

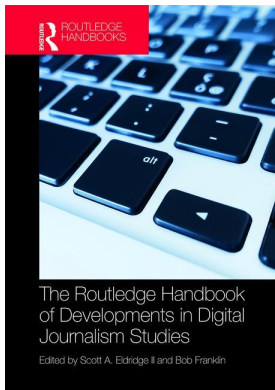
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## **The Routledge Handbook of Developments in Digital Journalism Studies**

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### **The Entrepreneurial Journalist**

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# 5

## THE ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNALIST

*Tamara Witschge and Frank Harbers*

### Introduction

While journalism has for a long while been understood as a practice thoroughly embedded in classic institutional structures, exemplified by the newsroom, we are currently witnessing a significant shift in journalism education, critique, and practice in which the future of journalism is envisaged to (also) lie in journalistic start-ups (see: Deuze and Witschge, 2017). In this chapter we investigate the ways that journalistic innovators discuss their work, especially how they position themselves in the field and vis-à-vis their ‘institutional’ counterparts. To gain insight into the self-understanding of entrepreneurial journalists and how they differentiate their work from traditional news outlets, we examine the discourses and practices of recent start-ups: *Mediapart* (France), *De Correspondent* (the Netherlands), and *Krautreporter* (Germany). These three outlets each argue they break with traditional ways of doing journalism. They are all online-only players that emphasize the importance of a digital platform and have strong discourses concerning what is ‘good’ journalism. These three start-ups feature prominently in ongoing debates about journalism in the digital age, and they are financially successful or at least sustainable. As such, they are highly informative in exploring the practice and understanding of emerging forms of journalism.

In this chapter, we first discuss the rise of the entrepreneur in the field of journalism, highlighting the main themes in the literature on entrepreneurial journalism. We then consider the methodological implications of changes in the field and discuss methods of data collection and analysis employed for this particular research, and in the final section we detail findings. After considering issues relating to the start-ups’ economic context, we focus on three themes that emerge from the data:

- 1 The self-understanding of these digital players: what do they consider journalism to be?
- 2 Journalism’s role in society: what do they deem journalism to be for?
- 3 Role of and relation to their audiences: how do they view and relate to their audiences?

Ultimately, this chapter discusses how these start-ups present technology as an integral tool for innovation. These case studies show how different forms of innovation go hand-in-hand: technological and economic innovations are not easily separated from cultural and normative innovations.

## **Journalism and ‘the digital entrepreneur’**

The ways in which journalism is produced, consumed, funded, and monetized have been rapidly expanding. Moreover, the places where journalistic content is produced, and by whom, are increasingly dispersed. Developments in the field have also shaped academic, societal, and professional understandings of journalism. Whereas journalism has long been understood as a practice thoroughly embedded in institutional structures, increasingly the future of journalism is anticipated to lie in journalistic start-ups, in line with a broader trend to see entrepreneurialism as a solution to societal problems (Audretsch (2009), for example, speaks of the ‘entrepreneurial society’). Start-ups abound (for a review of the landscape in Europe, see Bruno and Kleis Nielsen, 2012; for Australia, see Simons, 2013; for some U.S. cases, see Schaffer, 2010 and Coates Nee, 2014); courses and degrees in entrepreneurial journalism have been developed (Vázquez Schaich and Klein, 2013; Mensing and Ryfe, 2013); and more and more academic attention is devoted to this area (Anderson, 2014; Vos and Singer, 2016). Emphasizing individual traits, skills, and mind-sets, the future of journalism is envisaged in the form of journalists who (alone or in collaboration) are able to monetize content in innovative ways, connect to their publics in interactive new formats, grasp opportunities, and respond to (and shape) their environment (see: Briggs, 2012).

As new ways of defining and producing journalism affect the type of news and current affairs available in society, it is important to examine changing journalistic work practices on a micro-level and map their implications on a wider scale. The current journalistic landscape is characterized by a precariousness of work (Deuze, 2008), where flexible working, freelancing, and the merging of personal and professional spaces (and time) have become increasingly common. In The Netherlands, for instance, at least half of all journalists – approximately 7,000 people – work this way (Vinken and IJdens, 2013). Moreover, entrepreneurial journalism involves an increasingly hybrid set of roles. Journalists do not ‘simply’ produce the news but have to conduct part or all of the other aspects of the (economic) process as well, such as monetizing content; identifying target audiences; defining niche markets; designing websites optimally; and maintaining networks of sources and funders.

With the blurring of roles in journalism, the combining of professions (such as journalistic and marketing work), and the range of actors that work outside of traditional journalistic institutions (as freelancers, in start-ups, or as nonpaid workers), we need to consider “how the professional identity of journalists is discursively constructed” (Olausson, 2017: 1) and how the activities and self-understanding inform each other. Caroline Fisher, for instance, researched how journalists, after working as political media advisers, “perceived and managed issues of conflict of interest” (2015: 376). Similarly, Lia-Paschalia Spyridou et al. (2013: 79), quoting Thomas Hanitzsch’s definition of a journalist, highlight that journalistic culture “becomes manifest in the way journalists think and act”. Journalistic self-understanding and practice are intricately related and mutually constitutive (see: Witschge and Harbers, 2018).

We see that the professional status of journalism, which has been a long-standing issue, and the questions concerning what is ‘proper’ journalism and what sets journalists apart have become ever more pressing with the entry of new producers to the field – be they semi-professional amateurs (Nicey, 2016), activists (Breindl, 2016), sources (Carlson, 2016), or citizen witnesses (Allan, 2016). Moreover, the many different work settings and the increasingly ‘liquid’ nature of work practices (Deuze, 2008) also pose challenges for the conceptualization of journalistic work, not just for who is a journalist. At the same time, we see that journalists self-identify strongly with the ‘profession’, referring to journalism as their ‘calling’, ‘duty’ or ‘moral obligation’ (Witschge, 2013). We focus here on how start-up journalists operating in a digital environment talk about how they conceive and practice journalism and what they judge to be the aims and functions of journalism. The selected new forms of journalism show us in particular how they strongly invest in the debate about what is ‘proper’ journalism and what sets them apart from their competitors.

## Exploring digital entrepreneurial journalism as practice and discourse

We analyze three cases that express their professional ideology in opposition to their traditional counterparts (Wagemans et al., 2016; Harbers, 2016). They present interesting cases of entrepreneurial journalism as they are sustainable and even successful in monetary terms, and they are, in terms of cultural capital, acknowledged as important and innovative new players that push the boundaries of journalism further (van der Valk, 2016; Wirtschaftsplan Krautreporter).<sup>1</sup>

*Mediapart* is the oldest of these, founded in 2008 by several experienced and influential journalists. At their inception, their business model – completely rejecting the sale of advertisement space as a revenue stream – was unique and has proved successful (Wagemans et al., 2016). *De Correspondent* (established in 2013) and *Krautreporter* (in 2014) were similarly founded by senior and well-regarded journalists with the aim of reinvigorating quality journalism and funding it through subscriptions.

The data used in this chapter stem from two different projects that consider start-up culture in a comparative perspective: the research project “Beyond Journalism”, led by Mark Deuze and Tamara Witschge, and the project “Entrepreneurship at Work”, led by Tamara Witschge.<sup>2</sup> As part of these projects, interviews have been conducted with freelance journalists and start-up journalists, as well as designers and web developers at the journalistic start-ups. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, focusing on the everyday practices, routines, and experiences of these journalists in relation to their understanding of journalism and its societal role.

For this chapter, we draw from interviews with 10 journalists, one designer and one web developer at *Mediapart*, *De Correspondent*, and *Krautreporter*, conducted between 2014 and 2017. Two interviews with journalists and editors at *De Correspondent* were conducted by Shermin Chavoushi in 2015. One interview with a designer at *Momkai* (the digital design agency responsible for the design and development of the digital platform of *De Correspondent*) was conducted by Frank Harbers in 2017. Six interviews with journalists were conducted by Andrea Wagemans at *Mediapart* in 2014. At *Krautreporter*, two journalists and one web developer were interviewed by Frank Harbers in 2017.

To evaluate the view that proposes entrepreneurial journalism as the future of journalism, we provide a comprehensive empirical examination of the shifting understanding of journalism and how entrepreneurial journalists perceive their role in society and their relationship with the audience. To this end, we adopt a practice theory approach (Couldry, 2012; Bräuchler and Postill, 2010; Schatzki, 2001) to investigate the emerging definitions of entrepreneurial journalism and how these relate to traditional conceptualizations. With new entrants to the field, the focus both in journalism practice and theory has been on the boundary work undertaken to protect and gauge the conceptualization of who is a journalist (see: Carlson and Lewis, 2015). In this chapter, we focus on the ways in which the selected start-up journalists define journalism, how they view the role that journalism plays in society, and how they view their relationship with audiences. We conducted a qualitative analysis of the material, discussed later.

### The entrepreneurial reconceptualization of good journalism

In a chapter on journalistic entrepreneurship, one might anticipate the business element to be core: one of the main questions that journalism as a whole is faced with is a crisis of the economic model (Picard, 2014). In light of the decreasing revenues from advertising and decreasing audience numbers, this aspect seems to be one of the most pressing issues (see Phillips and Witschge, 2012). What is of interest in the cases we focus on in this paper is, though all of them have an alternative business model, the economic drive is only a ‘background theme’, and the focus is much more on the ideological rather than the commercial logic that is underlying their start-up.

They are critical of mainstream models of income generation, rooted in attracting a large audience and maximizing advertisement revenues. They argue that, especially in a digital age, this business model affects the journalistic quality of legacy media and online journalistic platforms. This concern is illustrated by a senior journalist at *Mediapart*:

This industrial revolution [. . .] promotes an economic model that destroys the value of the information model and drives on entertainment. It is, so to say, a form of free publicity aimed at the audience, for which one needs page views and clicks. [. . .] The audience, meaning the anonymous masses, demand content that is faster, more superficial, reaching more people, creating more buzz, and therefore [this is] a model of entertainment for me.

(Senior journalist A, *Mediapart*, 2014)<sup>3</sup>

This resistance to the mainstream models of business generation translates into the business models adopted by the start-ups: they do not host advertising on their platforms. When the interviewees talk about this, they use rather passionate, at times emotional language, stating they regard advertisements as an infraction of their editorial independence and a perverse incentive for valuing circulation above journalistic quality.

Denouncing the legacy business models does not, however, mean that income generation is not an issue for these start-ups. The interviewees are clearly aware of the economic context within which they operate and appreciate the need for financial sustainability. But they stress that this is not a goal in itself and, as becomes clear in the earlier quote, they are critical of what they consider acceptable models of income generation. They regard the economic interests of their start-ups mostly as a precondition to their journalistic goals. The entrepreneurial context of the start-up, then, is primarily seen as a necessary hurdle to be overcome, one that facilitates, but more often restricts, their journalistic practice:

We can execute one tenth of all the ideas we have. [. . .] We are only a small club, we don't have expertise on every issue, I am super-busy and [name of colleague] has to do ten things at the same time. A lot of it remains discussing it and then hoping something will come of it, for we cannot do more yet. But the larger we become, the more we will eventually be able to do.

(Senior editor A, *De Correspondent*, 2015)

As this quote illustrates, the economic context is certainly on the agenda of these journalists. But the focus in their responses is almost invariably on the journalistic aspects of the endeavor rather than the entrepreneurial. In contrast to other areas of entrepreneurship, journalistic start-ups do not focus primarily on profitability. As with *social entrepreneurship* (cf. Dacin et al., 2011), journalistic start-up owners and employees discuss first and foremost the importance of the social cause. And if they do discuss economic interests, it is how they impede or facilitate reaching the social objective of the start-up.

Such a discourse has a function: these start-ups differentiate themselves from established players precisely on the level of the business model. As such, the remarks by journalists about economic interests reflect how they position themselves in the field and create commercial value for these actors (see: Wagemans et al., 2016). Though *De Correspondent* and *Krautreporter* can be considered sustainable endeavors, they are not as financially successful yet as *Mediapart*. *Krautreporter* especially is exploring its economic model, like many start-ups in journalism (Bruno and Kleis Nielsen, 2012).

Interview discourses on the types of journalistic aims they wish to serve through their start-up provide us with insights into the ideological positioning, the definitions of journalism, and

the roles that they see for themselves in society and vis-à-vis their audiences. We discuss these here in turn.

### *Defining 'good' journalism*

As we outline earlier, entrepreneurial journalists that we interviewed emphasized the journalistic aspects of their start-up rather than the entrepreneurial. Focusing on what journalism is or, even more so, what it should be, the start-up journalists brand themselves as much-needed alternatives to the established news media, claiming that they are safeguarding quality journalism within the digital environment of twenty-first-century journalism (see also Singer, 2015). They not only reject the business model of legacy media but also the speed and superficiality of coverage they see as accompanying trends of that business model. In discussing what sets them apart from traditional players, they highlight the following key elements: in-depth reporting, both in terms of research and output, as well as editorial autonomy, measured in terms of financial ties and independence of the news agenda.

The entrepreneurial journalists at all three start-ups stress the importance of thorough reporting. Interestingly, while technology has been argued to further certain types of news consumption (Witschge, 2012), the interviewees explicitly reject this commonly held idea. They argue that the affordances of the internet do not necessarily entail a mode of news consumption in which people are only willing to read short articles that are free of charge. They proffer their start-ups as showcases that prove the possibility of creating a sustainable form of online journalism that provides in-depth reporting for which people are willing to pay. The journalists attach great importance both to the actual time spent on researching as well as the length of the publication, as this quote by a journalist at *Krautreporter* illustrates:

The main problem was not what the others [online journalists] did, but what they did not do. They didn't spend time on big research, they didn't spend time on long explanatory pieces to make sure that their readers understand the world, they didn't spend time to make sure that their protagonists see themselves in what they write. And they didn't spend time to level the playing field between themselves and their readers, and this resulted in stories that were good, or that made sense in an economic way, because they [generated] traffic and you could sell ads against these stories. But they were not necessarily stories that are in the readers' interest.

*(Journalist, Krautreporter, 2017)*

Not only do the journalists consider there is an interest and willingness to consume long-form journalism, but they also believe that audiences are willing to pay for that. A journalist at *Krautreporter* (2017) said, "I just think that the journalism we do [in-depth stories] is something people want and are ready to pay for".

In this light, we see that start-ups do not want to rely on advertisements for their income. They all stress the value of what they deem as independent reporting. Where this is often seen as free from government input, the start-up journalists in this sample refer to both political ties and financial dependencies. As a senior journalist at *Mediapart* puts it:

I think that the press should not be dependent on anything else than citizens' right to know. To do that properly, I think the ideal is to only exist for your readership. [. . .] And therefore, we at *Mediapart* don't have any advertising, we refuse all state

subsidization and we don't have financial supporters that are interested in buying influence. So we have all the means to be genuinely independent.

*(Senior journalist A, Mediapart, 2014)*

The journalists of all three outlets emphasize that they are not as strongly tied to the institutional news agenda and argue that they have much more freedom to choose what to write and to delve into the issues they deem important. Journalists at *Krautreporter* and *De Correspondent* stress that they resist the traditional news logic in terms of what is reported, as in their eyes this news logic has resulted in an overemphasis on incidents and extraordinary events, which gives a distorted image of the world. A senior editor (A) at *De Correspondent* claimed (2015), "It is more about showing how the world works instead of being about the spectacular exceptions in the world".

In this aim to understand how the world works, the audience is very much involved in the journalists' view: the start-ups envisage journalism as a joint search by the reporter and reader for information and understanding about what is going on in the world (see the section 'Engaging Audiences'). As such, being transparent about the way they gather, connect, and interpret information is one of the identifying elements of this form of journalism (see also Meier and Reimer, 2011). A journalist at *Krautreporter* (2017) describes journalism as a journey in which journalists explore and gradually gain insight about a certain issue through input from and interaction with their audiences.

This shows how these journalists do not necessarily uphold the professional values of the objectivity regime (Harbers, 2014): the start-up journalists reject coverage that heralds detachment and neutrality, saying they want to be open about the fact that they select and make choices in the reporting process that depend on their views on the world:

I think . . . it is important to be open about the choices you make and not pretend to show reality objectively, but you show that the way in which you look at the world is decisive in what you convey and not.

*(Senior editor B, De Correspondent, 2015)*

We see the interviewees are actively redefining the values of journalism. At the same time, they are rather reflective about this and do not identify their journalism practice as the sole new standard for quality journalism. The entrepreneurial journalists show they are aware of the phase of exploration and testing they are in and do not claim to have definite answers – in terms of business model or journalistic approach. They are attempting to outline an alternative but view this as work-in-progress. Moreover, the freedom to experiment with new ways of doing journalism seems central here: they are not so much trying to outline a definite new form as trying to break away from traditional ideas about how journalism is understood and practiced:

At *De Correspondent* we try to leave behind the idea that our correspondents need to live up to certain expectations. If we [do things differently], does that mean we still are a legitimate medium? We need to let go of such conventions. We are exactly the medium we can be. We don't need to live up to a specific image. Every day we can reinvent ourselves.

*(Senior editor B, De Correspondent, 2015)*

In general, the question remains concerning the extent to which these entrepreneurial journalists are radically altering journalism practice or are rather reviving the traditional professional values

within an online environment. A closer look at what they consider as setting themselves apart from legacy media can be seen as a confirmation of traditional values. The interviewees seem to effortlessly marry time-honored views on journalism with new, alternative, professional values and practices.

We can date back the notion of editorial independence that these entrepreneurial journalists champion to the period that saw the waning of the partisan press in the nineteenth century (Broersma, 2007), though at the same time they apply this norm in a different way. In the period of high modernism in journalism (Hallin, 1992), independence was also a core value, but with a diverging interpretation: in contrast to the views of the entrepreneurs in our sample, it was not considered to conflict with a profit-oriented business model rooted in the sale of advertising. It is important to note the importance of national context here: the investigative journalism of *Mediapart* seems to fit with core conceptualizations of journalism, but this form has never been common in the context of France (Harbers, 2014). So in this case returning to traditional values is actually innovative and part of the niche that this start-up is carving out, diverging from what is considered common practice for legacy media.

### ***What is journalism for?***

The blending of traditional values and new ideological conceptualizations of journalism becomes apparent not only in the definition of what constitutes (good) journalism but also comes to the fore in the discourse about what journalism is for. Again, journalists combine a seemingly conservative understanding of the societal role of journalism – such as performing a watchdog function – with those that can be said to be more unconventional – such as more activist aims of impacting on public views more directly. We consider these here in turn, but let us emphasize that though they may seem ‘contradictory’, these discourses are closely connected, as both describe the way journalism has an impact on society (Bro, 2008). They both allow journalists to give meaning to what they do and to draw boundaries around that work.

One of the traditional values entrepreneurial journalists hold dear is in-depth research and verification of issues that are in the public interest. A senior journalist at *Mediapart* maintains that *Mediapart* is defending “the tradition of modernity”, and echoes Kovach and Rosenstiel’s *The Elements of Journalism* (2001) when he describes what journalism is for:

To publish information in the public interest so that citizens are free and autonomous in their choices. The first obligation is to the truth, the first loyalty is to public opinion and the primary discipline is verification.

*(Senior journalist A, Mediapart, 2014)*

In a similar vein, entrepreneurial journalists all relate to the notion of journalism as society’s watchdog when envisioning journalism’s function in society. The journalists at *Mediapart* present this as the core task of journalism and, referencing their economic and political independence, state:

The journalist has almost become the only person without an agenda. No political agenda, no economic agenda. I won’t say [journalism] is the fourth estate, but [a journalist] is the person who will write down what hurts.

*(Senior journalist B, Mediapart, 2017)*

One of the journalists of *Mediapart* even refers to the American investigative reporters Woodward and Bernstein who brought the Watergate scandal to light in explaining how he works.



This reinforces a certain type of conceptualization of journalism's role in society, which squarely couples journalism to democracy (McNair, 2000). Such an understanding of journalism's role has been dominant in Western democracies (Nerone, 2013) and can serve to limit the diversity of both the discourses and practices of journalism (see Deuze and Witschge, 2017).

We do see, however, that the entrepreneurial journalists in our sample do not simply regurgitate the discourse that ties journalism to democracy but also stretch and perhaps breach this 'conventional' understanding. For instance, the journalists from *Krautreporter* and *De Correspondent* see journalists as watchdogs but conceive this notion in a broader sense. They not only aim to hold authorities in check but also to provide insight in broader societal structures (such as financial systems) that affect our day-to-day lives. As such, their understanding goes beyond providing the journalistic 'what, who, where, when, and why' to unveil wrongdoings and focus on underlying principles that are not as manifest. They stress the importance of putting world events in context and helping citizens understand how certain aspects of society work on a structural level.

Moreover, what these journalists aim for is different from the traditional conceptualization of journalism. We further discuss how these journalists relate to their audience in the next section, but it is notable that here, too, they diverge from conventional understanding in that they attribute to the audience a more active role. In doing that, they also allocate themselves a different task: to empower the audience by providing them with the necessarily tools to hold power to account.

So this is definitely a role of journalists, controlling the powerful, but the question is how we do it? Do we do it by really smart, investigative, hardworking, muckraking journalism? Or do we do it by making sure the public is informed? To give the public the tools to control the powerful themselves? And I see myself more as being in the second camp. So I do love good investigative stories, but I don't think it's the main role journalism should be playing. I think it's more important to make sure that the citizens of a country are able to understand what is happening.

(*Journalist, Krautreporter, 2017*)

This is not only about carving out a niche or identity for themselves (this is often seen as the core challenge for entrepreneurs in the field (Briggs, 2012)). Entrepreneurial journalists also aim to change the wider understanding of journalism by their practice. Entrepreneurial journalists are engaged professionals, convinced of the necessity of journalism as a critical voice in society. This means keeping track of politics and business and making people aware that traditional journalism is failing to provide what society needs. In this sense, they feel a responsibility to reflect critically on journalism and endeavor to show an alternative. As a senior editor at *Mediapart* says:

So, at the core of *Mediapart* is investigative reporting and its subsequent editorial positions regarding the reporting, which are radically different from other French media.

This has indirectly demystified the persistent conformism of the French press.

(*Senior editor, Mediapart, 2014*)

Journalists do not only ascribe a different role to the audience in the constellation of journalist/audience/society, but also to themselves. They call for a more involved type of journalism in a number of ways, including calling for what has been dubbed by some 'constructive journalism' (McIntyre, 2015): journalism should not only report society's problems but also possible solutions. Especially at *De Correspondent* we see this understanding highlighted; as a senior editor puts it: "So, what is our task? Maybe it is outlining new directions in society" (2015).

Extending the role of journalism, all of these entrepreneurs strive toward making an impact in society, signaling an understanding of their relationship to their audience. Whether it is by

uncovering wrongs in society, offering insight in how society works by researching and contextualizing events and issues, or discussing and promoting certain solutions, the interviewees strive to make a positive impact on society. Journalism's role in this view is 'impacting' rather than 'informing': "It is our task to breach the wall of indifference" (Senior journalist A, *Mediapart*, 2014). The interviewees explicitly challenge the view of journalism as confined to 'informing', as this quote illustrates:

To inform lacks several things that can make journalism relevant. It lacks the interaction with your audience, the assistance in situating issues – interpretation, involvement – why it is important.

(Senior editor A, *De Correspondent*, 2015)

Finding new ways to connect to the audience is therefore a core challenge for these start-ups, and their relation to audiences lies at the heart of their journalistic conceptions.

### ***Engaging audiences***

As we have shown, entrepreneurial journalists, in conceptualizing journalism's role in society, aspire to activate and transform audiences. If we look more closely at how they see their relationship with audiences, we see engagement relates not only to the end state of journalism but is central in the whole process. To some extent this is a commercially inspired aim, as journalists no longer assume audience loyalty amidst an increasingly competitive field:

The time that it was self-evident that the public came to you, simply because they read that particular medium is fading. [. . .] There is no longer an 'I read everything this particular medium serves me.' No, for every article and for every topic and every fascination you have, you need to prove you deserve someone's attention.

(Senior editor A, *De Correspondent*, 2015)

Allowing the audience an active role in the journalistic process is not simply about the lofty ideal of audience empowerment, it also shines through in the journalists' motivation to regain trust. At a time when trust in journalism is not always self-evident (Broersma and Peters, 2013), the interviewees stress the need to find new ways to win the trust of the public, and one of their answers lies in reinventing their relation to the audience.

As part of the way in which they imagine the active audience, the interviewees state that audiences now demand insight and a say in the journalistic process (including the beliefs and values of the producer of a story) and a place for debate. To the journalist, trust is work-in-progress that needs to be actively maintained, where individual journalists become much more important; they need to actively build their own personal brand, and can no longer rely on the institution for authority (cf. Meier and Reimer, 2011). The "large network of members" needs to be involved and kept in the loop at all stages of the journalistic process, as a senior editor (B) at *De Correspondent* argues (2015). Or as this *Krautreporter* journalist explains:

Journalists need to develop a new relationship with their readers. [. . .] It's like a chain. You start with that they first see you on social media, they see a picture of you in a Facebook post by you and they say 'Oh, who is this guy, this journalist' and they read your stuff. And then you take them with you when they read your articles and subscribe to a newsletter and then they follow you how you develop your stories.

(Journalist, *Krautreporter*, 2017)

The conceptualization of the audience as active, however, stems not only from an instrumental view (to attract and maintain audiences). The aspiration to let audiences participate also seems to be inspired by a more idealistic view of what the contribution of the audience could be:

What's also something special about *De Correspondent* is that we are in constant conversation with our readers. The moment that our healthcare correspondent put out a request it yielded a lot of suggestions. Those suggestions do not come from other journalists but from people out doing real things in the real world. Ultimately, that is much more valuable than journalists sharing what they have done amongst themselves.

*(Senior editor B, De Correspondent, 2015)*

We could argue that crowdsourcing in the broadest sense of the term plays an important part in the way these journalists envisage journalism. The audience is portrayed as a vast and still untapped reservoir of ideas, expertise, experiences, and perspectives, which, if included properly, can be engaged to improve their journalism at every step in the process.

### **The digital beyond technology**

In this chapter we have explored the ways in which entrepreneurial journalists, who almost exclusively publish via digital platforms, understand and practice journalism. Technology plays a central role in start-up culture. What we would like to consider in this final reflection is where the concept of the 'digital' extends beyond the technological aspect. We could argue that the 'digital' in the emerging forms of journalism has become a symbol of a range of economic, cultural, and social changes at the heart of shifts in the field. Technology is part of the self-understanding of start-ups in journalism in a way that surpasses the tools of production and distribution that technologies denote at first glance.

In this final section we consider how entrepreneurial journalists stretch our understanding of the kinds of journalism that are possible through the affordances of technology. In this, they can be seen as true innovators, or pioneers, as they make visible other types of using technology than the mainstream use in journalism. When we consider 'affordances' of technology not simply as synonymous with features of technology but rather a "process-oriented, socio-technical definition of affordance" (Nagy and Neff, 2015: 1), we can start to understand these start-ups as instrumental in the way technologies and their affordances for journalism are imagined in the field.

To some extent, entrepreneurial journalists adopt the same type of 'deterministic' discourse their traditional counterparts do (see: Witschge, 2012). The internet and digital technologies are seen as important drivers behind the changes in journalism:

It is an ecosystem that is entirely different; in that sense, the digital revolution has radically changed the conditions for producing and disseminating information. From that perspective, I believe it has an impact that for me has the same importance as the invention of the printing press, because the producers are not only professionals anymore and the distribution is horizontal.

*(Senior journalist A, Mediapart, 2014)*

At the same time, and as much of this analysis shows, these start-ups actively use technology to create new ways of doing journalism online. As pointed out, they do not concur with the popular notion that online journalism is for short and fast output: they deliberately produce long-form, investigative pieces. Moreover, where journalism has found it extremely difficult to counter the idea that "news is for free" (see also Chyi and Yang, 2009; Chyi and Tenenboim, this volume,

Chapter 12), these players have developed innovative revenue models. In particular, *Mediapart*, which was deemed an unrealistic endeavor at the time of launching the start-up, has been successful in monetizing its journalistic output (Wagemans et al., 2016).

Last, and perhaps most important, the journalists seem to be true to their entrepreneurial nature in viewing the digital environment as a dynamic place to experiment with new forms of coverage. As a senior journalist at *Mediapart* claims: “We are, I think, the laboratory of what can be the new press of the 21st century” (Senior journalist A, *Mediapart*, 2014). As we outlined earlier, these journalists consider journalism in a state of flux, and collaborations with non-journalists, such as web developers or designers, are at the core of their start-ups, which furthers innovation.

We could argue that technology becomes more of a discursive or even ideological tool rather than a mere technical tool. Journalists interviewed actively contribute to defining ‘good’ journalism, what journalism is for, and what the role of the audience is in this, and at the heart of this reconceptualization of journalism we find technology. In this way they contribute to our understanding of the affordances of journalism, of technology, and of the relation to the audience. The cases analyzed in this chapter illustrate that innovation cannot be reduced simply to technology but rather transpires and affects a complex web of cultural, technological, and economic relations.

### Further reading

Entrepreneurial journalism is a topic that has grown relatively quickly in terms of the attention it received, in terms of practice (see Briggs (2012) for a hands-on overview of the different aspects of starting a new journalistic business), in terms of theory (see the special issue of *Journalism Practice* from 2016 (Volume 10(2), edited by Kevin Rafter), and in terms of curriculum at journalism schools (see Anderson, 2014; Vázquez Schaich and Klein, 2013; Mensing and Ryfe, 2013). Vos and Singer (2016) offer an insightful introduction into the current discussion about entrepreneurial journalism, and Deuze and Witschge (2017) discuss how the trend of entrepreneurial journalism fits in with other changes in the journalistic field. There is a growing amount of empirical work conducted exploring the economic sustainability of start-ups: for a review of the landscape in Europe, see Bruno and Kleis Nielsen (2012); for Australia, see Simons (2013); for U.S. cases, see Schaffer (2010) and Coates Nee (2014). Usher (2017) offers a fruitful analysis of the way the innovation of start-ups from both Europe and the US is shaped and limited by traditional conceptions and critiques of journalism. Wagemans et al. (2016) and Harbers (2016) offer in-depth case studies of the discourse and practice of influential journalistic start-ups in France and the Netherlands, respectively.

### Notes

- 1 <http://genossenschaft.krautreporter.de/finanzen>
- 2 The project “Beyond Journalism” was funded by the Reynolds Journalism Institute and ran from 2015–16; the project “Entrepreneurship at Work” runs from 2015–2020 and is funded by NWO (number 276-45-003).
- 3 The interviews with *Mediapart* were conducted in French, with *Krautreporter* in English, and with *De Correspondent* in Dutch. Where relevant, we have translated the quotes used into English.

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