Publicistklubben (the National Press Club; an organization for media ethics and freedom of expression) and the Club's yearbooks; others addressing broader sectors of the general public, like the public service radio programs, *Publicerat* and *Medierna*. In addition there are organizations like SNS (Centre for Business and Policy Studies) and an increasingly lively discussion of the media in general news reporting (e.g., *Gomorrön Sverige* on public service television SVT, *Nyhetsmorgon* on TV4, *Morgon* and *Studio Ett* on public service radio, series of articles in leading newspapers like *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Sydsvenskan* provoked by media 'witch-hunts' and the like). We can only conclude that what the media do, or don't do, today is subject to much more scrutiny, criticism and discussion than ever before. In addition to the ceaseless attention of readers, listeners and viewers.

Still, several vital perspectives are missing. The above-mentioned coverage shows a strong bias toward ethical issues, issues relating to freedom of the press and politics, whereas examination of the media as market actors has had

low priority in the Swedish business press – possibly because so few Swedish media companies are listed on the stock exchange. If we compare economic coverage and analysis of the media with political perspectives – e.g., media's party loyalties and bias and the extent to which the various parties have been favored or disadvantaged in election coverage – we find a heavy preponderance of political slants.

Another area that has been accorded extremely little coverage is media habits, that is, how listeners, viewers and readers use the media. Recent years have seen significant changes in patterns of media use, particularly among young people. Only recently have newspapers begun to pay attention to what is happening on Internet, but many in the traditional media still fail to acknowledge the changes in the media landscape and their ramifications. Prime focus still rests on the conventional media; what is happening in the parallel media universe – in blogs, communities and other interactive media – is considered less important.

This is so, even though the emergence of a strong parallel media landscape has altered the very fundamentals of traditional media's roles and functions. Gone is the media's interpretive privilege and their unchallenged 'gate-keeper' function. Gone, too, is the passive mass consumption of media. Instead, we see a great multitude of channels and voices, which includes an increasingly focused discussion of media content.

This is an essentially positive development for the traditional media. It forces them to stay on their toes, to be accurate and more informative, while it stimulates a degree of involvement that, properly used, can enhance the importance of the media rather than diminish it. The media may become more transparent, with no loss of authority. Provided, that is, that they are aware that the playing field has changed and understand what Chris Anderson, editor of *Wired* and author of *The Long Tail*, means when he says:

THEN: We control the site. Editors are gatekeepers.

NOW: We share control with readers. Editors catalyze and curate conversations that happen as much 'out there' as on our own site. So there you have it, a motto for media in an age when consumers are in control: "Catalyze and curate" (Anderson, longtail.com, December 12, 2006).

Critics

Not everyone welcomes these developments. Some people reject the blogosphere out of hand as no more than a vehicle for venting aggressions, and regard the views expressed as irresponsible or ignorant. To these people the growing volume of citizen journalism lacks meaning. These critical views may be warranted in some cases, but hardly across the board.

Such views were also voiced at the conference on Media Accountability in Kalmar, Sweden, in March 2007. John McManus, lecturer on media at San José

State University in California and prime mover behind the project *Grade the News*, described a miserable state of affairs in American newspaper journalism, but hardly looked upon bloggers or citizen journalists as a stimulating counterbalance.

McManus could see that the blogosphere can contribute “new perspectives”, and that it is less subject to the dictates of market forces. But then he went on to list bloggers’ faults: “they have no education, no editors and no resources”, “all too many of them are lobbyists and spokespersons for vested interests”, and they fail to “keep their journalistic/editorial content apart from their commercial content”.

At about the same time Anders R Olsson, Swedish columnist and media debater, expressed similar views in two articles published in *Journalisten*. Among other things, Olsson noted that blogs had not helped any Swedish social commentator, indeed, any intellectual of any kind to take the step from anonymity to fame. He also stated baldly: “Bloggers can never influence anything of ideological significance.” In Olsson’s view the function of the blogosphere remains marginal in every respect: “Surely, bloggers fill a need for many people, but that has nothing to do with democracy or the quality of journalism.” Yrsa Stenius, columnist for *Aftonbladet* (and recently appointed press ombudsman) is on the same wave-length when she concludes that bloggers never will be a substitute for critically scrutinizing journalism. The tone in these articles is shrill. They are clearly defensive, aggressive, hackles up.

In my opinion the blogosphere has very much to do with both democracy and the quality of journalism. Through greater diversity, greater transparency, the questioning and correction of faults and errors, more qualified discussions and, in many cases, greater depth are possible – thanks to more initiated analysis and a degree of specialization that few news journalists can achieve.

Belittling the blogosphere on the basis of its worst output is like judging all journalism on the basis of the most flagrant sensationalism in the boulevard press. Of course there are blogs that campaign on pet causes, that slander, that are just plain stupid, but many others are highly professional, in the best sense of the word. Can anyone doubt that even non-journalists can do good investigative reporting? The examples are many, in Sweden and elsewhere. Nor is there anything in the continued development of the blogosphere that would keep traditional media from doing qualified and investigative journalism. A greater amount of user-generated material may instead stimulate the media to offer more depth – as a way of distinguishing themselves from the quick, superficial news flow.

Yet, within the profession a deeply rooted skepticism regarding readers’ contributions prevails. An article by Pnina Yavari-Molin, a member of the board of the Union of Journalists, in the Union’s magazine shortly after the Kalmar conference is a prime example. According to Yavari-Molin, publishers’ interest in readers’ contributions to newspapers and websites is sheerly a matter of economy:

Whenever the idea is presented to news desks, there is talk of reader involvement, of coming closer to the users and ‘bonding’. But, of course, it is actually about something completely different: the dream of being able to publish material without having to pay costly and critical journalists tantalizes many publishers. As a journalist and union representative the trend is clearly cause for worry. The thought that the job of journalist might be replaced by free [voluntary] material is naturally very disturbing.

This is archetypical of unions’ defensive position: Don’t start talking about taking away our jobs; the quality of journalism will suffer.

Little Support

But there is very little evidence that supports the argument. First of all, involving readers in newspaper production is, in most cases, not about saving money. Publishers can hardly take people off the streets and ask them to do the same job staff reporters do. The various forms of reader involvement – from blogs to user-generated material – are complements, not substitutes. They require editing and journalistic creativity. Or, to quote Rachel Sterne (*News Assignment*): “How does a blog become journalism? By getting organized.” The guiding, forming hand of the editor does not disappear, it just works with new kinds of material.

To consider user-generated material and blogs as no more than cost-free material is to ignore the great potential in the material. The media companies who are best at engaging their readerships and audiences will also be best at stimulating their involvement, which in turn lays the foundation for a longer-term and deeper relationship and enhances the media’s distinction. Respect for the public is rewarded, by the public, in the form of the credibility that Yavari-Molin is so anxious to preserve. This, too, is good for journalism, for qualitative, critical, professional journalism. To not let the public in only widens the gap, which does neither party any good.

Fortunately, many quality media understand this, and they are developing tools to facilitate exchange between traditional and parallel media. Blog links, “news sharing”, the option of creating personal web pages with news input and other forms of news aggregation make it easier for the public to take part actively in the news flow.

These developments give rise to a new kind of media criticism. People find errors, question and mount campaigns against the material traditional media publish. It is criticism, not from narrow-minded professionals who fear for their jobs, but from more personal platforms.

If taken seriously this criticism can result in more accurate, less partisan and more empathetic journalism. In which case it will have succeeded in a task that traditional media criticism has seldom managed to accomplish.

From Opinion Journalism to Internal Strife

*Vår grundade mening – A Program of Media Criticism on Swedish Public Radio**

Åke Pettersson

Vår grundade mening (VGM, roughly: Our considered opinion) came on the air in 1970. At that time the public service company, Sveriges Radio, which offered three channels, was alone on Swedish air waves. That first season consisted of eight 15-minute interviews with op-ed writers in leading Swedish newspapers. The theme in all the programs was how the writers formed the opinions they expressed in their columns. That is, what they knew about what they wrote.

Subsequently, the program leaned more and more toward a broader critical focus on the media. The program was a 'sometime phenomenon', aired in fits and starts. It was actually cancelled a couple of years at the end of the 1970s, but since 1981, when I was hired as a news reporter part-time and could devote the other 50 per cent of my time to VGM, the program was on the air without fail, until January 2007. Weekly since 1986. In those days the program had a fairly decent budget, with money for stringers and travel, which allowed us to do a good deal of reporting from abroad.

In retrospect, 1999 stands out as our "Golden Year". We had just shy of an hour (50 minutes) and two full-time staff! Our budget, what is more, even allowed us to engage columnists. But only the next year, there was a change of management at our channel, P1. We gave the new boss of P1 a pretty tough 'grilling' about her plans for the channel – with the result that she cut VGM's air time to 25 minutes and more than halved our budget. We did, however, manage to keep our staff of two. The following year our slot was extended to a half-hour...

Less Criticism

In time, our channel director was promoted to take charge of programming for the entire company. The whole company was reorganized according to an internal client-supplier model. The change aroused controversy, both in and outside the company. Seldom has P1 been under such fire as when the resulting programs came on the air.

Among other things, *VGM* was cancelled. The announcement, in Fall 2006, came as quite a surprise since we and a Sunday magazine-format program had just undergone major revamping. A 'new and improved' *VGM* was expected to make its debut only a couple of weeks later, in conjunction with our 25th anniversary.

Instead of *VGM*, the director announced, P1 would carry a program on media that would be produced by an independent producer (outside SR). All in all, P1 planned to increase its expenditure on independent productions by an additional SEK 40 million (4.25 million euro) in 2007. The new program was to be more news-oriented and carry more material on advertising and computer games – areas, the director said, that *VGM* had neglected. My interpretation of the changes is this: less media critique, which had been our forte, and more on media consumption.

VGMs cancellation provoked some listeners to start a spontaneous petition campaign via the web. A dedicated site, www.namninsamling.com/vargrundademening, that in the space of six weeks got 1772 signatures by the sheer force of being there. We at *VGM* were hardly in a position to advertise the site, still, many listeners seemed to find the site on their own. What listeners protested against was that the program had been farmed out to an independent producer. They liked our critical bent. Which was nice to hear, even if late in the game.

A small delegation from the campaign was able to meet with SRs management, but the meeting was to no avail. SRs representatives seemed unable to understand listeners' fears that a production company outside SR would have difficulty criticizing SR, i.e. biting the hand that fed them. Was there not always the risk that they might never see a second season, the campaigners reasoned. Nor did they want a less critical program. Management replied that the company was actually putting more into media coverage than before, albeit the focus would be somewhat different. And, surely, SR would continue to be examined in a critical light.

VGMs Public Relations

Over the years we managed to establish a fairly good relationship with our listeners and a fair degree of credibility in their eyes, or ears. Perhaps because we often covered stories after tips from listeners, and even let their voices be heard every now and then. And because we didn't pull our punches when it came to criticizing Sveriges Radio.

Ratings surveys revealed that we had an inverted listener profile, which meant that we attracted precisely the people SR management said they wanted to reach: younger listeners, which in the case of P1, means 50 years and under. *VGMs* age curve sloped downward with increasing age, not upward as in the case of most other P1 programs. (Generally speaking, the P1 audience increases with age.)

We also attracted more women than men – another deviation from the norm. These aspects were not even discussed when the decision to cancel us was taken. In fact, there were no talks with the production team at all when the so-called “Output Department” was drawing up the new program schedules. The reactions in other media were mixed. Many had valued a program of critical scrutiny focused on the media.

But when we trained our searchlight on our own company, we were not always awfully popular. For a while in the late 1980s several heads of local radio (SR) stations felt that we were persecuting local radio. One of them demanded (and was given) the logs of all our transmissions. He was collecting “evidence”. This was at a juncture when local radio stations were expected to extend their transmission time but had been given no extra editorial resources; that is, they would of necessity be forced to reduce their journalistic content. The stations never followed up their complaint.

But we have had many other reactions, too, over the years. Once, the Stockholm police called a press conference to apologize for a press release they had issued six months prior; there they had claimed that most of the Gambians in Stockholm were ‘pushers,’ dealers in narcotics. This was not true, which they discovered when they double-checked their statistics – after a critical report by VGM. Another time, the regional newspaper, *Sydsvenskan*, vowed to send their staff to a course in statistics, after we had pointed out several errors in the paper.

We know that many of our reports have been the subject of internal seminars in various media. And we have ‘had our hides tanned’ in different ways from time to time – in the columns, but more often in letters and irate telephone calls. But that, of course, is all in the line of duty.

Criticizing Sveriges Radio

SR management have become increasingly thin-skinned, they can’t handle criticism, not with any grace. When we bring up points that listeners have brought to our attention, they dismiss them as “an absurd discussion”. For example, there were a lot of on-air gaffes when P1 converted to voice tracking, especially evenings and week-ends. Perhaps mostly because program presenters had difficulty mastering the system. After our program, however, program presenters were brought back into the studio on Saturdays and Sundays.

There was a time when you could walk around the company with a microphone and tape-recorder. Just about everyone was willing to discuss just about any issue. Today, staff are tight-lipped. Some voice criticism, but they decline to be interviewed. This indicates a change of climate – which, unfortunately, we find in many other institutions, as well. Top management no longer accept being interviewed; they send their Directors of Communication instead. Once, General Managers always made themselves available.

Today, the company is controlled from the top, and people down the line are biting their tongues – no matter that management would have us believe otherwise. (The CEO, it should be noted, has since been forced to resign due to budget and staff mismanagement.)

Can media journalism bring about change? Yes and no.

Yes – it happens. Some media companies change their routines after criticism. They send staff off for training and admit their wrongdoing. Even more commonly, the issues are discussed behind closed doors.

But no – The same transgressions are committed, again and again. Especially by the evening tabloids.

VGM carried a lot of reporting and discussions that had an impact. For example, we examined how the media had handled a grisly murder case in Halmstad on the west coast, where the body had been dismembered, just days after the murder had been committed. And once we did a whole program about a case, after the sister of a young woman who died in Stockholm complained to us. Several newspapers, with the evening tabloids in the lead, were calling the death murder – more specifically, an “honor” crime – despite the fact that all the evidence pointed to suicide. The girls’ father, pointed out as the instigator, if not the actual killer, was totally innocent. The media based their speculations on the suspicions of a police officer without doing any investigative reporting of their own.

VGM frequently reported the findings of various media researchers. Actually, we discussed more than we had time to scrutinize or investigate. Our colleagues at *Mediemagasinet* on Swedish television (SVT) were able to put much more time into their stories. We at *VGM* had to produce a new program each week, 52 programs a year.

But *Mediemagasinet*’s reporting was often a little simplistic, too ‘black-and-white’. And often they only skimmed the surface, touching on too many items, without giving enough depth. The same can be said about SR’s new program, *Medierna*, which sometimes packs too many items – little more than news briefs – into the program.

Medierna has a generous budget, probably twice as much as *VGM* ever had. Most probably because of all the protests when *VGM* was cancelled – there were petitions and critical articles in cultural and debate columns. Ultimately, the channel management chose a group of journalists who had a slant on the media much like our own.

There are probably some fifty journalists in Sweden who cover the media: about 25 in the specialized press, 15 general news reporters and maybe 10 free lances. But public affairs programs, too, have begun to show a greater interest in the media and media issues over the past ten years or so. They are quick to pick up and discuss the hotter issues. And blogs give ordinary citizens a good opportunity to discuss the media. All in all, the more eyes on the media, the better.

* Åke Pettersson, who produced the media program, *Vår grundade mening* for Sveriges Radio some 26 years, now produces a program entitled *Publicerat*.

From PressWise to MediaWise

Promoting Journalism Ethics in the UK, 1993-2007

Mike Jempson

The print and broadcast media have an enormous influence upon the way we lead our lives, our perceptions of the world, and upon the conduct of public debate and the democratic process. The convergence of communication technologies and the concentration of (cross media) ownership, places the citizen, and especially the most vulnerable sections of society at an extreme disadvantage in relation to the media products they 'consume'. They rely upon journalists to keep them informed, but journalists themselves are subject to commercial pressures and the policies of their employers.

Those who wish to complain or assert their right to be heard must take on arguably the most powerful institutions in society or rely upon regulatory systems which can be difficult to negotiate without assistance, and which in the case of the UK press is funded entirely by the industry. MediaWise (formerly PressWise) is a champion of press freedom and recognises the enormous power that the media has for good but also believes that it is vital the public has access to independent advice and support when this power is abused.

Many people share the concerns expressed by Onora O'Neill in her 2002 Reith Lectures that certain media practices have undermined public trust in the function of journalism. Some would support Prince Charles' view that the Press has become "awkward, cantankerous, cynical, bloody-minded, at times intrusive, at times inaccurate and at times deeply unfair and harmful to individuals and to institutions."

For over a decade we have sought to act as a mediator in the relationship between ordinary citizens and the media, and to improve the standards and standing of journalism. We have had some success in obtaining redress for those who suffer as a result of unethical practices. We have also sought to influence trainee and working journalists especially in their handling of problematic issues.

Our services have been employed by both the National Union of Journalists in the UK and the International Federation of Journalists in other parts of the world, and we have devised and delivered training in more than 35 African, Asian and European countries, working with UN agencies such as UNDP, UN-

HCR, UNICEF and WHO. Our unique experience championing those who fall foul of unethical media practices, and devising guidelines and training materials to assist journalists to win back public trust, makes us something of a pioneer in the field of media ethics which has now become a 'hot' topic.

However our effectiveness has always been hampered by lack of staff and resources, especially as we have sought to remain entirely independent of vested interests. We began as volunteers working from home. In 1994 we opened an office on an inner-city business park in Bristol; at one time we had five full-time staff and a sub-office in London. In 2006 we moved into premises rented from the University of the West of England, but now we have been reduced to two part-timers who must supplement their incomes from freelance work.

Origins

PressWise was founded at a gathering of 70 individuals, families and groups in the Grand Committee Room of the Palace of Westminster in March 1993. The meeting had been called after the Commons voted down MP Clive Soley's Private Member's Bill, which sought to establish an Independent Press Authority to defend press freedom and adjudicate on complaints.

Not one of the national print and broadcast journalists invited turned up to hear 'victims of media abuse' describe the impact of unethical media coverage on their lives. Instead those present formed a steering group to create an organisation that would:

- assist those who suffer harm as a result of unethical media practices;
- promote ethics within the media;
- increase public awareness about the role of journalism and media regulation.

For almost two years PressWise operated as an unincorporated organisation, providing free advice on an entirely voluntary basis to people with complaints about the media. It registered as PressWise Ltd, a not-for-profit company, in June 1995, with a Management Committee comprised of four 'survivors' of media abuse and a journalist who is the current Director.

Charitable status was granted in June 1999 after lengthy negotiations with the Charity Commission which felt that our activities were 'political' since they referred to assumed but uncoded 'public rights' in relation to the media. A new Board of Trustees was recruited and took responsibility for running The PressWise Trust. In 2004 the Trustees decided to change the name to the MediaWise Trust (MediaWise), a process that was completed in 2005.

Aims and Objectives

The Trust is committed to enhancing the role of journalism by encouraging dialogue about best practice, and developing strategies to improve the vital, if unwritten, contract of trust between media professionals and the public which give the media such an important role in an open society. The Trust exists to:

- promote ethical standards of conduct among media professionals, in the UK and elsewhere;
- provide advice and assistance to members of the UK public affected by inaccurate, intrusive or sensational coverage or otherwise unethical conduct by media professionals;
- devise and deliver training for the public and media professionals on aspects of media policy, practice, law and regulation;
- promote media literacy;
- undertake research into media conduct as it affects the public.

Our “credo” is: ‘Press freedom is a responsibility exercised by journalists on behalf of the public’.

Activities

a. Advice and Support Work

The majority of those who contact the Trust for advice are ordinary members of the public who have suddenly found themselves in the focus of media attention. The majority are women, and many are from already disadvantaged social groups – members of ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities or mental health problems, prisoners families, refugees and asylum-seekers, ‘gypsies’ and travellers, etc.

We also provide advice to voluntary sector organisations, especially those dealing with marginalized social groups. Very occasionally we receive enquiries from small businesses on the receiving end of media attention. The volume of complaints varies enormously, rising noticeably after media appearances or when advice has been given to an NGO in contact with particularly vulnerable groups.

We provide a 24-hour helpline based at the home of the Director, which facilitates those who have ‘late notice’ that a problematic story/programme might be appearing, especially at weekends.

There may be as many as two or three enquiries a day or as few as two or three a week. Most can be dealt with over the phone, although enquirers are sent a pack and asked to send in cuttings and their evidence of errors. At least 50 percent of complaints enquiries go no further than one or two (long) phone calls. Some may then appreciate that they have no grounds for complaint; oth-

ers may then deal with their complaints themselves.

When we do take up the complaints, a phone call to an editor may result in swift resolution – our preferred route. More complex cases may take a great deal of time and occasionally we have sought the assistance of specialist media lawyers.

We have extensive files of ‘case studies’ which are anonymised for use in training materials, to inform policy statements and for publications and submissions to government, etc.

b. Research

The Trust is not an academic institution. Our approach is journalistic. We investigate aspects of media law, policy and practice as they affect the relationship between media professionals and the public they serve, and occasionally collaborate with academic bodies.

Drawing upon the issues raised by complainants, PressWise conducts investigations designed to improved media coverage of problematic topics – from reporting about the sexual abuse of children to coverage of suicide and health matters, from the representation of ethnic minorities, asylum-seekers and the families of prisoners to the impact of cheque-book journalism and the ‘death knock’.

Such research has an ultimately practical rather than polemical purpose – to offer advice and information to media professionals and the public about how coverage can be improved – through the development of guidelines and training materials, which are made as widely available as possible, particularly via the world wide web.

We deal with a steady stream of inquiries from media students, postgraduate researchers, and academics from the UK and internationally, including referrals from regulators and the NUJ. In part our website has developed to meet the range of enquiries we receive.

c. Training

The Trust has a special role to play in ‘use-of-the-media training’ for non-governmental organisations (the voluntary or ‘Third’ sector). Our advocacy-based approach has the added advantage of providing back-up when things go wrong, since that is our core function. Training, for charities, community groups and trades unions, has generated a modest revenue that helps to sustain our ‘core business’. Competition and shrinking budgets have reduced this aspect of our activities, since we lack the resources to sustain the level of marketing required to convert such training into a substantial revenue stream. Recent UK media training contracts have included work with Travellers groups, prisoners’ families, young refugees, and graphologists.

In the last ten years the Trust has been engaged in ‘ethics’ training work among journalists often linked to research and other consultancy work from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and UN agencies. This has greatly

enhanced our reputation, and resulted in some important initiatives around the reporting of children, diversity, health issues, human rights and suicide. It has also provided the Trust with much needed revenue, although MediaWise lacks the economies of scale that characterise the better known international media development agencies.

- We worked with the IFJ to develop *Guidelines for Reporting Children* now in use worldwide.
- We produced *The Media and Children's Rights* for UNICEF, a handbook for media professionals now into its second edition and translated into more than 12 languages.
- We devised the initial content for the *Media Activities and Good Ideas by, with and for Children* website; www.unicef.org/magic
- We devised the initial content for *Health Correspondents* that were adopted by the WHO European Health Communications Network.
- Our *Guidelines on Reporting Suicide* were endorsed by the IFJ and are in use internationally.
- We produced guidance on *Reporting Refugees and Asylum-seekers* for the NUJ Ethics Council of the National Union of Journalists (UK & Ireland).

Ethics is generally considered a low priority in vocational curricula and mid-career training for working journalists, and degrees in journalism are a relatively new development in the UK. The Trust provides speakers for college-based vocational training about the damaging consequences of unethical journalism, and devises specialist curriculum materials.

d. Consultancies

Trust staff provide free, over-the-phone advice to voluntary sector groups on media policies and strategies. Most community based groups cannot afford press officers or the type of consultancy from which they would benefit most; and few voluntary sector groups realise what information and skills they lack until in a crisis they are suddenly faced with (hostile) media attention. Very often our role is to provide instant 'media crisis management' advice.

In recent years we have been commissioned to conduct more formal consultancies with the British Council, World Health Communication Associates, UK public health bodies, international development and UN agencies.

We have avoided commercial consultancies with the private sector on the assumption that such work is likely to be viewed as 'preventative PR' and unlikely to enhance our reputation for impartiality within the mainstream media.

Recent consultancies have included a study about the efficacy of guidelines for journalists on reporting suicide; analysis of the impact of Press Complaints Commission guidance for editors on reporting of refugee and asylum issues; curriculum development for journalism training in the Caucasus; and research on Changing News Flows in UK Journalism for a forthcoming book.

e. Website

The relaunch of PressWise as a charity included the creation of an immense website (www.presswise.org.uk) detailing our activities and including our publications. It contained what was at the time the largest collection of journalism codes from around the world, and remains the only topic-indexed collection. Very soon over 1,000 people a month – mostly journalism students and academics, who are able to download our training materials and briefing documents, were accessing the site.

A comprehensive review of website content and design was undertaken in 2002, and the new website www.mediawise.org.uk went online in 2004. An electronic bulletin commenting about topical media issues is distributed to media correspondents and journalism colleges on regular basis. Latest figures for the period August 2006 to February 2007 show that over 200,000 pages were accessed, averaging around 30,000 pages per month – more than 1,000 ‘hits’ per working day.

The most popular pages during this period were:

Codes of conduct	4,309
Suicide and media	3,897
Reporting asylum guidelines	3,108
Journalism schools	2,677
About us	2,222
Children	2,000
Press freedom	1,791

Top downloads during the period:

Covering Suicide Worldwide	4,643
Media & Children's Rights	3,222
Exiled Journalists in Europe	1,407
Media and Suicide – Spanish	1,126
Chequebook journalism	997

f. Publications

From the outset the Trust has provided briefings for Members of Parliament and other interested parties on legislative and regulatory issues. We have also published booklets around themes identified by our core work and projects.

MediaWise publications and co-publications include:

- *Exiled Journalists in Europe* (2006)
- *Working with the Media: Health communications* (2005)
- *The RAM Report: campaigning for fair and accurate coverage of refugees and asylum-seekers* (2005)
- *The Media and Children's Rights: Handbook for Media Professionals* (1999/2005)

- *Journalism and Public Trust* (2004)
- *Satisfaction Guaranteed? Press complaints systems under scrutiny* (2004)
- *Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Media: conference documents* (2001)
- *Reporting Suicide Worldwide: Media Responsibilities* (2001)
- *Access to the Information Society* (1998)
- *Ethnic Minorities and the Media* (1998)
- *Information and Child Rights: The Challenge of Media Engagement* (1997)
- *Children in the Picture: Media Ethics and the Reporting of Child Labour* (1997)
- *Child Exploitation and the Media: Forum report and recommendations* (1997)
- Video: *On the Receiving End: Exiled journalists speak out* (2005)

Trust staff have also contributed to:

- *Putting Children in the Right* (IFJ, 2001)
- *Ethics and Media Culture: Practices and Representations* (Focal Press, 2000)
- *Children and Media: Image, Education, Participation* (UNESCO, 1999)
- *Children and Media Violence* (UNESCO, 1998)
- *The News Pack* (English & Media Centre) (1995)

g. Seminars and Conferences

The Trust tries to create opportunities for dialogue between the public and the media on problematic areas of coverage. We have always sought to work in partnership with related professional and voluntary sector groups, and to seek positive outcomes rather than encouraging negative criticism. These have included a series of discreet consultations between local editors and senior journalists with, for example, refugees and their support organisations, and mental health service users, in an attempt to encourage more balanced and accurate coverage and an understanding of the constraints under which the media operate.

Significant national events have included:

- *Journeys into Journalism* (London, 2006)
Evening events looking at the increasing use of leaks, public relations and forms of cheque-book journalism in shaping the news agenda, and the human consequences of unethical behaviour by so-called ‘investigative’ journalists.
- *Children’s Rights vs. Press Freedom: Who wins?* (Bath, 2005)
Bringing together young people, care workers and media executives to discuss issues raised by analysis of youth coverage and stereotyping.

- *Journalism and Public Trust* (London, 2004)
Held jointly with the National Union of Journalists to discuss the repercussions of the Hutton Report following the suicide of Dr David Kelly and other media issues, and fed into the unions campaign for a 'conscience clause' and demands for greater investment in journalism.
- *A Sense of Place: Media Day* (Swansea, 2003)
A day of deliberation about media coverage of refugee and asylum issues in the UK and elsewhere, as part of an international event hosted by the British Council.
- *Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Media Forum* (London (2001)
An opportunity for media executives and politicians to meet with refugee groups, hear asylum-seekers' stories and discuss media coverage; this generated some positive coverage and the eventual formation of the Exiled Journalists' Network.
- *Info-City 98: Access to the Information Society* (Bristol, 1998)
An EU sponsored exhibition and conference to consider the social and democratic implications of new communications technology, especially as it relates to minority communities, people with disabilities and the elderly.)
- *Ethnic Minorities and the Media* (London, 1997)
An opportunity for ethnic minority community groups to meet with media executives and regulators to discuss issues of representation and employment.
- *Child Exploitation and the Media Forum* (London, 1997)
A public investigation headed by the Chair of the Bar Family Law Association, into coverage of child abuse which resulted in recommendations for training for all the professions involved.

Projects

MediaWise has also organised a series of long-term projects combining research, media literacy, campaigning, training and the production of information materials.

Children and the Media (since 1997)

This has included

- research and training work with the IFJ on reporting children, reporting child labour, and reporting the commercial sexual exploitation of children;
- assisting NGOs and journalists in 12 countries to develop new approaches to coverage of children's issues (Representing Lost Childhood, funded by

the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund) – resulting in creation of a street children’s radio station in Delhi and an agreement by local radio network in Peru to broadcast programme by and for children;

- developing training materials for journalists about coverage of children and violence in 5 European countries (funded by the EU Daphne programme);
- devising and delivering training for journalists in over 20 countries working mainly with UNICEF.

Refugees Asylum-seekers and the Media (since 1999)

Organised in response in an upsurge of hostile and inaccurate coverage in the UK press, this included;

- media training for refugee community organisations and support groups;
- the development of a national network of activist groups willing to challenge the media and promote best practice;
- creation of an informational website <www.ramproject.org.uk> linked to a monthly e-bulletin compiled by exiled journalists and sent to 2,000 contacts across Europe;
- research and media monitoring;
- production of guidelines for journalists;
- the development of training and work experience opportunities for exiled journalists;
- the formation of the Exiled Journalists’ Network with its own website www.exiledjournalists.net and electronic bulletin *EJNews*.

Suicide and the Media (since 2000)

This also grew out of criticism of media coverage of suicidal behaviour in the UK and was linked to international academic studies of the impact of media coverage of suicidal behaviour. It has included:

- international research into training and guidelines for journalists;
- development of training materials and guidelines for media professionals;
- organising ongoing sister projects in Sri Lanka and Taiwan where suicide rates are high and media coverage has been sensational;
- analysing the efficacy of guidelines and the need for pre-entry and mid-career training for media professionals.

Journalism and Public Trust (since 2003)

A long-term preoccupation of the Trust, this continuing project has included:

- presentation of papers at conferences and in learned journals, and distribution of materials to journalism students.
- research collaborations with the academy and a leading investigative journalist into the structural causes of changes in journalism practice.

Conclusions

It is always difficult to measure the precise impact of the type of work undertaken by MediaWise. We know that we have helped many hundreds of people over the years, and occasionally assisted them to obtain financial redress.

We like to think that the short course training we have provided for journalists in about 40 countries have proved helpful to their professional development. Certainly our website fulfils a need, we are regularly invited to take part in public debates, make submissions to government inquiries, and contribute to conferences internationally – so it would seem that our experience and expertise is valued.

Our efforts to strengthen the Editor's Code of Practice and encourage reform of Press Complaints Commission procedures have met with some success – notably around the coverage of children, suicide and refugees, the creation of a hotline for complainants, regular public consultation on the Code of Practice, and a system of internal audit – though regrettably this does not include the opportunity to appeal decisions with which either party to a complaint might be dissatisfied. We have also been able to contribute useful suggestions in the development of the codes and procedures of the broadcast regulator, Ofcom, for handling complaints about privacy and fairness.

The new role of the largely unregulated Internet as a primary source of news AND misinformation has also highlighted a whole range of complex communication and ethical issues which still need to be addressed. The tension caused by mass migration and the so-called 'war on terror' has also given rise to new problems both for media professionals and those who feel demonised as a result.

There is rich seam of excellent journalism in Britain's newspapers and magazines, but there is also a fault-line of tawdry and slipshod journalism driven by competitive pressures. As newsrooms and investment in 'frontline' journalism shrinks, journalists become more desk-based and reliant on tips and material originated by the myriad forms of public relations that seek to influence public tastes and opinions. In broadcasting the advent of 'reality television' has opened up many new problem issues not least the definition of 'informed consent' – something in which MediaWise has taken a particular interest.

Multi-skilling and increasingly concentrated cross media ownership have added new stresses under which journalism is produced. The competitive approach to news-gathering has become institutionalised in the 'global free market', but making money out of others' misfortune cannot be justified by

calling in aid 'press freedom'. It is an abuse of press freedom to regard it as 'a licence to print money'.

MediaWise regards press freedom as a responsibility exercised by journalists on behalf of the public – to research and disseminate information of direct relevance to people's lives that might otherwise remain hidden from the public domain and to provide citizens with information that they can rely upon in making decisions about their personal and political decisions. In short there is a continuing need for a 'watchdog to watch the watchdogs', and to promote the notion of the media's accountability to its publics. However, as we have learned the hard way, funding 'media ethics' is as difficult as the Sisyphean task of promoting them.

Ten Things I Want Community Leaders to Know About Journalism

*A Former (external) Ombudsman at
The Spokesman-Review Teaches Media Literacy*

Gordon S. Jackson

My community (Spokane, in Washington, USA) has a program called Leadership Spokane, in which about 30 leaders from business, government, education, and other non-profit organizations spend a year learning about our city and how it works. Over the past decade, I have spoken to each year's group about the role that journalism plays in our community.

Here are the ten ideas I share with each year's group of leaders. I do so from the perspective of someone who has worked as journalist (in South Africa, where I grew up) but also as one who understands the craft from an academic perspective.

1. The News Media Play a Crucial Role in the Democratic Process

This is the most important thing I want them to know. More than anything else, I emphasize, they need information about the community they serve – and ultimately they can get that information only from the media. I acknowledge that the media have faults, and significant ones. But whatever the media's weaknesses, without journalists telling us what's going on in our world, we'd be poorly equipped as participants in a democratic society.

I liken the role of the media to mapmakers, who help us understand our landscape and identify hazards and opportunities. Sometimes the maps have gaps or are misleading or even seriously in error. But in an open society, there's always the potential for those initial maps to be refined and made more accurate. If the media did not provide us with these maps we'd struggle to find our way in society. It is crucial if our democratic system is to work well that the media be free to provide us the best maps possible.

2. The News Media have a Credibility Gap

These leaders agree with this first point. But they're bursting to say, "Yes, but..." So it's important to acknowledge the weaknesses and flaws that mark contemporary US journalism. The main criticisms that American level against

their news media are that (1) they are inaccurate, (2) they are biased, and (3) they are too readily given to sensationalism.

I ask if they have had encountered an error in media coverage of a story with which they've been involved. Always the great majority of hands go up. For the reality is, the media often get things wrong.

Regarding bias, here too there's some truth. But I caution them that perceived bias is a matter of perspective. Many see the media (especially the national US media) as having a liberal bias. Others, on the political left, see it as exactly the opposite: they regard the press as a conservative, pro-establishment voice. So while bias may be present in the media, it not as easy to identify as they might think.

And on sensationalism? One need mention only "O. J. Simpson" or "Monica Lewinsky" for them to nod their agreement. Here too U.S. media have a serious problem in how they are perceived.

3. Journalists Can Usually Provide Only a Headline Service

I ask them to think of some issue or problem with which their company or organization has been dealing for the past six months or so. Then, I invite them to imagine telling that story in 500 words – or in 90 seconds for TV. Light bulbs begin to go on as many of the listeners realize that journalists are often extremely limited in how little of the story they can tell.

4. Journalists Work under Tight Time and Space Constraints

Then I remind them that I'd like to have the story they've identified to be written for the paper by this 5 afternoon or for the 6 o'clock TV news. For people who are often accustomed to working on reports and projects that last months, they get the point. They begin to grasp that journalists' ability to give only a headline service comes from those tight limits on time and space.

5. Like Most of Us, Journalists Work within Systems

With few exceptions, print and broadcast organizations in the US need to make a profit to stay in business. They operate within a competitive system and this puts intense pressure on broadcast media in particular to attract viewers and listeners. US newspapers typically have less direct competition. I cite the paradoxical observation by Fred Friendly, a legendary figure in US broadcasting, who said that "Because television can make so much money doing its worst, it often cannot afford to do its best."

Then I address the frequently voiced complaint that the media are obsessed with bad news. People ask, "Why can't they give us more positive news?" I remind them of how they define news in their own lives. As with the media, we see news as a break from the norm. Often that happens to be bad news. For example, I note that we don't phone relatives in a distant city at 3 a.m. to

tell them that once again nobody in the family died today. Nor does our city paper write stories about 100 planes landing safely again at our local airport yesterday. The very system or definition of news, then, is what shapes a great deal of media content.

6. Journalists are not Licensed

In this country (USA), journalists need no formal qualifications to play a role of potentially great influence. I tell them that's exactly the way it should be in a society that is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. If someone is going to license journalists, I ask, whom do they trust to do that? Ultimately, it would have to be the government. I've never heard one of these leaders, despite their frustrations with the media, say they'd welcome government regulation of the press.

7. Journalists Make their Biggest Mistakes Public

It's been said that lawyers send their mistakes to jail, doctors bury theirs, but journalists put theirs in headlines for the whole community to read. That's certainly true of the "sins of commission," the mistakes made in covering or presenting a story. That saying doesn't apply to those stories which never get covered, but should have been. Still, the point is that when *The New York Times* catches a Jayson Blair engaged in a pattern of dishonest journalism, the whole world gets to know about it – and all of journalism is hurt as a result.

To put things in perspective, I ask each group if any of them has ever made a mistake in their professional lives. Of course, every one of them has. Then I ask, how many of the rest of us learned about it? Maybe their boss or a few co-workers learned what they did wrong. But their mistakes almost certainly didn't make it on the 6 o'clock news.

8. Journalists' Agendas and Yours Probably Differ, and that's OK

I remind them that journalists (or at least the good ones) are interested in a story and finding out what happened. The journalist's role is not to be an advocate for their business, government agency or organization. That's *their* role. Often these roles conflict; that's to be expected. But I also caution them never to try to deceive or mislead the media, a step that will almost certainly come back to bite them.

9. Be Clear on What You're Entitled from Good Journalism

I share with them the code of ethics of the Society of Professional journalists [www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp]. This document shows what good journalists aspire to achieve in their work. I tell my audience that if they believe they've been poorly treated or that a journalist got something wrong, they should look

to the specific area of the code where they think the news organization fell short. It's not good enough to say, "The paper did this story that made us look bad." The question should be, "Did this story fall short of the standards that good journalists seek to follow?" Of course, it's difficult to distance yourself from a story that you think has portrayed you badly. That's where the code of ethics is helpful as an objective, written set of guidelines to guide any follow-up with the media.

10. Good Journalism Needs Your Support

Just as we should insist in our communities on good government, good health care, or good education, so we should insist on high quality journalism. When the media fall short of that standard, I urge these community leaders to follow up with the news organization concerned. Register concern about errors or bias if necessary, I tell them. Perhaps these leaders will learn why a story was handled the way it was and be satisfied with the explanation. But if the news organization is at fault in some way, it is vitally important to hold a news organization accountable for any deviations from good journalism.

Albert Camus once said that "A free press can of course be good or bad, but, most certainly, without freedom it will never be anything but bad." I ask these leaders to see themselves as partners with journalists in bringing to our communities the best journalism possible. By holding their media accountable to the standards of good journalism, these leaders and journalists can together establish news media that are "both free and good."

And even these sometimes skeptical listeners agree that this is a difficult combination to beat.

EXAMPLES OF
COOPERATIVE MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

Chink in a Stone Wall

*A Presentation of a Readers' Ombudsman at Bergens Tidende, Norway**

Terje Angelshaug

When *Bergens Tidende* (BT)¹ created the position of Readers' Ombudsman in Spring 2004, it was an attempt on the part of BT's management to bridge a gap between the paper's editors and journalists and their readers. Despite widespread access to Internet and the opportunities for interaction and unlimited publishing that the web afforded, many on BT's staff were living in a bygone era, the days when the press still controlled access to publicity.

Surveys among the readership had revealed that 15-20 per cent of BT's readers characterized the paper as arrogant. Perhaps one might say that 15-20 per cent is only a fraction, but I venture the hypothesis that those 15-20 per cent are individuals who at one time or another have tried to express themselves via the paper or have otherwise been in direct contact with it.

Their initiatives have been met with silence or with an attitude that they have perceived to be condescending, patronizing. In an era when the press has lost its control over information flows and people have endless opportunities to express themselves on the web, meeting the public 'from on high' just won't do. On the contrary, it is imperative that the press start filling empty phrases like "We work for our readers" with some convincing meaning.

This, then, is the background to the institution of the Readers' Ombudsman at BT. Since Spring 2004 I have communicated readers' various reactions to the editorial staff, instigated collegial discussions based on readers' critiques, and talked with innumerable readers about their relationship with the paper. In the following I shall try to summarize what I have learned about journalists and readers, and offer some ideas about the future development of BT's relations with the readership.

Newspapers are still perceived to be closed, unwelcoming organizations. Very few people outside the editorial staff have any insight into the values that underlie newspapers' handling of important issues. Editors seldom make themselves available to the public to field critical comments or explain the journalism they produce. Critical letters-to-the-Editor are seldom answered, and when they are, the response is generally dismissive, devoid of all admission of guilt. This inability to practice self-critique is rooted, I believe, in the

fact that many editors and journalists see themselves as the sole protectors of freedom of expression and, indeed, of Truth. They tend to see their critics as opposing these values.

Editors and newsdesks would appear to believe that any admission of error diminishes their credibility in the eyes of their readers. The fact is that trust in the press is indeed wearing thin – but editors' and journalists' inability to enter into meaningful dialogue with their critics most likely contributes.

Unspoken Power

When the press does break its silence, it is generally the Editor-in-Chief who sallies forth to defend what the organization has done. What the editors have to say on these occasions is seldom of any greater value. They generally show little interest in the criticism raised against them, but are instead preoccupied with their own position in the organization they lead. Understandably enough, I should add. An Editor-in-Chief needs to have the trust of the staff in order to be able to do his or her job. One way to build and secure this trust is to defend journalists' work – even when it is not worthy of being defended.

The highly predictable statements Editors-in-Chief put forward in defense of underlings' misdoings is itself a logical consequence of journalists' inability to take criticism. In the course of my work as Ombudsman I have relayed a good amount of criticism from readers, and I have written more than a hundred articles, most of which are based on critical comments from readers. Hardly ever have I heard the journalist in question say: "I have to admit it, what I did was wrong. The reader has a point."

In the vast majority of cases the readers' viewpoints are rejected out of hand: "He or she doesn't understand, ... is a crank, a fanatic, ... is overly sensitive, ... has a vested interest". Etc., etc.

As Readers' Ombudsman it is my duty to try to change these attitudes. And in positive moments I see certain signs that this know-it-all attitude may be beginning to change at *BT*. I cannot claim more than a small part, if any, of the credit for it. Thanks to the growth of web-based communication even the most conceited newsperson must have realized by now that readers possess considerable resources; they are not to be underestimated.

My own experiences of contacts with readers have been wholly positive. When I took this job, my journalist colleagues warned me that I would be spending my days fending off cranks of all descriptions. Of the several hundred readers with whom I have come in contact, there has been only one I would call a crank. Just one. All the rest have proven to be both knowledgeable *and* to some degree impassioned about their particular issue. The issues are many and varied, ranging from delivery of the paper, via the amount of advertising it carries, to *BT*'s journalistic profile and its role as the leading paper in the region, Vestlandet.

Readers' Advice to BT

Most of those who contact the paper are middle-aged, 50 and older. In other words, they represent the paper's 'core readership'. Most of them have developed strong bonds to the paper; *BT* is their prime source of information, and they have definite expectations regarding the paper's reliability and objectivity.

Those who turn to me, their Ombudsman, are not people in positions of power, seeking to make the paper dance to their tune. People like that go straight to the Editor-in-Chief or to individual editors and journalists. No, 'my' readers are well-oriented individuals who want to do their part to further the cause of serious, decent journalism. Many are disillusioned and disappointed with the media; a good number have given up reading the Oslo tabloids and fervently hope that *BT* will continue to be a reliable source of information and knowledge. Toward this end they contact the paper about tendencies and content that worry them: sensational headlines; excessive use of photos; stigmatization of minorities and individuals; odd priorities, where important issues may be covered in a few sentences, while a so-called 'human interest' story ("Man bites dog") fills a two-page spread; column-meters of soccer at the expense of the Arts; inordinate attention to crime at the expense of news from the fields of science and technology.

In short, I think it fair to say that these readers react whenever *BT* uses a journalistic slant or strategy that reminds them of the Oslo tabloids or the local tabloid, *Bergensavisen*. Provided that *BT* listens to this group of readers the paper (the paper edition) will keep its many loyal core readers for years to come.

But what about young people? Young people have a quite different relationship with *BT*. Whereas readers at mid-life and upwards have grown up with the paper as *the* authoritative interpreter of events and phenomena, today's young people have access to many versions of reality. They are far less loyal and tend to 'shop around' for the news sources that suit their fancy. Many newspapers have very conventional ideas about what attracts young readers and double up their coverage of sports, music and fashion/design. Whether the strategy succeeds is an open question. As I see it, the web's potential for interactivity has to be used much more offensively than is the case today in order to attract young people to *BT*'s web pages.

Those who have an established relationship with the paper are accustomed to, and more or less accept, a daily press that stands between the power elite and the general public. With a well-developed sense of its own infallibility, the press for its part has taken on the role of 'High Priest', interpreting reality for its readers. If *BT* is to retain its dominant position, the paper will have to engage young people of today in a dialogue and interaction in an entirely different manner than was needed to attract their parents.

Ombudsman the First Step

Newspapers have long been the dominant arena of public debate. Readers have been given the opportunity to express their views, but the papers have seldom paid notice in any active sense to what “ordinary people” have to say. On the whole, there has been little communication between the paper and its readers. *BT* has presented its view of society and current events, while setting aside some space for readers’ views and comment. *BT*’s editors and journalists, however, read very little of what readers send in. Their letters have little, if any influence on the paper.

Today, the relative power of newspapers vis-à-vis ordinary people has diminished. Readers have any number of channels in which to express their views, quite independent of the press. Naturally, the media are still influential, but if they wish to keep their positions of power, they will have to provide channels that are of use to members of ‘the web generation’. In this regard *BT* has a long way to go.

The creation of the position of Reader’s Ombudsman was a first step toward opening a chink in the wall surrounding the paper’s editorial staff. Next steps have yet to be taken.

Unfortunately, *BT*’s forum for debate on the web does not come out very well when compared to other papers’ websites; the opportunities that blogs represent have hardly been explored. Journalists at *BT* have essentially the same attitude to readers’ views as ever. They are continuing in the same old wheel-tracks, using the same old news sources, with a heavy dependence on influential figures in the Establishment. This has to change. Internet provides the paper with fantastic opportunities to communicate with its readers, and that communication has to be two-way.

It seems reasonable to start with the paper’s op-ed articles. Like many other papers, *BT* uses the pronoun “we” when it expresses the paper’s considered opinion. These opinions have remarkable influence in many different quarters. If for no other reason, the articles should be put out on the web for discussion. It would provide a natural forum for a dialogue with readers.

As I noted earlier, Editors-in-Chief are no longer public figures; they no longer take part in the current of public debate. This, too, needs to change. They must make themselves visible and available to the general public. They are, after all, responsible for the content of the paper and its various channels. Blogging would give the editor an opportunity for easy, continuous dialogue with the paper’s readers. *BT* can, to a far greater extent than at present, be a vehicle for direct contact between influential decision-makers and the people their decisions affect, thereby filling a vital role as vehicle or conduit, without imposing its own perspectives and prejudices on the communication. The record shows that debate fora where members of the paper’s staff take part, work best. Moreover, debates on the website afford a unique opportunity to gather information about the consequences of various events, decisions, etc.,

inasmuch as those who take part in discussions on the web are generally people who have first-hand, often acute, experience of those consequences.

As a remedy for their tendency to serve as a megaphone for the Establishment, the media might invite people from the social periphery to start blogs on their websites. That would give those whose voices are little-heard in society at large an opportunity to discuss social issues on their own terms. The result would be an expansion of the public arena and a vast enrichment of public discourse.

An increasing number of newspapers have developed new channels through which readers can express their views. For *BT*, too, the web represents an exciting opportunity. Readers' accounts of "the lives they live" can serve as a corrective to *BT*'s present, highly edited version of reality.

BT still has a strong position among the people of its region. It will be able to defend that position provided that its readers feel that the paper takes them seriously as partners in an ongoing dialogue and as contributors – once *BT* has created and developed new channels of communication with them.

Note

1. *Bergens Tidende* is a profitable regional newspaper on the Norwegian west coast. With a circulation of 86 000 copies (2006), it is the largest Norwegian morning paper outside Oslo. *Bergens Tidende* was the first – and is still the only – Norwegian paper to employ a Readers' Ombudsman.

*This article previously appeared in the web magazine, www.voxpublica.no

When Readers Wonder

A Column in Bergens Tidende with a Comment

Terje Angelshaug

This is Readers' Ombudman Terje Angelshaug's column in Bergens Tidende on the Steiner School. An example of his style and subject for a column – and the reaction to it.

Recently a number of readers have asked questions relating to how the paper gets to be what it is. For example, some have asked if *BT* might have secret ties and loyalties that influence how the paper selects and treats its news. Questions like these generally refer to specific issues where the reader feels the paper has been biased, or issues that the paper has totally neglected.

Let me give an example that aroused reactions of this sort:

A couple of years ago the family of a pupil sued the Steiner School [a Waldorf school] in Bergen. Their son had been the target of mobbing, had been harassed and excluded from the community of the school and his class. The plaintiffs, supported by affidavits from psychologists, etc., charged that the mistreatment the boy suffered at the school had seriously impacted on his ability to learn. The parents lost their case in the District Court. Although the court found that the school had failed in their teaching of the boy and, indeed, had set aside laws and statutes, it concluded that their intentions were good.

After the verdict, Dr. Thomas Nordahl, one of the professionals who had supported the family's complaint, submitted a commentary for publication in *BT*, where he discussed some troubling implications of the finding: "As for the rights of children at school, the Court is saying that 'good intentions' are sufficient excuse for a school to violate law and statute", he wrote.

It took some time before the article appeared in print. Only after Nordahl had removed all reference to the Steiner School was *BT* willing to accept it. The paper argued that it was too polemical in tone to appear as a 'comment'. Later, *Dagbladet*, [a tabloid in Oslo], carried an uncensored version of the article. The court finding in Bergen attracted attention nationwide. Nordahl's article was also published on the website of the Parents' Committee for Primary Education. The organization, which represents parents throughout the country, fears that the court finding may leave pupils unprotected by the law. The Children's

Ombudsman has also become involved and has requested copies of all the documents in the case.

BT received a tip about the suit against the Steiner School early on, but chose not to write about it.

After the court handed down its decision, the plaintiffs turned to the newspaper they considered 'theirs'; they were told that *BT* would look into the matter. It didn't.

The father of another pupil at the school contacted the paper to say that the parents who filed the suit were not the only ones to have got a negative impression of the school. He, too, was told that the paper would look into the matter. It didn't.

It was [Oslo-based] *Dagbladet* that in the summer of 2006 publicized the many points of criticism raised against the Steiner School's management and the way the school treated its pupils. The series started with an article by Kaj Skagen, novelist and poet and a resident of Bergen. *BT* had had access to Skagen's highly critical views of the school for more than six months before they turned up in *Dagbladet*, but the article he had sent to *BT* apparently went straight into the archives. Nor did the paper take part in discussions of the school, not even when the storm of debate in *Dagbladet* was raging through the summer – despite the affair being about a school in Bergen and despite the fact that the paper had received highly relevant material about the case.

Observant readers noticed, however, that one of *BT*'s staff writers took part in the debate in *Dagbladet*. He criticised the paper's 'campaign' against the school and referred to his own positive experience as a pupil there. The parents have appealed the case to Gulating Appellate Court and are awaiting the Court's findings.

BT carried reportage from two days in court, but has not touched the broader implications of the case. Nor has the paper deemed it worthwhile to give the case continuous coverage. The last day in court is November 10th [2006].

Interested readers ask me why an issue of such importance hasn't received better coverage in *BT*. They wonder if *BT* for some reason is trying to shield the Steiner School from criticism. One reader asks if *BT* would have remained this passive, if the same criticisms, to the same extent, had been raised against the school operated by Levende Ord [a controversial Lutheran sect].

Personally, I feel this example shows that people sometimes have good reason to wonder what it is that decides *BT*'s priorities.

Comments

Terje Angelsbaugs comments (2007) on his column on the Steiner School:

It set off a terrific row at the paper. The *BT*-journalist who had written in support of the Steiner School in another paper, as I mentioned in the column, was furious. (He knew what I was writing before the column went to press and did everything in his power to get me to 'kill' the article.)

Another journalist who had made a “journalistic evaluation” and come to the conclusion that *BT* would not cover this very interesting story, reacted to the criticism with hurt. Her desk editor wrote a piece in the paper that was scathingly critical of the Readers’ Ombudsman’s views and actions. I responded in rather few words.

The internal debate as to the justification for, and proper role of, the Readers’ Ombudsman was like a bed of hot coals for a while there. Staff members whose work I had criticized on previous occasions entered the fray with further attacks on my position. The Editor-in-Chief chose to respond by publishing my job description.

The column had no influence on *BT*’s coverage of the Steiner School. But once word of the row over the article reached the outside world, it most probably strengthened the credibility of the Readers’ Ombudsman in readers’ eyes. They could see that I had dared stand up to the top management. I also have the impression that the staff has begun to accept the fact that they have a Readers’ Ombudsman, whose job it is to criticize them.

Viewed in this light, the Steiner School affair has been something of a touchstone – I know how far I can go in relation to my paper, within the bounds of my mandate.

Obviously, I might have made life more difficult for *BT*, had I told our readers that the journalist who came to the school’s defense not only once attended the school, but members of his immediate family teach there, as well. I left that part out, out of deference to the journalist – and consideration of myself.

Watching the Watchdog-Watching Dog

*A Call for Active Press-Councils**

Claude-Jean Bertrand

I have been watching press-councils for 32 years. And I am happy to report that there are more and more press councils. It has taken at least half a century, for the concept to take off. True revolutions are slow. Now it seems that the PC is no longer perceived as a threat to press freedom, but rather as a weapon to protect it.

Yet, I feel rather depressed. Contempt for and hostility towards PCs are still intense in many parts – and, I am sorry to say: I think they are partly justified.

While a PC is, potentially, the most useful media accountability system and the greatest weapon in the fight for quality news media, the record of PCs is not impressive. They have rarely acquired much influence. For instance, do newspapers serve the public better in Sweden (which has had a PC for almost a century) than in Spain (which has more recently started one)?

A few years ago, I asked the councils themselves what their greatest achievement was. Their replies were dismal; no council felt it had clearly contributed to the improvement of media.

The very few books and articles devoted to PCs normally shovel criticism upon them:

- A common criticism, in France but even more in the US, is that it is a plot by government to restrict the freedom of the press. A PC, they say, will fast turn into a tribunal. Yet that never happened.
- The council is a PR operation by media owners
 - to persuade Parliament not to pass restrictive laws and
 - to persuade the citizens that they care about delivering good public service. That's what you hear in the UK, for instance.
- Everywhere, critics note that the public is not aware of the PC's existence, even after many years of operation or,
 - if they know it exists, they do not know what it's for and,
 - if they do know, they don't believe it can improve the media...
- ... largely because the council has "no teeth", lacks the power to punish. So it seems useless.

- The good media don't need it and
- the bad ones pay no attention to it.

Better informed observers consider that the typical PC rarely has enough money to assume its functions well. That was the verdict of two Royal Commissions on the late British Press Council. And partly because of that lack of funds, but mainly as a matter of policy, the PC does not handle the most serious cases, simply because complaints are not made about them and the PC does not monitor the media.

A fundamental question needs to be asked at this point: is a press council nothing but a complaints processing bureau or should it be more? A complaints processing agency endeavours to settle differences between a few individual citizens and some newspaper or broadcast station. If it can't, it debates whether the complaint was justified and publishes its opinion. Most present-day PCs actually are little more than complaints commissions.

That kind of council is set up by the industry and/or by the profession to avoid costly law suits and to avoid the establishment by law of some supervisory agency. Very few PCs were created voluntarily: legislators first had to make threatening noises about regulating the media by law, usually under pressure from an outraged public.

Such PCs usually succeed in those two limited missions but they are ignored or fiercely criticized and the media are not much improved by them.

The True Press Council

Now what about the true Press Council? As I see it, (but not just me, also such authorities as the three British Royal Commissions on the Press, the Hutchins Commission and the 20th Century Fund in the US), a true press council takes advantage of the fact that it brings together and represents the people who own the power to inform, those who possess the talent to inform and those who have the right to be informed. Also that it is a permanent institution that is democratic, independent, flexible, multifunctional, harmless and that its sole purpose is to improve media service to the public. And so it can afford to do more than just settle complaints.

It will strive to improve media services by:

- Monitoring the press: after all, what the press does worst is what it does not do. And the ordinary citizen most often cannot spot omissions easily.
- Encouraging research on how the news media actually function, what influence they have, what citizens need from them etc.
- Helping to develop other media accountability systems.
- Putting pressure on government not to vote laws unfavourable to the media – or to pass laws favourable.

In other words, a press council could be a wonderful weapon for media improvement, but it isn't. Where will suggestions for improvement come from?

They are not likely to come from the public who knows little about the PC, and feels powerless. Criticism will rather come from publishers and journalists who hate being watched and evaluated and sometimes blamed for unethical behaviour. And from academics who expect too much and tend to be disappointed (1): they analyse all that is wrong with PCs but have no alternatives to advocate.

It would be better if evaluation came from the PC itself. It should get itself audited regularly and seek reform to improve its representativeness, its visibility, its effectiveness etc. Feedback could also come from other media accountability systems, like the appointment by a newspaper of an ombudsman. M*A*S never compete: they work in different ways towards the same goal. And each should keep an eye on what the others do.

However, the problem is not so much to watch PCs, there is not much they can do wrong. Their problem is NOT that they censor or scare the media and NOT that they yield to unjustified pressure. Their problem is what they don't do.

Conclusion

I wish to express a few suggestions, that go to the root of the problem:

1. All PCs should be mixed (as now most are).
2. PCs should cover all media (as 60% now do).
3. PCs should do much more to publicize their existence.
4. All PCs should initiate cases – hence they should either monitor the media or arrange for an observatory (in a university for instance) to do it. That would be costly.
5. Which is one more reason why all PCs should be well financed. Funds should come from many sources, to insure independence. From media companies (can be generous if scared), government agencies, foundations, non-media corporations, public and private organizations and unions.
6. That money should finance PC activities – other than processing complaints – like reporting on the news media scene, commissioning research and issuing public warnings on dangerous trends.
7. One of those «other activities» should be to help develop a loose network of accountability systems (starting with regional and local PCs) to supplement and support their work.
8. Lastly, PCs should cooperate more internationally to help each other, to promote the creation of new PCs (especially in emerging democracies) and to join forces in campaigning on important issues.

A PC cannot do its job alone; if alone, it cannot become a true instrument of media progress.

Note

1. See David Pritchard (ed.) (2000), *Holding Media Accountable: Citizens, Ethics and the Law*, Bloomington, Indiana UP.

* Slightly edited presentation at the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, October 2004.

“Constructive Criticism” vs Public Scrutiny

Attitudes to Media Accountability in and Outside Swedish News Media

Torbjörn von Krogh

The Editors-in-Chief of Sweden's largest daily newspapers prefer professional training of reporters and media research rather than public scrutiny as means to improve the quality of news media. To be taken seriously, criticism from outside the company should be knowledgeable and constructive. The editors hold the Swedish Code of Ethics in Journalism and the National Press Council in high regard; they are assigned great importance.

The press officers/communication directors of the principal national labor market organizations in Sweden, on the contrary, consider public scrutiny to be a more effective means to improve Swedish journalism than professional training. But, they say, it is no easy task to persuade journalists that they are in the wrong. These communicators have little faith in the effectiveness of codes of ethics or the National Press Council.

This chapter discusses media accountability as it is perceived in and outside Swedish media companies. The focus in this chapter rests on newspapers and communicators in four of Sweden's principal labor market organizations.¹ The findings presented here are the results of a survey undertaken in the winter of 2006/2007 among different sectors of “Media Sweden”.

People in executive positions in 18 of Sweden's 24 largest newspapers (circulations of 34-420 thousand copies) responded. All told, the responding papers account for 86 per cent of the 24 papers' combined circulation. They may be taken to be representative of the group.² Press officers/communication directors for all of the four principal labor market organizations responded.³ The organizations represent employers and three federations of unions: for blue-collar, white-collar and university-educated employees, respectively.

The Self-regulatory System

Over the course of the past century a national system for ensuring media accountability has emerged outside of the courts; a voluntary and self-regulatory system. It consists of a code of professional ethics, a National Press Council

and a National Press Ombudsman. Editors and press officers/communication directors differ as to how effective these institutions are. They are more highly regarded within the press than in the labor market organizations.

The Code of Professional Ethics

Publicistklubben (PK), an organization of editors, journalists and publishers throughout Sweden, drafted rudimentary ethical guidelines in the early 1900s. PK started as a discussion forum and interest organization for leading figures in the Swedish press. In the interval since the early 1970s, the guidelines have been formalized and adopted by Pressens Samarbetsnämnd, a group made up of the Union of Journalists, newspaper publishers association, magazine publishers association and PK. The Swedish public service broadcasters also abide by the code.

In their responses to the questionnaire Editors-in-Chief of daily newspapers accord the Code great or very great importance for their journalists' work. They say, for example, that the rules form "a basis for our ethical judgments" and provide "good guidance".

Press officers and communication directors in the labor market organizations are, for their part, not convinced that the Code exerts any greater influence over the practice of journalism: its effect is diffuse or limited. The rules per se may be well formulated and comprehensive, but the sanctions are weak and, what is more, they are not imposed on violations committed 'in the heat of the fray'.

The press officer for the university-educated employees' organization summarized his complaints with the system: "That the rules are not followed, that violations do not lead to sanctions, and that violators are seldom found guilty. What is more, a good share of the media not only ignore the rules, but have precisely the kind of thing the rules are to prevent as their 'business idea' – invasion of privacy, for instance."

The Press Ombudsman/The National Press Council

The institution of Press Ombudsman (PO) was created in 1969 in response to criticism of journalistic practices on the part of Social Democratic MPs. (The Social Democratic Party dominated Swedish politics at the time.) The PO responds to complaints from private citizens, but not organizations or firms. (The PO can, however, help the latter get their rebuttals published.) The PO may choose to dismiss a complaint, but in such cases the plaintiff may appeal the decision to the National Press Council. When the PO finds that some form of reprimand is in order, the case is referred to the Council for deliberation. The Council may either follow the PO's recommendation or 'acquit'.

The Press Council is chaired by an experienced judge. The members of the Council represent the same groupings as make up Pressens Samarbetsnämnd (publishers, journalists and PK) plus representatives of the general public. The

PO and the Press Council confine their reviews of print media performance to the content, i.e., text and images. They do not review and judge the methods journalists use to gather the material. Media and newsdesks that are found in error must pay an 'administrative fee'. The word 'fine' is conscientiously avoided. Fees are 10 000 SEK (roughly 1100 euro) for publications having circulations up to 10 000 copies, and 25 000 SEK (nearly 2800 euro) for larger circulations.

In their responses editors express strong approval of both the Ombudsman and the Council. Their findings are frequently discussed. "A compass," "knowing that somebody is watching us," and "keeps us from cutting corners," are some of the comments. "We believe in the system – although we may not always agree with the findings," as one editor puts it. Another writes: "It's like 'the bogeyman' when you're bringing up children. You can scare them with it."

The labor market organizations are not so sure that the PO and the Council have that much influence on media quality. They do have some influence on public opinion, however. As to their influence on the press, one press officer writes: "I can't help thinking that it's more like Jiminy Cricket's relation to Pinocchio" (i.e., good advice, but to little avail). The system may give the public more confidence in the press, and some private citizens may get some help, but the system is too restricted; others besides private individuals should be allowed to file complaints. "Journalists, publishers and media owners shouldn't have a monopoly on questions of freedom of expression," one communication director comments. Another writes: "It seems like the accountability system for mass media has much less relevance and status" than corresponding systems in, for example, health care.

Readers' Editors

News Ombudsman or Readers' Editor – the position has different names, but the idea is that the media company or newsdesk appoints a person to field complaints from readers/listeners/viewers, to investigate the more important cases, and to write about them within the company and/or publicly. The concept is still young in Sweden (an attempt at the Stockholm morning paper, *Svenska Dagbladet*, in the late 1980s was not long-lived). TV4, a commercial television channel, reintroduced the function in 2002. *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's largest morning paper, followed suit in 2003, and Sveriges Television (public service television) in 2005. The positions were filled through internal recruitment in all cases.

The Readers' Editor is a model that receives good ratings in all the groups surveyed. Big media have a lot of power, a special ombudsman is one way to deal with that power, one editor writes. The problem is in the recruitment, write others. Those who are less enthusiastic – they are to be found both within the press and outside – worry that the function will degenerate into sheer PR. To have any real effect, ombudsmen should be recruited from outside the company; they should also have an explicit mandate.

How do the Media Respond to Complaints and Comment?

We answer, explain and rebut, says one editor regarding how complaints are handled by the staff at her desk. It is their ambition to respond to every complaint. Most comments come in via e-mail or telephone; most are answered by e-mail or telephone. Several editors say that they try to be generous toward the paper's readers; they publish the critical comment that is of general interest or that touches on matters of principle, and they try to present a broad selection of views. "The important thing is not that the paper is in the right, but that the paper gets it right," writes one editor of a metropolitan paper.

One response is critical of the branch on the whole and finds that contacts with the readership are unstructured, and that complaints tend to be regarded as "a headache that comes with the job rather than as an asset that helps to improve quality." Practically all the respondents consider communication from one's readers an important 'signal' to the editors and journalists ("Even details are important"), but above all as so-called public relations: "People see that we can admit our faults and not – like many others – simply sweep them under the carpet."

Respondents in the labor market organizations paint an entirely different picture of media's attitudes and praxis in this regard. "You need a lot of clout" to get through to them, one respondent writes. She ascribes the problem to an unwillingness on the part of members of the press to "have their work scrutinized and critiqued". "At worst they even refuse to correct plain factual errors," another press officer writes. The same respondent also comments that it has become more difficult to "engage editors and journalists in dialogue".

These comments are not to be taken as the 'real' story as to how the media relate to their publics. We have to bear in mind that the labor market organizations are interest groups, each pursuing its own agenda. But the responses do show that editors' perceptions as to their own behavior vis-à-vis readers are not the *whole* story.

Corrections

Most editors prefer to have corrections spread out through the paper, to the sections where the error appeared. Respondents outside the press would rather see the corrections collected and printed in a given place or, in the case of broadcast media, at a given slot in the schedule. The Editors-in-Chief assign corrections importance: they show we are not infallible, and they are needed to maintain the quality of our archives, to keep the record straight, so to speak. The editors also think that corrections are important for their readers: People see that we admit our errors, which fosters confidence in what we do, as one editor puts it.

The communicators representing labor market organizations feel that corrections should be important to the media: they are a "hygienic factor", they should enhance credibility and quality. "But editors", one communicator comments, "apparently really detest having to admit a mistake". As for the public,

corrections should heighten people's respect for the media; they make it possible for individuals to clear their names; they are important, if people are to be able to take the media seriously, are some of the comments.

What Kinds of Criticism are Most Effective?

The questionnaire contained an open-ended question as to what kinds of criticism the respondents considered most effective when it comes to pointing out weaknesses and improving the media's quality.

One editor of a tabloid daily stressed the day-to-day flow of e-mail from readers. Respondents in metropolitan morning papers tend more to emphasize the quality of comment, rather than the quantity: "It has to be credible and be earnest, serious", one editor writes. Several editors at local and regional papers offer qualitative criteria for their judgment of comment: "specific and constructive", "to the point, with concrete examples", and "well-founded and verifiable". For others, the most important thing is that the criticism comes from readers, one editor says "many readers". A third group characterize the criticism in terms of form: frank and constructive discussions within the staff, professional (academic) evaluations, critical media coverage and editorial comment.

Respondents in the labor market organizations say that the first step is always direct contact with the responsible newsdesk. But, as one communication officer sees it, these initial contacts are generally negative and seldom have any effect: "It is always hard to persuade a journalist that he or she has made a mistake since they, particularly here in Sweden, consider themselves the extended arm of public opinion and thus, in principle, they can never be wrong." A third comments: "Sometimes we have to publish a press release to correct misinformation in order to prevent its spreading to other media."

Ratings of 34 Different Systems

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of 34 examples of accountability systems on a five-point scale. Codes of ethics and national press councils were not included, nor were publicized corrections and Readers' Editors. These were the subject of separate questions. The 34 systems are here given in the order assigned them by editors of daily newspapers. The rankings of editors of evening tabloids, regional papers (circulations of 34 000-83 000 copies) and editors of metropolitan morning papers (more than 84 000 copies) were listed separately. The rankings below represent the three lists combined, in declining order of importance.⁴

1. Internal "Devil's advocate" on the newsdesk when 'witch hunts' start up
One of the most frequently raised criticisms of the Swedish news media is that they occasionally fall into a frenzied 'pack mentality' and engage in 'witch-hunts'. As a means to prevent or dampen excesses in this context, a senior member of

the newsdesk may, from the first signs of ‘frenzy’, assume the role of Devil’s advocate, questioning prevailing ‘truths’ and pointing to circumstances that support alternative explanations and scenarios. It is my impression that this method is more commonly talked about than actually put into practice.

2. Internal investigations after controversial stories

A system having a strong potential to bring about change since those who do the investigating are very familiar with the work of the newsdesk and enjoy high esteem, but are in no way responsible for or involved in the story in question. A widely known example of this method is the inquiry undertaken at the New York Times after the Jayson Blair affair.

3. Readers’ panels

A system that a growing number of papers find satisfactory. The system can be elaborated. Panel members’ views may, for example, be put on the paper’s web site for public discussion.

4. Pre-publication checking of interview quotes with the source

A method that has become routine at a number of newsdesks, but not all. Some newsdesks differentiate between interview subjects: those with little or no media experience (the reporter reads the quote(s) on his/her own initiative); experts or mid-level officials (the reporter offers to read the quotes); and top politicians and policy-makers (the journalist doesn’t offer, but will check the quote at the subject’s request).

5. University-level training in journalism

Newspaper editors express considerable confidence in specialized training of journalists. Of the top ten ratings, three have to do with professional training, basic and ‘further’/in-service.

6. Public warnings of possible bias on the part of news sources

In connection with war reporting from ‘the march on Baghdad’ in Spring 2003, several Swedish newspapers reminded their readers of how few the news sources were, that they were biased in one way or another, and that it consequently was difficult to judge their reliability. By opening the editorial process to the public, editors helped readers to become more critical news consumers.

7. In-service training through seminars arranged by an association for investigative journalists

Since 1989, between 500 and 800 Swedish journalists meet annually for a three-day seminar about methods, problems encountered, and other aspects of investigative journalism. The organization and the seminars were inspired by the American organization, Investigative Reporters and Editors. (Disclosure: I was among the founders of the Swedish organization.)

8. *Pressens Tidning*

This branch magazine was included in the questionnaire as an example of branch-related media journalism. It was published by the Swedish Newspaper Publishers' Association and might be characterized as a lesser version of the American publication, *Editor & Publisher*, with a mixture of articles on ethics, journalism, law, economics and technology. The magazine was recently replaced by *Medievärlden*, a monthly. (Disclosure: I was the editor of *Pressens Tidning* 1996-2006.)

9. Fojo – The Institute for Further Education of Journalists

Fojo is a government-financed mid-career training center for professional journalists that trains some 1 500 Swedish journalists each year, mainly in 3- to 10-day courses or workshops. The courses are free of charge and, by the terms of labor-management agreements, journalists attend the courses on paid working time.

10. Readers' ability to comment on content published on the web

A growing number of newspapers give their readers an opportunity to comment on journalistic and editorial content on the web. Interactivity gives readers a direct channel that they can use to comment on articles, provide complementary information and point out factual errors. One problem that papers have encountered is that individuals among the general public use the facility to spread slander and racist views.

11. Media journalism in other media

Media criticism has a long, albeit narrow, history in Sweden. In the 1860s there was even a short-lived weekly magazine (*Granskaren*) that was devoted to criticizing other print media's content. Starting in the 1960s, media journalism steadily increased, and reached a peak about the time the 'IT bubble' burst in the early 2000s. At that point several daily newspapers had journalists who specialized in the media, and both television and radio carried weekly or bi-weekly media magazines. Since then, the volume of media journalism has declined somewhat.

12. *Journalisten*

The house organ of the Swedish Union of Journalists is published weekly, except during the the summer months. *Journalisten* carries a mixture of media and union news and discussions of ethical issues and professional praxis; the emphasis has varied with its editors.

13. Background and depth on the web

In connection with big and controversial stories some media (chiefly investigative TV newsdesks in Sweden to date) publish background material (interview transcripts, statistics, etc.) on their websites. The purpose is to enhance transparency regarding the basis for their reporting and how they select content.

14. Academic media research

Many academic students of the media doubt whether their own and others' research findings exert any influence on media practices. It seems they do, however, judging from the rankings given by editors of morning newspapers.

14. The Centre for Business and Policy Studies (SNS) Media studies

SNS is an enterprise-financed 'think tank' that studies and debates public affairs issues that have a bearing on the business community and Swedish society. Over the past three years SNS has focused on media integrity; several monographs and articles on the subject have been published.

16. Independent polls of public confidence in the media

The SOM Institute (Society-Opinion-Media) at Göteborg University has measured public confidence in Swedish mass media annually for some twenty years. The findings form a unique series of comparable data.

17. In-house media journalism

Media journalism that focuses on company performance and the work of the (respondent) newsdesk.

How do editors react to criticism from their own ranks? The responses indicate that they accord it some importance, but less than criticism that appears in other media.

18. Programs of media criticism on public service radio

The question inquired about *Vår grundade mening*, a weekly program on Sveriges Radio P1 that started in the early 1970s and ran continuously from the early 1980s until 2006. (See also Åke Pettersson's article in this volume, page 83.)

19. 'Editorial balance sheets'

In the late 1990s, the idea of supplementing financial accounts with editorial balance sheets that summarized newsdesks' performance and achievements during the year emerged in Sweden and Norway more or less simultaneously. Media scholars at Göteborg University developed an instrument for the collection of relevant statistical data and structured interviews.

20. Citizen participation in news reporting

The participation of 'grassroots reporters' (as at the Korean *ObmyNews*) has yet to be tried on any significant scale in Sweden. Evening tabloids have developed this approach most, engaging young people, celebrities, and eye-witnesses to spectacular events.

21. Academic/journalistic media criticism

The term "criticism" refers to two principal genres inquired about in the questionnaire. One is criticism of current trends in journalism based on a desire to

preserve traditional professional ideals and routines. (See entry 34 below for the second.)

22. Criticism expressed in blogs

So far, no blogger outside the established media has had any strong and continuous influence as a media critic. On occasion, however, factual errors are pointed out and discussed in blogs, and media have taken note.

23. Criticism on the part of consumers' organizations

Traditionally, Sweden has lacked a strong independent consumers' movement, but this is changing. One of two umbrella organizations has recently criticized how products for children are advertised.

24. Media criticism on public service television

Swedish public service television, SVT, does not have as long a record of critical coverage of media as public radio, but some of the programs the two channels have carried probably have had a greater impact. The program specified in the questionnaire, *Mediemagasinet*, was on the air 2001-2006.

24. Research by the Institute for Media Studies

In 1999, a group of communication and PR directors for major Swedish companies and interest organizations raised some 20 million SEK to create a foundation that operates a small independent media research institute. They felt the need for better insight into how companies and organizations are framed and discussed in the media. Academic research is often too slow-paced for the business community's communication needs.

26. Views of organizations within the profession

In Sweden there are a number of organizations for specialties within journalism (the environment, science, medicine, etc.). Among other things, they monitor and discuss media performance and exchange experiences from their respective newsdesks.

27. PK debates

Founded in 1874, Publicistklubben, 'PK', was initially a small interest organization for editors and journalists. Today (2007) PK has 5000 members. Ethical standards are a central focus. Debates on current issues are held once a month in Stockholm and generally draw between 100 and 400 members. PK occasionally arranges similar debates in several other Swedish cities, as well.

27. The Union of Journalists' Board on Professional Ethics, YEN

After heated debates in the late 1960s the Union of Journalists adopted a code of professional ethics that, among other things, banned bribes and set standards of professional propriety. The Union subsequently formed a Board of Professional Ethics that is charged to review alleged violations of the code and to

determine whether or not the member in question should be expelled from the Union. The system has been harshly criticized for inefficacy.

29. Quick Response

For the past ten years the youth organization of the Swedish Red Cross has operated a newsdesk with a staff of 2-3 journalists who monitor news coverage of instances of xenophobia and racism in Society at large. They also monitor expressions of racial prejudice, discrimination, etc., on the part of Swedish mass media. Quick Response' work, which is funded by government grants, is not as widely known as might be expected, but is well established among those who work with these issues.

30. *Resumé*

Resumé is a branch weekly for advertising and marketing professionals; it includes some coverage of media trends and media scandals. The paper is occasionally criticized for not checking all the facts it reports.

31. Scrutiny on the part of other specialized newsdesks

Many respondents answered "Don't know" when asked about media criticism on the part of other newsdesks than those mentioned explicitly in the questionnaire.

32. Media-critical groups like "Allt är möjligt"

Allt är möjligt [Everything is possible] was organized in 1992 by a group of women who reacted to stereotyped depictions of women and men in the media. The organization has published handbooks of media criticism, members occasionally take part in debates and hold lectures. Still, the group is not widely known.

33. PK's yearbook

PK (see entry 27 above) publishes a yearbook, which is distributed to all 5000 members. The yearbook reviews the activities of the organization during the past year, but also contains a thematic section on some aspect of journalism. The theme for 2007 is how the media cover political extremism.

34. Political/radical media criticism

This second principal genre of media criticism (see entry 21 above for the first) also criticizes the media's 'vulgarization' or 'fall from grace', but these radical critics doubt that the mass media actually ever performed in a satisfactory manner.

Rankings by the Labor Market Organizations

Press officers and communication directors for the principal Swedish labor market organizations ranked Checking of interview quotes and Internal investiga-

tions highest. All the groups who often meet the media in an interview situation (organizations, media researchers and the public) considered pre-publication checks of the accuracy of quotes the most important way to improve media quality. The following shows the top fifteen rankings of the labor market organizations (the figures in parentheses indicate editors' rankings):

1. Checking of interview quotes (4)
1. Internal investigations (1)
3. Warnings of sources' possible bias (6)
3. Academic/journalistic media criticism (21)
5. Media journalism (11)
5. Background and depth on the web (13)
5. Devil's advocate (1)
8. *Pressens Tidning* (8)
9. In-house media journalism (17)
9. *Journalisten* (12)
9. Criticism on the part of organizations of journalists (26)
12. PK debates (27)
12. Media-critical blogs (22)
14. Media criticism on public radio (18)
14. Polls of public confidence (16)

About half of the systems are listed by both groups, albeit in somewhat different order. The principal difference is that the labor market organizations emphasize scrutiny of the media more than the editors do. This is reflected in the ratings of Academic/journalistic media criticism, Media journalism, In-house media criticism, PK debates and Media-critical blogs.

Further down the list (after 15) there is a tendency among the press officers/communication directors to favor public scrutiny of the media. Their rankings of the PK yearbook, YEN, and *Resumé* are more than ten points higher than editors' rankings. *Mediemagasinet* on SVT, Political/radical media criticism and the Institute for Media Studies are ranked 5-9 points higher.

Which Innovative Systems are Worth Trying?

Seven different accountability systems that are little known and have yet to be used in Sweden were presented in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked which of the seven seemed worth trying. The responses reveal a distinct difference between newspaper editors (papers with circulations of 34 000 and over) and the labor market organizations.

A web site featuring all the corrections the media make topped the list of respondents representing the labor market organizations. (A site of this kind

exists in the USA: www.regrettheerror.com.) Newspaper editors most favored empathetic dialogues between editors and journalists and individuals who feel they have been victimized by the media, whereas the corrections website was last on their list – only one of the eighteen editors favored it. Empathetic dialogues were last on the communication directors' list.

Three systems interested both groups:

- A website that explains how the media evaluate news events, news sources, how they set headlines, and so forth.
- Questionnaires to interview subjects, giving them an opportunity to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with how they were treated.
- Annual conferences of media practitioners, the general public, researchers and policy-makers, with debates on the media's roles.

Some Tendencies in the Survey Material

The two groups of respondents are in agreement as to the value of some systems:

- The Readers' Ombudsman is an excellent institution; more news media should have one.
- The media's practices or methods – not just media content – should be subject to review by the self-regulating system of Press Ombudsman and National Press Council.
- Among the innovative accountability systems that should be tried are the above-mentioned website that explains media's methods and how media performance can be evaluated, questionnaires to interview subjects, and annual conferences.
- It is important that media work on issues relating to their reliability, credibility, and quality.

The material also reveals distinct differences between the groups' evaluations of different systems:

- Newspaper editors consider codes of ethics very important; the press officers/communication directors are skeptical.
- The editors ascribe considerable importance to the Press Ombudsman and the National Press Council; the press officers/communication directors have their doubts.
- Sanctions against ethical transgressions are adequate, say the editors; they should be more forceful, say the communicators.
- The editors express doubt as to the usefulness of a joint institution to administer complaints lodged against all the media (press, web, radio

and television); the press officers/communication directors think a new combined system should be tried out.

- The editors feel they are responsive to critical views expressed by readers; the communicators disagree.
- The editors prefer to have corrections spread out in the newspaper (corresponding to where the error was committed); the press officers/communication directors would rather see them collected in a single, prominent place.
- In practice news chiefs appoint internal veteran reporters and editors to the position of Readers' or Viewers' Ombudsman; critical communicators would prefer to see recruitment from outside the media company.
- The editors take the number (evening tabloids) or quality (morning papers) of comments as the most effective media criticism; press officers/communication directors stress how difficult they find it to impress critical views on "smug" and "self-satisfied" journalists.
- Editors give top ratings to professional training, media research and contact with readers when they rank different accountability systems; the representatives of labor market organizations prefer critical scrutiny and greater transparency on the part of news media.
- As for innovative accountability systems, editors express greatest faith in empathetic dialogues with 'victims' of the media; the communicators express greatest faith in a website featuring all the corrections in all the media.
- Given the chance to express their personal views freely, editors remain silent or express satisfaction with the status quo; the organizations' representatives take the opportunity to warn the media of tighter regulation unless the media reform their ways.

Painting in broad strokes, we might say that the newspaper editors are more or less satisfied with the way things are; change should be moderate and criticism should be well-founded and constructive. Press officers/communication directors are, on the contrary, dissatisfied with the situation today; they would like to see new accountability systems that imply more far-reaching changes and much more exacting public scrutiny of the media.

Media scholar Claude-Jean Bertrand (represented in this volume), finds that media accountability systems make use of at least four different methods: education/training, monitoring/research, feedback, and examination/critique. Any given system can, of course, combine several methods. On the basis of this schema, editors seem most inclined to recommend methods in the first three categories, whereas the press officers/communication directors recommend the fourth.

Muller (2005) makes a different distinction and points to two forms of accountability: accountability for ethical transgressions (e.g., complaints lodged

by individuals concerning mistreatment of themselves or persons close to them), and accountability for poor performance in relation to accepted standards of quality (e.g., complaints that a medium is not living up to its social responsibilities).

In this regard the responses in the survey indicate that the editors are highly conscious of their treatment of individuals (even if they sometimes decide that other interests are more important) and hail the systems that can help individuals to be heard (e.g., the Press Ombudsman, the National Press Council, empathetic dialogues). They also express interest in responding to readers' criticism, particularly when it is constructive and well-founded.

Press officers and communication directors, for their part, seem more oriented toward standards of performance than toward protecting people's personal integrity. (We should recall that complaints lodged by legal entities fall outside the PO's and the Press Council's bailiwick.)

That representatives of the media and representatives of interest organizations have different perspectives on the responsibility of the media and different methods of exacting accountability is only natural. The latter group have the goal of furthering their members' interests, and as media have become increasingly important channels for influencing opinion, the interest groups are naturally anxious to ensure that the media maintain standards of quality that neither favor their opponents nor put themselves at a disadvantage.

Plaisance (2000) sees the question of media accountability as a field of tension between the practices and values of media practitioners and those of the individuals and groups that use the media. The conflicts between the two are not a problem to be solved, Plaisance argues, but rather a tension that needs to be accommodated. "Although codes of ethics and correction boxes have their places, the media are accountable when they never stop seeking that uncomfortable balance with audience values", he writes. The material presented above may be taken as an example of the kind of tensions he refers to.

A tendency on the part of newspaper editors to be satisfied with the present system may also be approached in the context of Swedish press history. The national code of ethical behavior evolved in the first years of the twentieth century and much of the work on ethics that has been done since then has concerned adapting the standpoints of the press organizations to the terms of overall national agreements. As noted elsewhere, Hallin and Mancini (2004) place Swedish democracy in a category they call the "democratic corporatist" model.

Inasmuch as the system of press ethics has been developed through agreements of national, branch-wide status, reached by nationally representative organizations, the drive to develop and try local initiatives has most likely been weaker. Furthermore, one of the motives for taking branch-wide initiatives like the Code of Ethics, the Press Ombudsman, the National Press Council and the Union of Journalists' Board on Professional Ethics (YEN) has been to assure politicians that there is no need for stricter regulation of the media, despite recurrent waves of criticism following controversial press behavior.

The element of self-interest in the press' standpoint has sometimes given cause to critique of the self-regulating initiatives. A linkage between threats of legislation and self-regulating responses is present in the survey material, both among editors who argue for redoubled efforts of self-regulation and among critics of the media who use it to buttress their criticism of what they perceive to be self-seeking and self-righteous media. Proponents of accountability systems – see, for example, Bertrand (2000) – sometimes point out that the important thing is what is actually accomplished; the achievement of significant change will require many different measures, born of many different motives.

McQuail has studied how media accountability relates to media's freedom of publication (McQuail 2003). The present study of Swedish media practitioners reveals a certain fear of encroachment on the freedom to publish due to sharper controls in possible new legislation, but no such fears relating to greater accountability. Concern about diminishing media freedom seems greater among people outside the media, but here the prime cause of concern is commercialization and owners' increasing emphasis on profits.

Bertrand (2003) argues that cooperative systems are the most effective because they are based on cooperation between the media and society. Is this true? To be able to say one way or the other we should, first, consider what our survey respondents have to say about efficacy. Let us do so in terms of three categories of systems: internal (in-house or within the newsdesk); external (outside the newsdesk or media company); and 'cooperative' (cooperation between media and the public).

Internal

Some internal systems are ranked high by the editors; these include internal investigations, prepublication checking of quotes, and warnings of possible bias. These are systems that the editors can control. Other systems, like Devil's advocate in the case of witch-hunts and local ethical rules are praised, but seldom practiced – as yet. Collecting corrections to a single place in the paper is resisted by the editors, and in-house media journalism is given low priority.

The communicators for labor market organizations, too, give several internal systems high rankings, despite their not having any influence over them. Their reasons are instead that they perceive external critique to be ineffectual, it is difficult to 'get through to' editors and journalists. In their view, a discussion of quality that takes place within the newsroom or media company has a greater impact, since editors and journalists cannot be suspected of having 'ulterior motives' as representatives of interest groups tend to be.

External

The editors extol national ethical rules, journalism training and media research. These, too, are systems that they can influence to at least some extent, but hardly control. The editors are distinctly less interested in external media journalism,

systematic media scrutiny, and media criticism – areas over which they have considerably less influence.

The labor market organizations would like to see much more external scrutiny and criticism. They also favor the creation of a website that collects all the corrections made in journalistic media – a suggestion that editors show no interest in.

Cooperative

The editors support the system of Press Ombudsman and National Press Council. They feel they are liberal in the treatment and publication of readers' comments. They have faith in systems that provide for comment on the web. It is important to listen to what reader panels have to say. Empathetic dialogues with individuals whose integrity has been violated by the media should be tried, as should annual conferences of all concerned parties to discuss media performance and ethical issues.

The representatives of labor market organizations do not give mutual cooperative systems very high rankings. They are skeptical of the institutions of Press Ombudsman and the National Press Council. But they do favor trying new accountability systems, like a website with suggestions and basic orientation to the business of news, questionnaires to interview subjects after the interview, and annual conferences of concerned parties.

Thus, we find no clear pattern when it comes to the respective groups' views on internal, external and cooperative systems. Aspects like control and assessments of effectiveness vary within and between categories.

One way to enhance effectiveness might be to introduce elements of mutuality cooperation into more systems. For example:

- If newsdesks solicited the public's views on their ethical rules, not to let the public decide, but to engage in dialogue about them, it might enhance people's awareness of and interest in the rules. That, in turn, would equip the public with a better measuring stick against which to judge media performance.
- If newsdesks were to publish monthly or annual lists of the corrections they make and ask for comments on how they do their job, it might encourage reporters to be more systematic about examining their sources and verifying the facts they report.
- If newsdesks become more transparent about how they operate – and invite readers in to discuss their methods and news values – it might boost their credibility and perceived reliability. A greater degree of interactivity is also a logical step in view of the growing importance of the web.

In Conclusion...

The responses reported here suggest there is some dissatisfaction with the traditional Swedish ethical accountability system among groups outside the media, coupled with an interest in developing new and different accountability systems.

Media practitioners are accustomed to – and perhaps satisfied with – the well-established system of ethical rules and the institutions of Press Ombudsman and the National Press Council. But their survey responses also hint of a growing curiosity about other, parallel models.

There is a natural element of conflicting interests between the editors and the labor market organizations with regard to media performance. To some extent it has to do with the time dimension. The two groups' preferences naturally reflect their respective roles, but they also reflect different valuations of speed and impact. The communicators for labor market organizations basically operate in short-term perspectives and aim to achieve strong and immediate impacts. Media practitioners, on the other hand, are more oriented toward improving what they do and how they go about doing it; it is more important to them that changes are well-rooted and stable in the longer term than that they have a palpable impact overnight.

The responses also contain hints of ignorance and prejudice, both in and outside the news media. For this reason, annual conferences of representatives of the media, the public, the research community and policy-makers to discuss media content and the methods used to produce it may well have a role to play.

It seems a better idea to try to define and understand the concrete conflicts that do exist than to cultivate myths of the Other's ignorance, ill will and/or arrogance. For newsdesks to do more in the way of checking interview quotes, more media journalism (especially in the regional press), more Readers' Ombudsmen (if only part-time due to budgetary constraints), and more systematic corrections of errors should be easily achievable. They are actually small steps, but steps that are highly valued by groups outside the media.

An increasing number of accountability systems will be supported by the web and mobile telephony and new ones will evolve. In all likelihood the transition will take place as rapidly as the transition of media content from hard copy to electronic media. More interactivity will lead to higher demands on the news media. Greater media literacy among the general public is a boon to all media whose quality is their best selling point.

Notes

1. A more detailed report of this survey of views on media accountability in these and other groups (broadcast media, media researchers, media scrutinizers, and members of the public with an active interest in the media) will be published in Swedish in a forthcoming (2008) work by Torbjörn von Krogh.

2. *Metropolitan morning papers with circulations of more than 83 000 copies.* The questionnaire was addressed to five Editors-in-Chief. Four responded, either personally or together with a subordinate executive. The four papers account for 89 per cent of the category's total circulation (920 000:1 037 000 copies) in 2006.

Regional or local morning papers with circulations of more than 34 000 copies. The questionnaire was sent to all 17 papers in the category. Twelve responded. They represent 70 per cent (585 000:833 000 copies) of the category's total circulation.

Nationally distributed evening papers. The questionnaire was sent to the two papers in the category; both responded. Together, they have a circulation of 770 000 copies.

All in all, the responding papers represent 75 per cent of the titles in the overall category (Daily newspapers, > 34 000 copies) and 86 per cent of the circulation.

3. Organizations representing employers in the private sector and employers' counterparts in the trade union movement have both wielded considerable influence in Swedish society for many years. (Sweden fits rather nicely into Hallin & Mancini's northern European Democratic Corporatist Model.) Although the organizations' direct ties to party politics may have weakened in recent years, they still have considerable influence, not least as opinion leaders. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise has 50 member organizations that organize 55 000 companies, having 1.5 million employees, or about 60 per cent of all employees in the private sector. Almost 80 per cent of the labor force are union members.
4. A straight tabulation of points for all newspapers would have resulted in an overrepresentation of the regional press, inasmuch as they are relatively many. The present procedure may, on the other hand, be seen as giving too much emphasis to evening tabloids, of which there are only two in the population. The tabloids' combined circulation is, however, considerably greater than the total circulation of the regional press, 770 000 compared to 585 000 copies) and the content of and methods used by Swedish tabloids are frequently in the centre of the media debate.

A comparison of a straight tabulation and the procedure used here reveals only minor differences. Of the fifteen highest-ranked systems, *fourteen appear on both lists*, albeit in somewhat different order.

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Final Words – New Starting Points

Torbjörn von Krogh

Much of what fills the preceding chapters derives from a seminar on media accountability held at the School of Communication and Design at the University of Kalmar, Sweden, in March 2007.

The participants were media owners and executives, Editors-in-chief, editors, journalists, union representatives, researchers, media critics, teachers of Journalism, students, institutional and individual users of the media. Painting in broad strokes, all were agreed that the subject is interesting and important, but also, that it needs further development.

Mass communication researchers point to the need to better define concepts, to develop theory and to explore the relationships between media accountability measures and structural measures, like legislative requirements pertaining to content, accessibility and ownership.

Researchers with a focus on political communication would like to know more about the ability of media accountability to influence the function of mass media in the service of democracy.

Teachers want to see how media accountability, its theory and 'best practices' can be incorporated into professional training.

Media managers want more experiential evidence of how media accountability measures affect public trust and confidence in the media and media use.

Finally, members of the public are looking for effective means to persuade the media to listen to their views on media performance and to engage in meaningful dialogue.

In short, there is considerable interest in more research and further discussion of the topic. Speaking at the University of Minho, Portugal, some years ago, Denis McQuail ended his comments on a similar note:

There is a need to develop a branch of theorising in which philosophical, ethical, social, political and legal matters surrounding public communication can be explored. This need arises from the relative paucity and fragmentary nature of current theorising, which is often too closely tied to practical and immediate concerns of policy and the current realities of a single country or

media system. It also stems from the rapidly changing circumstances of public communication that have been referred to (McQuail 2004).

As the contents of preceding chapters indicate, some of the participants make different assessments of what the end of mass media's monopoly on rapid publication of news and opinion implies. The differences are especially marked regarding the blogosphere. Some (Jönsson, Øvrebø) feel they have the potential to revitalize and democratize journalism and media criticism, whereas others (McManus and Jempson, the latter even moreso in his remarks at the seminar) stress the problems associated with non-professionals' often uncritical use of sources and issues of personal ethics.

Many hold the opinion that we are in a period of transition and that there is still not enough experience of interaction on the web to provide a basis for establishing guiding ethical principles. Some themes have been brought forward, like the following, proposed by Jeff Jarvis:

...the ethic of the link (which says, 'don't take my word for it, go see for yourself'), the ethic of permanence (which says that knowledge grows on knowledge, via the link), the ethic of correction (which is only more immediate in new media), and the ethic of transparency (Jarvis 2007a).

How can we handle the problems associated with speed of publication and acts of ill-will (such as libel) online? A major search engine wanted to hire Jeff Jarvis as a 'Users' ombudsman', but he declined the offer. There was "something so old-media" about it all. Instead, he argued, both users and reporters should be considered ombudsmen:

Every one of your readers with an addition, correction, or challenge is an ombudsman. And every one of your writers, dealing directly with the people who know more, is an ombudsman for your brand or product. You have to have the faith in your public to do this. This is what I've been saying to newspapers: It's not right to ghettoize contact with the public through one person so that the rest of the staff thinks that the public is someone else's problem; everyone needs to be responsible got conversation with the public (Jarvis 2007b).

In an age when a great number of sources are accessible, via the web, to great numbers of people, and people can publish their views and reports on the basis of these sources, Jane Singer (2006) asks what constitutes a journalist. She proposes "a blend of two competing philosophical approaches, existentialism and social responsibility theory, as well as two roughly corresponding professional norms, independence and accountability" (p 2).

Singer attempts to defuse the tension between freedom/independence and responsibility/accountability that has persisted ever since the Hutchins Commission six decades ago by defining journalists as those whose reporting is both independent and accountable.

It suggests that journalistic independence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for journalism in the current media environment and is contingent on the notion of individual commitment to social responsibility. The emphasis thus is on a journalist's personal choice to uphold the public trust (p 3).

Journalism of this kind should be very transparent, since one of the principal aspects for which it should be possible to hold journalism accountable is, precisely, accountability. In a later article, Singer cites Matt Welch of *Reason Magazine* on how bloggers contribute to keeping journalists accountable:

For lazy columnists and defensive gatekeepers, it can seem as if the hounds from a mediocre hell have been unleashed. But for curious professionals, it is a marvelous opportunity (...) journalists finally have something approaching real peer review, in all its brutality (Welch 2003, cited in Singer 2007).

As Singer sees it, internet and bloggers are more than a challenge to professional journalists; they also afford journalists opportunities to raise their standards, to do it openly, and to use norms like independence and accountability to distinguish themselves from writers who do not live up to them.

The fact that their claims to telling the truth or to be accountable for their actions and decisions, as well as their claims to independence, are not exclusive does not make those norms less important. ... If bloggers offer an impossible-to-ignore grassroots motivation for journalists to understand both the meaning and the importance of social responsibility in an interconnected world – and to take seriously, on a daily basis, the central role that an open exchange of both information and criticism plays – so be it (Singer 2007, p 90).

Bloggers can give news journalists incentives to be more transparent, and bloggers can contribute to better journalism by contributing the kind of expert knowledge in specific fields that journalists may lack. Furthermore, the technology can help many accountability systems to become cooperative projects (cf. the preceding chapter that reports the findings of a Swedish survey), thereby enhancing both media's contact with readers, viewers and listeners and users and the effectiveness of the accountability systems. There is a need for further research, including experimental research, to study these effects.

Accountability for All

Internet facilitates cooperative accountability systems. It is no stretch of the imagination to envision communities of people with specialized knowledge that both stimulate and challenge news media to be more accountable than they have been to date. These communities, it should be noted, are hardly confined by national frontiers.

Internationalization of the media is, of course, much, much more and raises the question: To whom are global media accountable? International frontiers have obviously crumbled in a media world where cartoons produced in provincial Denmark can provoke responses and have consequences thousands of miles away, and where global warming, bloody conflict, drastically contrasting living conditions, streams of refugees and expressions of xenophobia and racist nationalism fill the headlines.

Roger Silverstone (1945-2006) discusses these issues in his posthumously published book, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (2007). He defined "mediapolis" as "the mediated public space where contemporary political life increasingly finds its place, both at national and global levels, and where the materiality of the world is constructed through (principally) electronically communicated public speech and action" (p 31). It is a scene on which events are shared globally, but there are also enormous cultural differences. In Silverstone's words: "The mediapolis is both an encompassing global possibility and an expression of the world's empirical diversity" (p 34).

Silverstone pointed out that everyone involved in the process of mediation – media owners, professional staff, interviewees, etc., but users of the media, as well – have to take responsibility for their participation in the process. How should members of the public, who have no control over what the media communicate, exercise their responsibility? Silverstone's answer is to be more critical, to take action. Remaining passive is also a form of participation, he argues. "For our ultimate responsibility as citizens goes wider than the media's representation of the world: it reaches to the world which the media represent" (p 135).

Government regulation and self-regulation are not enough for media companies to fulfill Silverstone's ideal, namely, a widespread assumption of moral responsibility for "the other person in a world of great conflict, tragedy, intolerance and indifference".

A responsible and accountable media can be encouraged and regulated, however imperfectly and however vulnerably. A responsible and accountable media culture is another matter entirely, for it depends on a critical and literate citizenry (as well as a critical and literate, that is, a reflexive, profession), a citizenry, above all, which is critical with respect to, and literate in the ways of, mass mediation and media representation (Silverstone 2007, p 165).

Critical media literacy at all levels is a key factor in Silverstone's thinking; he develops his arguments for it under the motto, "Education, not regulation" (p. 185) Media owners and executives should draw up ethical balance sheets annually. In the case of editors and journalists it is "a matter of informed and reflexive understanding" combined with a sense of individual responsibility. Among audiences and users "it should be developed as a civic project".

Participation

In the Introduction to this volume I cited David Pritchard, editor of an anthology of empirical studies of practical media accountability projects in the late 1980s, with an emphasis on cases from midwestern USA. In Pritchard's view, like democracy, media accountability depends on citizen participation. The need for accountability has hardly diminished in the years since he wrote, while the technical potential for transparency and interactivity has mushroomed. Pritchard, too, sees more than one beneficiary of greater accountability:

We choose to be optimistic about both media accountability and democracy, in part because the alternatives are so unpalatable, but also because we believe that a stronger system of media accountability and a stronger democracy are in everyone's self-interest (Pritchard 2000, p 192).

Each of us has a role to play in this endeavor. Researchers need to do their research, practitioners practice their profession, teachers teach, bloggers blog, and all of us participate as our common civic duty.

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SUPPLEMENTS

Press Councils in the World – 2007

Compiled by Claude-Jean Bertrand

A. Mixed Councils (including non-media members)

1. National Councils – 40 (43)

Country	Creation	Modifications
Sweden	1916	Modified in 1969
Finland	1927	Modified in 1968
Norway	1928	Modified in 1972
Netherlands	1948	Modified in 1960
Great Britain*	1953	Modified in 1963; transformed in 1991
Turkey	1960	Dead in 1968 ; recreated in 1988
South Korea	1961	See note**
Israel	1963	
Taiwan	1963	Modified in 1974
Iceland	1963	
Philippines	1965	Suppressed in 1972; relaunched in 1993
Switzerland*	1972	Revived in 1984; transformed in 2000
New Zealand	1973	
Australia	1976	
(Greek) Cyprus	1990	Still-born; recreated in 1997
Estonia 1*	1991	
Chile	1991	
Fiji	1993	Relaunched 1996; modified 1998
Poland*	1996	
Peru*	1997	
Tanzania	1997	
Thailand	1997	
Russia 1*	1998	"Grand Jury"
Malta*	1999	
Indonesia	2000	
Hong Kong	2000	
Estonia 2*	2001	Set up by seceding publishers
Bosnia & Herz.*	2001	

Country	Creation	Modifications
Ukraine	2001	Remodelled 2006
Belgium (Flemish)	2002	
Slovakia	2002	
Sri Lanka	2003	Replaces government PC
(Eastern Caribbean)	(2003)	Reported dead
Azerbaijan	2003	
Tonga	2003	
Botswana	2003	
Kenya	2004	
(Swaziland)	(2004)	Not operational
(Zambia)	(2004)	Not operational
Russia 2*	2005	Press Complaint Public Committee
Georgia	2005	
Bulgaria	2005	Double PC (print & broadcast)
Ireland	2007	PC and Press ombudsman

As of early 2007, Armenia and Spain (FAPE) were working on establishing press councils.

* Bipartite PCs, either not including owners or journalists.

** The Korea Ethics Commission (set up by the press) is overshadowed by a statutory Commission of Press Arbitration (1981) that covers all media and can demand corrections.

2. Councils Statutory, yet non-State – 5 (6)

Country	Creation	Modifications
Denmark	1964	Statutory since 1992
India	1965	Suppressed in 1975; revived in 1978
Ghana	1968	Dead 1970. Reborn statutory 1992
Luxembourg	1979	Modified 2004
(Nigeria)	(1992)	Remodelled 2003 – not operational
Lithuania	1996	Mixed since Oct. 2000

3. Regional Councils – 21

Western Europe – 1

Country	Creation	Modifications
Cataluna (Spain)	1997	

Russia – 7

Country	Creation	Modifications
Rostov (Russia)	2003	
Nijni-Nov. (Russia)	2004	
Voronezh	2004	Regional Jury
Krasnodar	2005	
Oryel	2005	Regional Jury
Ryazan	2003	Regional Jury
Ekaterinburg	2005	Regional Jury

Canada – 6

Country	Creation	Modifications
Quebec	1971	
Ontario	1972	
Alberta	1972	
Maritimes (Atlantic)	1980	
British Colombia	1983	
Manitoba	1984	

United States – 5

Country	Creation	Modifications
Honolulu	1970	Covers most Hawaii media
Minnesota	1971	
Washington	1998	
New England	2006	News Forum
South. California	2006	

Philippines – 2

Country	Creation	Modifications
Baguio	2002	
Cebu	2002	
(Palawan)	(2002)	Not operational

B. Professional Councils – 8
(comprising only media people)

1. Set up by publishers and journalists – 2

Country	Creation	Modifications
Germany	1956	
South Africa	1998	national ombudsman + appeals pannel

2. Set up by journalists alone – 6

Ethical commissions

Country	Creation	Modifications
Italy	1963	Statutory Professional Order
Belgium (francoph)	1988	Union's Ethics committee (inactive)
Slovenia	1995	Ethics Committee
Czech Republic	1998	Com. for Ethics of Union of Journal.
Macedonia	2001	Ethics Committee
Hungary	1994	MUOSZ Ethics Committee

C. Media Observatories – 15

“Observatoires des médias” have recently multiplied in francophone African nations under prodding from Western ONGs and to avoid restrictive legislation. They are set up by the profession to improve the ethics of the press through monitoring, criticizing, processing complaints and training. Lack of funds and government pressure make it difficult for them to function.

Country	Creation	Modifications
Bénin	ODEM	2004
Burkina Faso	ONAP	2000
Burundi	OPB	2004
Cameroun	CCM	2005
Congo-Brazzaville	OCM	2002
Congo (Zaire)	OMEC	2004
Côte d'Ivoire	OLPED	1995
Guinée	OGUIDEM	2001
Mali	ODEP	2000
Mauritanie	CRED	2001
(Niger)	(CIMED)	1999
Rep. Centre-Africaine	OLPCA	2002
Sénégal	CRED	1999
Tchad	ODEMET	
Togo	OTM	1999

D. Dead Press Councils

Country	Creation	Modifications
Austria	1961	Modified in 1963; dead in 2003
Burma	1962	Dead in 1964
Pakistan	1965	Dead in 1968
USA (NNC)	1973	Dead in 1983
Portugal	1975	Dead in 1990
West Indies	1976	Dead, date unknown
Cook Islands	1995	Dead 1999

*E. Government-controlled “Press Councils”**

Country	Creation
Nepal	1967
Bangladesh	1979
Egypt	1980
Nigeria	1992

* Calling themselves “press councils”: they can assume some functions of a regular PC, but their main purpose is different.

110 Media Accountability Systems

Compiled by Claude-Jean Bertrand

Non-governmental means of inducing media and journalists to respect the ethical rules set by the profession. They are extremely diverse but all aim at improving news media. Here is a list of over 110, but more can, and will, be invented. One classification of the M*A*S is into three groups according to their intrinsic nature: documents (printed or broadcast)/people (individuals or groups)/processes (long or short).

Text, Broadcast or Website

- A written code of ethics, or an "ethics handbook", listing rules which media professionals have discussed and/or agreed upon with, preferably, input by the public. And which should be made known to the public.
- An internal memo reminding the staff of ethical principles (maybe the "tradition" of the paper¹ and providing it with guidelines as to behavior in particular circumstances.
- A daily internal self-criticism report circulated in the newsroom.²
- A correction box, or column³, published, very visibly. Or time taken to correct an error on the air.
- A regular "Letters to the Editor" column/program, including messages critical of the newspaper/ magazine/ station.
- An accuracy-and-fairness questionnaire, mailed to persons mentioned in the news or published for any reader to fill out.
- A public statement about media by some eminent decision-maker, abundantly quoted in the news⁴.
- A space or time slot purchased by an individual, a group or a company to publish an "open letter" about some media issue⁵.
- An occasional "Letter from the editor", expounding values and rules, or explaining how media function.
- A sidebar explaining some difficult editorial decision to publish or not to publish.
- An "Editors' blog" by senior staff to explain operations and decisions; also to take the reader/viewer "behind the scenes" and respond to his/her remarks.⁶

- A newsletter to readers, inserted or mailed, to keep them informed of what goes on at the newspaper or station.
- A regular media column, page, section⁷ in a newspaper, newsmagazine, trade review – or a program on radio or television, that does more than just mention new appointments and ownership changes.
- A regular ethics column in a trade magazine.⁸
- Regular reports by media-oriented citizens' associations that are published by newspapers.
- A daily online clearing house carrying info on events in the media world, quotes and criticism.⁹
- A web site systematically posting corrections of media errors,¹⁰
- or the grievances of working journalists¹¹,
- or abuses by advertisers.¹²
- A website offering journalists information and advice on "promoting accountability".¹³
- A website devoted to debate on media issues (e.g. media and the children).
- A section of a newspaper's web site devoted to immediate feedback by readers to a particular article.¹⁴
- A website teaching the public how to evaluate media.¹⁵
- A satirical presentation of the news implicitly exposing the failings of regular TV newscasts.¹⁶
- An online newspaper whose material is entirely supplied by citizens.¹⁷ Or readers' blogs within a newspaper's site to cover neighborhood news and issues. A printed newspaper can also make good use of readers' input.¹⁸
- An alternative periodical (esp. published by a minority), non-profit station or website, that publishes facts and gives viewpoints which regular media ignore, including criticism of the said media.
- A "journalism review", on paper or the air or the Web¹⁹, devoted principally to media criticism, exposing what media have distorted or omitted, and whatever other sins reporters or media companies have committed.
- "Darts and Laurels", a page or website consisting of short stories in criticism or praise of some media action, such as most journalism reviews have had.²⁰
- Guides to "media empowerment" i.e. getting involved in media policy.²¹
- An annual report by a newspaper presenting a social and ethical audit of its contents and services, based on the opinions of thousands of readers.²²
- Publication on the Web of full transcriptions of interviews and emails by news sources angered by bias or distortion.
- A petition signed by hundreds or thousands to put pressure on media directly or via advertisers or via some regulatory agency.
- A yearbook of journalism criticism, written by reporters and media users, edited by academics.²³
- A weblog run by a journalist, or by an amateur, that scrutinize mainstream media, critiquing what they say and don't say.²⁴

- An article, report, book, film, TV series about media, informative about media and, to some extent at least, critical.
- Newsletters emailed to subscribers by media-watch organizations.²⁵
- The review of a consumer group (regional or national) which occasionally deals with media.
- A website showing how foreign media report on your country, with translation of stories.²⁶
- A television network²⁷ or weekly newsmagazine²⁸ entirely made up of material borrowed from foreign media, enabling users to evaluate their own media.
- A non-profit regular daily newspaper, immune from share-holder and advertiser pressure.²⁹
- [Very exceptional] A newspaper given by its publisher to a journalism school to serve as a "teaching hospital".³⁰

Individuals or Groups

- An in-house critic, or a "contents evaluation commission"³¹, to scrutinize the newspaper, or monitor the station, for breaches of the code – without making their findings public.
- An ethics committee or a "staff review group" (a rotating panel of journalists) set up to discuss and/or decide ethical issues, preferably before they occur.
- An ethics coach operating in the newsroom, occasionally, to raise the reporters' ethical awareness, to encourage debate and advise on specific problems.
- A media reporter assigned to keep watch on the media industry and give the public full, unprejudiced reports³².
- An outside critic paid by a newspaper to write a regular column about the paper.
- A whistle-blower who dares to denounce some abuse within the media company.
- A consumer reporter who warns readers/viewers against misleading advertising – and intervenes on their behalf.³³
- An ombudsman, "editor in charge of reader relations", or a team of reporters, employed by a newspaper or station, to listen to suggestions and complaints from customers, investigate, obtain redress if need be and (usually) report on his activities.
- A Complaints bureau or Customer service unit to listen to grievances and requests.³⁴
- A disciplinary committee set up by a union or other professional association to obtain that its code be respected – under pain of expulsion.
- Unions of journalists have shown everywhere a keen interest in media ethics, drafted codes and initiated press councils.
- A watchdog's watchdog, monitoring established M*A*S.³⁵
- A liaison committee set up jointly by media and a social group with which they may occasionally clash³⁶.
- A citizen appointed to the editorial board; or several (often chosen among users who have complained) invited to attend the daily news meeting.

- A panel (or several specialized panels) of readers/ listeners/ viewers regularly consulted³⁷ – a Readers Advisory Committee to serve as the eyes and ears of the newspaper in their communities.³⁸
- A club (of readers/listeners/viewers) that uses perks to attract members and leads them into a dialogue about the medium (most often a magazine).
- A radio club, to listen together and debate issues, to provide local news and suggestions to the regional broadcaster which supplies equipment and training.³⁹
- A local press council, i.e. regular meetings of some professionals from the local media and representative members of the community.
- A national (or regional) press council set up by the professional associations of media owners and of journalists, and normally including representatives of the public – to speak up for press freedom and to field complaints from media users.
- A national ombudsman appointed by the press to deal with complaints, either in association with a press council (Sweden) or independent (South Africa).
- A watchdog agency set up by a media-related industry (like advertising) to filter contents – and ask that some not be made public, for ethical reasons⁴⁰.
- A militant association dedicated to media reform⁴¹ or to helping persons with grievances against media⁴².
- "Media observatories" set up by journalists to monitor attacks on press freedom and adherence to a code, receive complaints, debate ethical issues with publishers.
- An single-issue federation of many kinds of NGOs (civil rights groups, labour unions, consumer associations etc.) to fight a battle for better media.⁴³
- A foundation that funds projects or institutions aiming at the improvement of media.⁴⁴
- A media-related institution, national⁴⁵ or international, that has a direct or indirect interest in promoting media quality⁴⁶ through conferences, seminars, publications etc.
- A "combination M*A*S" like the Poynter Institute in Florida, involved in research, data-gathering, publication, training, advice
- A national or international NGO to militate on behalf of journalists' freedom and welfare.⁴⁷
- An NGO that trains personnel, and provides free services to media, in emerging democracies (Eastern Europe) and under-developed nations.
- An NGO that organizes regular public debates or campaigns on media issues.⁴⁸
- A citizen group (like a labor union or a parents' association) which, for partisan and/or public interest reasons (e.g. the welfare of children⁴⁹), monitors the media – or attacks a special target, like advertising⁵⁰.
- A consumers' association, especially one of media users, using awareness sessions, monitoring, opinion polls, evaluations, lobbying, mail campaigns, even boycotts to obtain better service.⁵¹
- A commission set up by Parliament⁵² but independent, in order thoroughly to study a major media issue, like concentration of ownership.
- A team assigned by a social group (women, ethnic minority, physicians etc.) to monitor the media coverage they are receiving.

- A representative group of journalists in the newsroom, endowed with some rights, as allowed by law in Germany or required in Portugal.
- An Order of journalists, statutory but totally independent, one of whose purposes is to formulate and enforce ethical rules.⁵³
- An association of publishers and editors to debate issues and promote quality.⁵⁴
- A team formed by a group of specialized journalists (investigative reporters, women etc.) to exchange information and promote their interests.
- A "société de rédacteurs", an association of all newsroom staff, that demands a voice in editorial policy – and preferably owns shares in the company so as to make itself heard.⁵⁵
- A "société de lecteurs", an association of readers which buys, or is given, shares in the capital of a media company and demands to have a say.⁵⁶

*It seems reasonable also to place in this category three types of institutions that some experts would leave out of the M*A*S concept. Provided they do not take orders from government, to the extent that their purpose is to improve media service, it does not seem possible to leave them out completely. They might be called associate M*A*S or para-M*A*S:*

- *The regulatory agency, set up by law, provided it is truly independent, especially if it takes complaints from media users.*⁵⁷
- *The international broadcasting company, public or private, using short wave radio or satellites, that makes it difficult for national media to hide or distort the news.*⁵⁸
- *The autonomous non-commercial broadcasting company*⁵⁹, *whose sole purpose is to serve the public and which constitutes implicit criticism of commercial media. That category might be widened to include all high quality media whose primary aim is good journalism and which can serve as models.*

Processes

- A higher education, a crucial M*A*S. Quality media should only hire people with a university degree, preferably (though this is controversial) one in mass communications.
- A separate course on media ethics required for all students in journalism.
- Further education for working journalists: one-day workshops, one-week seminars, six-month or one-year fellowships at universities. Such programs, quite common in the US⁶⁰, are very rare elsewhere.
- An in-house awareness program to increase the attention paid by media workers to the needs of citizens, especially women and cultural, ethnic, sexual or other minorities; or
- Offering readers a news menu and asking them to pick what they want to see on the front page next day.⁶¹
- Teaching journalists how to respond appropriately to readers/ listeners/ viewers on the phone or on the Web.
- Internally investigating major failures by a media (serious inaccuracies, unfounded reports, lack of adequate coverage, etc.)⁶²
- Teaching journalists, through seminars and publications, how to organize and fight for quality.⁶³

- Building a data-base, within a media outlet, of all errors (type, cause, person involved) so as to discern patterns and take measures.
- An internal study of some issue involving the public (like a newspaper's relations with its customers).
- An ethical audit: external experts come and evaluate the ethical awareness, guidelines, conduct within the newspaper or station.
- Giving the email addresses and/or telephone numbers of editors and of journalists (whenever a story of theirs is published).
- The (controversial) "readback" of quotes to sources to avoid errors.⁶⁴
- A "media at school" program to train children from an early age in the understanding and proper use of media.
- A "media literacy" campaign to educate and mobilize the general public.
- A listening session: once a week or irregularly, editors man the phones to answer calls from readers.⁶⁵
- The regular encounter of news people with ordinary citizens in a press club, on the occasion of neighborhood meetings – or even on a cruise⁶⁶!
- A regular (e.g. quarterly) opinion survey (polls, public meetings, internet forum), commissioned by the media, to get feedback from the person-in-the-street; also a questionnaire on a newspaper or station website.
- A nation-wide survey of public attitudes towards all or some media (e.g. towards public broadcasting).
- Polling the public or groups within it so as to operate a barometer of satisfaction as opposed to the conventional systems of sales, ratings and shares.
- Non-commercial research, done mainly by academics in the universities, but also in think-tanks or scientific observatories⁶⁷, studies of the contents of media (or the absence of them⁶⁸), of the perception of media messages by the public, of the impact of those messages.
- Organizing an occasional street demonstration to promote some cause.⁶⁹
- Sponsoring a national or regional forum on a big issue (e.g. The Hutchins Commission in the US – 1942-1947) or limited issue, like local reporting.
- An annual conference bringing together media decision-makers, political leaders and representatives of citizens' groups of all kinds⁷⁰.
- An annual seminar on journalism criticism organized by a Journalism School.⁷¹
- Attracting the finest minds to journalism by creating bridges between academe and media.⁷²
- International cooperation to promote media quality and accountability.⁷³
- A prize, and other tokens of satisfaction, to reward quality media and ethical journalists⁷⁴ – or an anti-prize⁷⁵.

Notes

1. To its "Standards & Ethics" code, the *Washington Post* appends Eugene Meyer's (its former owner) 1933 "Principles".

2. Like at *Zero Hora*, a daily of Porto Alegre in Brazil.
3. As in *The Guardian*, the British quality daily.
4. A huge ballyhoo greeted US Vice-President Spiro Agnew's two 1969 speeches against "liberal" media.
5. Like the one against toxic popular culture published in newspapers all over the US by 56 eminent Americans in July 1999.
6. As initiated in 2005 by the CBS network and the *New York Times*.
7. Like the *Media Guardian* within the Monday edition of the *Guardian* (London).
8. As the monthly "Ethics Corner" in *Editor & Publisher* since 1999.
9. Like the Romenesko column since 1998, on the Poynter Institute website.
10. Like www.slipup.com in the US.
11. Like, in the US, the *News Mait* site maintained by Maurice Tamman for 3 years until 1999.
12. Like www.adbusters.org in Vancouver, run by former Madison Avenue types.
13. Like the IFJ (International Federation of Journalists) website for African news people: www.ifj.org/regions/africa.
14. The online edition of the French daily *Le Monde* actively solicits such feedback. Also BBC News Online.
15. Like John McManus' San Francisco Bay Area website focussed on television news: www.gradethenews.org
16. Like Jon Stewart's *Daily Show* on Comedy Central (USA), very popular with young viewers.
17. Like *Obmy News* in South Korea which uses thousands of amateur reporters and scores 2 million page-views a day. Similar is *Scoop.co* in Israel.
18. Two pages in the Spanish daily *El Correo*. The French *Dépêche du midi* has thus widened its staff to several thousands.
19. Like the *American JR* (University of Maryland) or the *On-Line JR* (U. of Southern California).
20. See also the internal bulletin circulated by the *New York Times*, called "Winners and Sinners".
21. Like that produced in the US for the Consumers' Union. Or a book by anti-dysinformation militants on how to access the columns of *Le Monde*.
22. As the British *Guardian* and *Observer* have done since 2003. In Sweden, a similar audit is produced by the University of Göteborg and an association of publishers.
23. Like the one put out by the University of Tampere, in Finland, after an annual seminar on the topic.
24. Like university-based Media Lens in the UK "correcting the distorted vision of corporate media".
25. Like FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) or Project Censored in the US.
26. Like *Watching America* in the US, with articles and audio and video clips.
27. Like SBS in Australia.
28. Like *Courrier International* in France.
29. Like the *St Petersburg Times* (Florida) whose profits go to the excellent Poynter Institute.
30. The *Anniston Star*, whose assets were given in 2003 to a foundation that will join the University of Alabama in running a "community journalism" program.
31. Like the *shinsa-shitsu* set up by Japanese dailies as early as the 1920s.
32. The best-known, David Shaw (of *The Los Angeles Times*) was awarded a Pulitzer prize in 1991.
33. Like the "Action Line" teams common in US newspapers in the 1970s.
34. Like that of the BBC in Britain.
35. Like the FPS association in Germany watching over the press council and other M*A*S.
36. Like the police or some immigrant minority.
37. In Mexico, the *Reforma* group of newspapers uses 60 "reader boards" assigned to various fields. In Argentina, *La Nacion* has 1500 readers it consults twice a month.
38. Such as the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* uses.

39. Common in sub-Saharan Africa, e.g. in Burkina, Benin, Niger, and Congo.
40. Like the BVP (Bureau de vérification de la publicité) in France or the Advertising Standards Authority in Britain.
41. Like FAIR in the US (www.fair.org) .
42. Like MediaWise in Britain (www.mediawise.org.uk)
43. Such a federation in the US in 2004 obtained from Congress that some media deregulation be nullified.
44. Like the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Friedrich-Naumann Foundation in Germany or the Pew Charitable Trusts in the US.
45. Like the AEJMC (Association of Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication) in the US.
46. Like the International Press Institute or the World Association of Newspapers.
47. Like RSF, Reporters Sans Frontières or the US Committee of Concerned Journalists.
48. To be found in the UK (MediaWatch) or the Czech Republic.
49. Like ANDI in Brasilia which monitors Brazilian media, and reports on how they deal with children.
50. Like "Résistance à l'agression publicitaire" in France.
51. Like the Spanish FIATYR, a federation of associations of media users in every province or People For Better TV, a US broad-based national coalition.
52. Called Royal Commission in the UK and Australia.
53. Like the Ordine dei Giornalisti in Italy.
54. Like the Verein für Qualität in Journalismus in German-speaking countries.
55. The first was set up at the French daily *Le Monde* (1951).
56. As is the case at *Le Monde* , of which it owns about 11%.
57. Like the Italian Ordine dei giornalisti (Order of Journalists) or the French Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (equivalent to the FCC in the US) Two very different types of institutions.
58. Like the BBC World Service or CNN – or a Polish radio station aimed at fascist Belarus.
59. Like NSK in Japan or ARD in Germany
60. Like the Knight fellowships at Stanford University and the Nieman Fellowships at Harvard U.
61. Like Chile's *Las Ultimas Noticias* or , in the US, the *Wisconsin State Journal*
62. As done by CBS on a Dan Rather blunder (2004) and by the *New York Times* on Jayson Blair's plagiarism and its uncritical pre-war coverage of Iraq.
63. What MediaWise does in the UK.
64. As the *Wall Street Journal* encourages its reporters to do.
65. As is done at some Brazilian papers.
66. The Belgian daily *La Libre Belgique* has organized such cruises.
67. Like the European Institute for the Media in Düsseldorf, Germany.
68. Like Project Censored in the US.
69. In 2005, media watchdog organizations in Romania set up an "Information Fair" to protest harassment by government.
70. Like, until 2005, the "Université de la communication" in late August, in Carcans-Maubuisson, later in Hourtin, SW France.
71. Like the one at the University of Tampere in Finland.
72. Eg. Reuters creating a Journalism Institute at Oxford. Millionaire publisher Steven Brill by endowing such training at Yale University.
73. Like the European alliance of press councils (AIPCE) or the Ibero-American Federation of Ombudsmen.
74. Like that started in 1999 by the J-School at the University of Oregon.
75. Like the "Silver Sewer Award" bestowed by Empower America, a conservative media watchdog.

About the Authors

TERJE ANGELSHAUG, Readers' ombudsman at *Bergens Tidende* (Bergen, Norway) since 2004. He is the first person to serve in that position at the paper, and is the only ombudsman in Norway. His academic training was in Education, and he worked as a teacher ten years before switching to journalism. He has worked at *Bergens Tidende* since 1986 as political reporter, page editor and news editor. He also is involved in journalism training at the University of Bergen.

CLAUDE-JEAN BERTRAND, (1934-2007) was Professor emeritus at Institut français de presse (Université de Paris-2). It was he who coined the term, "Media Accountability Systems" (MAS) after extensive study of press councils, readers' ombudsmen, codes of ethics and local publications that monitor media performance. He has written and edited numerous books, among them: *Media Ethics and Accountability Systems* (2000) and *An Arsenal for Democracy* (ed., 2003). He recently coedited a book in Swedish, *Medieetik i Europa* [Media Ethics in Europe] (2007) with Olof Petersson. He lectured on the subject worldwide.

SUSANNE FENGLER is Professor of international journalism at the University of Dortmund, Germany, and focuses on comparative studies of journalism cultures. She has published numerous books and articles about media criticism, among them *Medienjournalismus in den USA* (2002), a study of media reporters and media critics in the United States, and co-edited a German anthology on media journalism, *Medien auf der Bühne der Medien* (2000). Besides her academic work in Germany and Switzerland, she has worked as a journalist as well as in political communication.

GORDON S. JACKSON, Professor at Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington (USA). Jackson has served as an external part-time ombudsman and consultant for the Spokane daily, *The Spokesman – Review*. He is a frequent speaker on the media and related issues. He wrote *Breaking Story: The South African Press*, and is the compiler of a collection of quotations on the media, titled *Watchdogs, Blogs and Wild Hogs*.

MIKE JEMPSON, Coordinator of the British organization, MediaWise and a Visiting Professor of Media Ethics at University of Lincoln (UK). MediaWise was founded in 1993 by people who had been victimized by the media; its aim is to improve the quality of British news media. Mike Jempson has headed up the organization since 1996. He has trained journalists in 25 countries and written course material on many subjects, including media treatment of children, ethnic minorities and suicide.

MARTIN JÖNSSON is Editor in charge of the business section and media analyst for the Stockholm morning paper, *Svenska Dagbladet*. He is also a frequent commentator on the paper's media blog (www.svd.se/mj). An economist by training, he has previously served as Editor-in-Chief of *Civilekonomen* (house organ of the union of academically trained economists), *Nöjesguiden* (a Stockholm entertainment guide) and *Journalisten* (house organ of the Swedish Union of Journalists).

TORBJÖRN von KROGH was Visiting Professor at the Department of Communication and Design, Kalmar University (Sweden), 2006-2007. He arranged and moderated a conference on Media Accountability at the University in March 2007 and edited this volume of papers from that event (and wrote some new chapters). Torbjörn von Krogh has worked as a journalist 35 years. 1996-2006 he edited *Pressens Tidning*, a branch paper on the media. Currently a doctoral candidate at Mid-Sweden University in Sundsvall, the subject of his research is media criticism.

JOHN H. McMANUS earned his doctorate at Stanford University (USA). He is the author of *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?* (1994). As a consequence of his analysis of the impact of market forces on journalism he started the website, GradetheNews.org, with the aim of equipping visitors to the site to judge the quality of news media. John McManus is currently writing a book on news literacy.

ÅKE PETTERSSON, Editor of Swedish public radio's (Sveriges Radio P1) media-critical programme, *Vår grundade mening* since the early 1980s. Under pressure to diversify content of the channel, Sveriges Radio turned *Vår grundade mening* over to an independent producer in January 2007. Åke Pettersson is now in charge of *Publicerat*, a new P1 program on media issues. He has written a number of textbooks on basic media matters for high school students.

STEVEN A. SMITH, Editor of *The Spokesman-Review*, a daily newspaper in Spokane, Washington (USA) since 2002. The paper is noted for its experimentation with different methods to make the newsgathering process more transparent to readers. Steve Smith was inspired by Buzz Merritt, a pioneer of 'public journalism', with whom he worked at *The Wichita Eagle* (Kansas) 15 years ago. Since then, his career at newspapers in Oregon, Colorado and now Washington state have earned him a reputation as a free-thinker in the newspaper industry.

OLAV ANDERS ØVREBØ, Free-lance journalist in Oslo specialized in mass media and communications technology. He currently leads the team behind *Vox Publica*, a web magazine put out by the University of Bergen (Jostein Gripsrud, publisher) that focuses on issues relating to democracy and freedom of expression. Olav Anders Øvrebø has also worked on the staff of the weekly newsletter, *Mandag Morgen* in Norway and *Netzeitung* in Germany.

Tony Blair demands it, Reuters wants it, the Spokane Spokesman-Review practices some of it and scholars try to define it – media accountability.

The need for media accountability was formulated more than 100 years ago and made manifest with codes of ethics and “bureaus of accuracy”. The Hutchins Commission used the concept in 1947 as a way to avoid government prescription of media content. The practice of media accountability has since been fueled by market expansion, looser regulation of public service and a technological facilitation of media/public interaction.

In March 2007 these issues were discussed in a two-day international conference at the School of Communication and Design, University of Kalmar, Sweden. Scholars gave overviews of Media Accountability Systems (MAS), media journalism, media blogs and the effects of market-driven journalism on media accountability. Practitioners presented cases dealing with victims of the media in the United Kingdom, news ombudsmen and media critique in Scandinavia, and transparency in Spokane, Washington, USA.

To the presentations from Kalmar the conference-initiator Torbjörn von Krogh has added a background chapter on the origins and rise of media accountability and some thoughts on its future. He also offers a new working definition of media accountability, building on the work of European and North American scholars:

Media accountability is the interactive process by which media organizations may be expected or obliged to render an account (and sometimes a correction and/or excuse) of their activities to their constituents. The values and relative strength of the constituents vary over time and are affected by media systems and media technologies.

Contributors

Scholars: Claude-Jean Bertrand, Susanne Fengler, Gordon S. Jackson and John H. McManus.

Practitioners: Terje Angelshaug, Mike Jempson, Martin Jönsson, Åke Pettersson, Steven A. Smith, Olav Anders Øvrebø

Editor (and practitioner/scholar): Torbjörn von Krogh

NORDICOM

Nordic Information Center for Media and Communication Research

University of Gothenburg

Box 713, SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden

Telephone +46 31 786 00 00

Fax +46 31 786 46 55

www.nordicom.gu.se

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