

**Ніко Дрок,**  
професор Дослідницького Центру медіа  
та громадянського суспільства  
Віндесхеймського університету прикладних наук  
(Віндесхейм, Нідерланди),

**Niko Drok,**  
Professor Media & Civil Society Media Research Centre,  
Windesheim University of Applied Sciences  
(Netherlands),  
ORCID iD 0000-0001-8494-4540  
Email: n.drok@windesheim.nl

УДК 070:316.77]:077.5

DOI <https://doi.org/10.28925/2524-2644.2023.151>

## ПРОФЕСІЙНА ЖУРНАЛІСТИКА В ЧАСИ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖ

---

## PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

**АНОТАЦІЯ.** Стаття присвячена аналізу сучасного стану професійної журналістики в епоху розквіту соціальних мереж. Автор підкреслює, що контекст, у якому працює професійна журналістика, багато в чому змінився у XXI столітті. Ці зміни різноманітні й іноді суперечливі, але їх можна підсумувати як перехід від середовища масової інформації до середовища мережі.

У статті описано чотири основні сценарії розвитку та співіснування соціальних мереж і професійної журналістики. Існує сценарій синтезу, додатковий сценарій, сценарій витіснення та сценарій заміни. Автор зазначив, що реалізація найімовірнішого сценарію залежить від багатьох факторів. Окремо наголошено на проблемах і сильних сторонах соціальних мереж.

У статті представлено класичну схему журналістської роботи. Її основними компонентами є конкретний процес, продукт, платформа та аудиторія.

Автор робить висновок, що професійна журналістика, безперечно, має майбутнє в епоху соціальних мереж. Це майбутнє значною мірою залежить від того, наскільки журналістика та журналістська освіта зможуть адаптуватися до нового цифрового середовища. Головне, що потрібно – це журналістика, яка пропонує перспективу, готова співпрацювати з громадськістю та слухати її. Це було б чудовою відповіддю на тенденцію, згідно з якою соціальні медіа поступово захоплюють частину того, що раніше було сферою медіа, тобто стислих і швидких новин. Отже, професійна журналістика повинна спеціалізуватися розслідуваннях та більш якісних формах. За професійною журналістикою в епоху соціальних мереж майбутнє.

**Ключові слова:** професійна журналістика, соціальні медіа, класична схема журналістської роботи, нові медіа.

**ABSTRACT.** The article is devoted to analyzing the current state of professional journalism in the era of the flourishing of antisocial networks. The author emphasizes that the context in which professional journalism operates has changed in many respects in the 21st century. These changes are manifold and sometimes contradictory, but they can be summarized as transitioning from a mass media environment to a network environment.

The article describes four main scenarios of the development and coexistence of social networks and professional journalism. There are the synthesis scenario, the supplemental scenario, the supplant scenario, and the substitute scenario. The author said that the implementation of the most probable scenario depends on many factors. The problems and strengths of social media are emphasized separately.

The classical journalistic workflow is presented in the article. Its main components are disclosed in a particular process, product, platform, and public.

The author concludes that professional journalism certainly has a future in the age of social media. This future largely depends on how much journalism and journalism education can adapt to a new digital environment. What is mainly needed is journalism that offers perspective and is willing to cooperate with and listen to the public. That would be an excellent response to the trend that social media is gradually taking over parts of what used to be the domain of news media, concise and fast news. Consequently, professional journalism should specialize in slower and more investigative forms of journalism. There lies the future for professional journalism in the age of social media.

**Keywords:** professional journalism, social media, classical journalistic workflow, new media.

© Niko Drok, 2023

**I**ntroduction. The context in which professional journalism operates has changed in many respects in the 21st century. These changes are manifold and sometimes contradictory, but they can be summarized as a transition from a *mass media* environment to a *network* environment (Drok, 2017). New technology has put an end to the monopoly of the settled news media, in which the journalist was the central gatekeeper. It has enabled the spread of an ongoing series of new (social) media, which have become the main source of news for various groups in society, especially the young (Newman, 2022). At the same time, social media can serve as a vehicle for an increase in ungrounded opinions and unverified information.

The transition to a network society is still underway, but it is clear that the changing environment brings many challenges for 21st-century journalism to the forefront. Will there be room for professional journalism in this rapidly changing news ecology? How to stay of value in an environment where news is abundant and concentrated attention is scarce? How to make sure the public sees the difference between right and wrong information and between reliable and unreliable news sources? How to stay connected with the public? How to stay trustworthy in the years to come? How to adapt in order to survive?

Kovach and Rosenstiel rightfully suggest that we should put more effort into reconsidering and clarifying the societal role of journalism: "Journalism is facing a crisis of survival. And lack of clarity about the purpose of journalism lies at the center of that crisis" (2021, p.xi). The question 'What kind of journalism does our society need at this time in history' has become crucial, but is not so often asked. Journalism is in need of a thorough

reflection on the future of professional journalism in light of the new network environment.

### Scenario's

The main question is how journalism should respond to the ongoing digitalization and – as a consequence – how journalism educators can prepare their students for a world that will fundamentally differ from our world of today. It is impossible to precisely predict the future, but it is our duty to reflect on different possible scenarios and their implications. In this article, I will focus on the relationship between the traditional, established news media ("news media") on the one hand and the new group of internet-related platforms ("social media") on the other. There are several ways in which this relationship can evolve, and therefore, there are various scenarios possible.

Four basic scenarios are:

1. The synthesis-scenario is one in which differences between news media and social media become smaller, and in the end, they merge in such a way that their different characteristics and strengths lead to synergy.

2. The supplemental scenario is one in which news media and social media continue to exist side-by-side in a complementary way. They fulfill different needs; for instance, social media is for expressing oneself, and news media is for understanding news.

3. The supplant scenario is one in which social media takes over parts of what used to be the domain of news media. For instance, short and fast news. It forces news media in the direction of slower and more investigative forms of journalism.

4. The substitute scenario, in which social media eventually takes over most tasks of news media, is driven by the news habits of the new generations of

users and the lack of a business model for in-depth journalism outside niche markets.

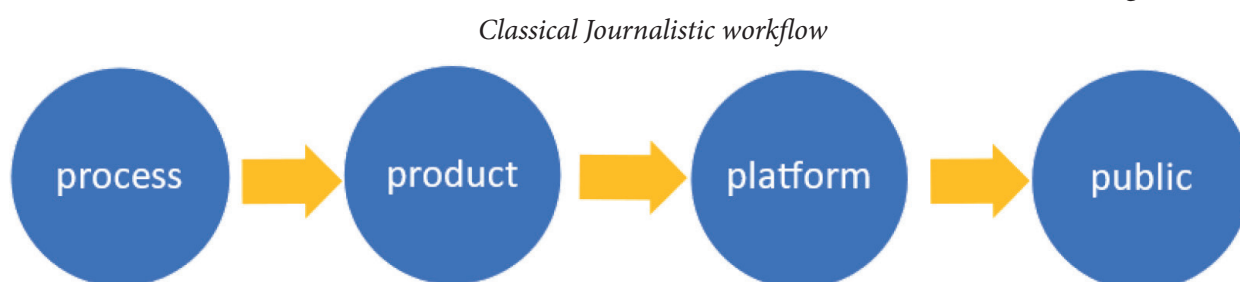
Which scenario will come true depends on many factors. Often, scenarios appear to be self-defeating as new strategies are formulated in an attempt to avoid them from coming true. That is precisely what scenarios are for: to give an idea about what might happen if we do not take any

targeted action. In the end, the goal is to ensure that the best scenario will come true.

### Workflow

In order to get there, we should have a look at some of the most important problems that professional journalism faces. To identify these problems, it is helpful to first deconstruct the professional workflow into four elements (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

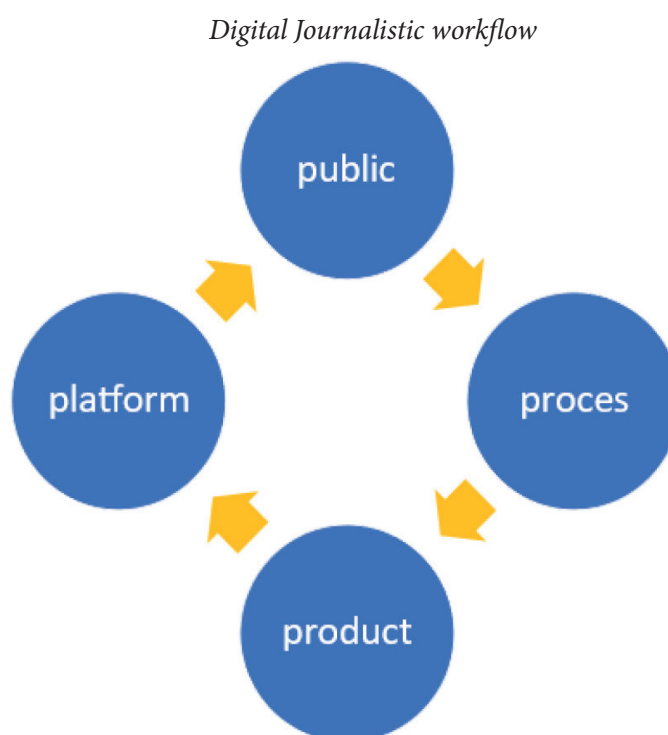


The classical journalistic workflow starts with the process of finding a news topic, choosing an angle, and finding sources. The next step is to make the product – an article, a TV item, a podcast – and then use a platform (print, broadcast) to reach the public. The linear workflow has a clear beginning and

a clear ending. The information that is presented to the public can be seen as the final stage of the best attainable version of the truth. Or, as some believe, as the truth itself.

In the digital era, the journalistic workflow changes (Figure 2).

Figure 2.



The *digital* workflow is not a line but a cycle; it has no clear ending. It is always a work in progress. New information and perspectives keep

coming in. The truth is provisional; a new or more complete truth can arrive at any moment, and the public can play an active role in this process.

**Problems of news media**

On each of the four elements of the cycle, whether classical or digital, the established news media experience rather severe problems (Figure 3).

With regard to the *public*, a major problem has to do with Representation. A growing number of people do not recognize themselves in the news. They regard the news as something that is about and for political, economic, and cultural elites. They do not feel their interests are recognized,

their views are included, and their voices are heard.

With regard to the *process*, a major issue is Reliability. In the rising sea of information, disinformation, and opinions, people find it hard to tell what is true. In many countries, people are experiencing a distance from news media and are losing trust in the authority of professional journalists. The traditional claim of journalists that they are objective messengers of the truth does not seem to work anymore.

**Figure 3.**

*Some major problems for news media*

	NEWS MEDIA Problems
<b>PUBLIC</b>	<b>Representation</b>
<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>Reliability</b>
<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>Relevance</b>
<b>PLATFORM</b>	<b>Reach</b>

With regard to the *product*, a major problem is Relevance. Many people find that the issues they really care about are poorly covered by the news media. Next to that, most of the news is seen as negative, depressing, and simply reproducing or even magnifying problems – instead of trying to help reduce them.

With regard to the platform, a major problem is Reach. In many countries, the circulation of newspapers has gone down dramatically, and so have the figures for watching or listening to television and radio news. Young people, people from lower income classes, and people from minority groups are among those who are largely out of reach, but they do use social media.

**Strengths of social media**

On each of these four elements – public, process, product, platform – social media have specific strengths that clearly contribute to their success.

With regard to the Public and the issue of Representation, an important strength of Social

media is that it gives room to *unheard voices*. People can express themselves about the topics they find interesting; they can share information without interference from gatekeepers about subjects that matter to them.

With regard to the Process and the issue of Reliability, an important strength of Social media is that participation is a key feature. People are not kept at a distance but are part of the process, which enhances feelings of trustworthiness. This does not automatically mean that users of social media trust the input of others, but the feeling of being involved in the process enhances trust.

With regard to the Product and the issue of Relevance, social media connects to what is relevant for various subcultures. The flow of information often is more or less integrated into the flow of communication with relevant others. People can tap into the groups and topics they find important for their lives.

With regard to the Platform and the issue of Reach, social media have the advantage of being free, fast, and fun. They integrate the functions of communication and information, and they are always there on your mobile devices, easy to use and pleasant to use, often with customized information on topics that you have shown interest in before.

**Risks of social media use**

Of course, social media do not only have strengths, but also weaknesses. The use of social media can entail certain risks (Figure 5).

The first risk is that the people with the loudest voice or the most extreme voice can dominate the content on social media. Algorithms often amplify this. Stories with nuances rarely go viral or become trending topics.

The risk of open participation on social media without moderation is that it can open the gate for hate speech and all kinds of harassment – including death threats. It also opens the gate for third parties that deliberately produce false information that is harmful to individuals or society as a whole.

**Figure 4.**

*Some strengths of Social Media*

	NEWS MEDIA Problems	SOCIAL MEDIA Strengths
<b>PUBLIC</b>	Representation	<b>Unheard voices</b>
<b>PROCESS</b>	Reliability	<b>Participation</b>
<b>PRODUCT</b>	Relevance	<b>Own subculture</b>
<b>PLATFORM</b>	Reach	<b>Free, fast, fun</b>

**Figure 5.**

*Risks of Social Media Use*

	NEWS MEDIA Problems	SOCIAL MEDIA Strengths	SOCIAL MEDIA Risks
<b>PUBLIC</b>	Representation	Unheard voices	<b>Loudest voices</b>
<b>PROCESS</b>	Reliability	Participation	<b>Harassment</b>
<b>PRODUCT</b>	Relevance	Own subculture	<b>Filter bubble</b>
<b>PLATFORM</b>	Reach	Free, fast, fun	<b>Privacy</b>

The risk of a too strong focus on information about your own subculture is that you are not confronted with information that can serve as a corrective for one-sided or false information: the so-called filter bubble. The mechanism behind customization can amplify this process and contribute to a society where people do not share a common idea about the truth and seem to live in parallel universes.

The risk of getting everything for free can be a loss of privacy, as the social media business model is largely built on selling attention ('eyeballs') to advertisers or selling detailed user information to third parties. The user has become the product, not the information.

**Towards new points of attention**

In comparison to the established news media, the advantages of social media are huge. But so are the risks. With regard to the future of journalism and

journalism education in the age of social media, the challenge is to find ways to incorporate the strengths of social media in professional journalism while avoiding the risks.

There are no simple recipes for this, but established news media and professional journalism can learn from social media. It would be a good start to put more emphasis on elements of a strategy that might help to realize the Supplement or Supplant scenario (Figure 6).

With regard to the *public*, the keyword is *Connection*. News media should invest time and money in building a broader relationship with their audience. It should be more than just an economic producer-consumer relationship. It should also be a social relationship that makes people feel that they are members and not just buyers. News media should make it clear that they care about a connection with their audience.

**Slide 6.**

*What news media should emphasize more*

	<b>NEWS MEDIA Problems</b>	<b>SOCIAL MEDIA Strengths</b>	<b>SOCIAL MEDIA Risks</b>	<b>NEWS MEDIA More Emphasis</b>
<b>PUBLIC</b>	Representation	Unheard voices	Loudest voices	<b>Connection</b>
<b>PROCESS</b>	Reliability	Participation	Harassment	<b>Cooperation</b>
<b>PRODUCT</b>	Relevance	Own subculture	Filter bubble	<b>Context</b>
<b>PLATFORM</b>	Reach	Free, fast, fun	Privacy	<b>Cross-media</b>

With regard to the process, the keyword is Cooperation: news media should tighten the gap by engaging the public more actively in the journalistic process at various stages while choosing the news topics, choosing an angle, choosing sources, and choosing how to present stories. Next to that, news media can often be more open about and accountable for the professional choices that were made during the process.

With regard to the platform, the keyword is Cross-media: news media should look beyond the still-existing walls between broadcast and

print and divide relevant content over a variety of media in the most attractive and effective way. Obviously, such a strategy should include social media.

Probably the most important challenge has to do with the product. Here, the keyword is Context. News media should invest a larger part of their time and money in making things that matter in society relevant for various groups of users. This includes:

- giving insight into the meaning and consequences of the news for these groups,



- giving perspective: not just summing up problems, but also giving information about directions for solutions
- giving perspectives: acknowledging that reality is not black and white but contains many shades of grey and even many colors. Offering multiple perspectives makes stories more interesting and reliable.

**Conclusion.** There certainly is a future for professional journalism in the age of social media. What this future looks like will largely depend on the extent to which journalism and journalism education will be able to adapt to a new digital environment. The change that is needed goes much further than only adopting new platforms; it requires another conception of the public, other ways of organizing the process, and another kind of product. It starts by learning from the strengths of social media. These strengths offer – at least partial – solutions for four essential problems that news media encounter: lack of representation, reliability, relevance, and reach.

What is mostly needed is journalism that offers perspective, that offers perspectives, and that is willing to cooperate with and listen to the public. That would be a good response to the trend that social media gradually take over parts of what used to be the domain of news media, especially short and fast news. As a consequence, professional journalism should specialize in slower and more investigative forms of journalism. There lies the future for professional journalism in the age of social media.

### **References**

1. Drok, N. (2017). Mastery of Journalism innovations. In Rupa, V. (ed) Themes and Critical Debates in Contemporary Journalism (pp. 105-124). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
2. Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2021). The Elements of Journalism, Revised and updated 4th edition. New York: Crown.
3. Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C. T., Nielsen, R. K. (2022). Digital
4. News Report 2021. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

*Надіслано до редакції: 11.06.2023 р.*