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Provider versus navigator. News values and the journalistic professionalism

Abstract

The text examines the condition of contemporary journalism in the context of professionalization and values. Presenting the analysis of different ways of defining journalism as a profession, the author notes that contemporary journalism operates within two sets of values. Those that are normally associated with the so-called "professional journalism", which are referred to the fractographical pact (mainly constituted by such values as: truth, objectivity and independence). The second set of values is called news values. They are fundamentally different and inconsistent with the norms that are considered constitutive for journalism as a profession. In this situation, journalism as a profession and journalists as its representatives are obliged to perform simultaneously two, partly at least contradictory, functions the information provider and the navigator who guides his / her recipients through information for him / her for attractive, noteworthy.

Keywords: journalism, professionalism, fractographical pact, ethics, news, news values.

Dostawca informacji versus nawigator? News values i dziennikarski profesjonalizm

Streszczenie

Tekst odnosi się do kondycji współczesnego dziennikarstwa w kontekście procesów profesjonalizacji oraz kategorii wartości. Prezentując analizę różnych sposóbów definiowania dziennikarstwa jako profesji, autorka zauważa, że współczesne dziennikarstwo funkcjonuje w ramach dwóch zespołów wartości. Tych, które standardowo wiązane są z tak zwanym profesjonalnym dziennikarstwem, a które są określane mianem paktu faktograficznego (konstytuowanego głównie przez takie wartości jak: prawda, obiektywizm i niezależność). Drugi zespół wartości określa się mianem news values. Są one zasadniczo odmienne i częściowo sprzeczne z tymi, które są uznawane za konstytutywne dla dziennikarstwa jako profesji. W tej sytuacji dziennikarstwo jako profesja oraz dziennikarze jako jej przedstawiciele systemowo są zobowiązani do realizacji równocześnie dwóch, częściowo przynajmniej sprzecznych, funkcji: dostarczyciela informacji oraz nawigatora, który prowadzi swoich odbiorców tak, by uznali przekazywane przez niego/nią informacje za atrakcyjne, a zatem warte uwagi.

Słowa kluczowe: dziennikarstwo, profesjonalizm, pakt faktograficzny, etyka, informacja, news values.

Introduction

The category of professionalism in journalism has been a subject of much debate not only in a context of so called crisis of journalism (understood as a departure from established indicators of "good" or "quality" journalism), but also in a discussion about the "true journalism" as opposed to all kinds of activities that are only pretending to be journalism (for example Public Relations and native advertising) or are simply trying to gain some relevance by stating that they are taking over the function of journalists (especially all sort of actions performed in social media).

At the same time the issue of profession and/or professionalization of journalism is constantly problematized both in the journalistic self-description and the theoretical observation – metareflection¹. It is possible that no other profession (be it doctors, lawyers or scientists), is constructed – let me repeat, both in the description and the self-description – by so apparent references to its own rules and by continuous (self)control how these rules are respected and implemented.

The main theoretical statement of the text is built upon these selfand meta-descriptions². I would like to claim that the difficulties with the professionalization project of journalism, and also permanently declared state of its crisis, result from intrinsic systemic/discursive conflict in the very same field of journalism. In other words, journalists want to be (and have to be, if we talk about "quality journalism") providers of objective knowledge, but at the same time they would like to act (and they act) like navigators in the postmodern capitalist societies, attracting aggregated attention, like in the case of tabloids³. It is clear that these roles cannot be compatible.

The aim of the presented analyses is therefore, first of all, to reconstruct the juxtaposition of two oppositional or at least incompatible discourses (self-descriptions, methods of social construction) of journalism. Secondly — an indication of the possible consequences of this state of affairs (the existence of two separate discourses of professional journalism) for the future of this profession, especially in the context of the alleged (because often invoked) crisis of it.

The method used in the text is based on the assumptions of the so-called discourse-theoretical analysis (DTA)⁴. The texts are here regarded as specific

¹ Klinika dziennikarstwa. Credo, ed. K. Wolny-Zmorzyński, K. Konarska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2016; Klinika dziennikarstwa. Diagnoza, ed. K. Wolny-Zmorzyński, K. Konarska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2017.

² A. Giddens, Nowoczesność i tożsamość. "Ja" i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności, trans. A. Szulżycka, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010; K. Stasiuk-Krajewska, Crisis of journalism? On the difficulties of self-description strategy [w:] Dziennikarstwo i media 3. Przemiany świata mediów, ed. I. Borkowski, K. Stasiuk-Krajewska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2012.

³ J. Hartley, *Television Truths*, Malden: MA, Blackwell 2008, p. 34.

⁴ N. Carpentier, B. De Cleen, Bringing Discourse Theory into Media Studies. The applicability of Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) for the Study of media practises and discourses, "Journal of Language and Politics" 2007, vol. 6, no. 2; N. Carpentier, Discoursetheoretical

materializations of meaning, and thus — the interpretation of reality (ideology, hegemony etc.). In this approach, discourses constitute complex ways of perceiving and constructing reality through historically and socially produced ways of meaning / interpretation.

Therefore, texts are a kind of social knowledge that generates specific ways of talking about ..., and thus shapes social practices, at each level (in relation to individuals, social groups, institutions etc.). But in this approach, the task of analysis is no longer just to examine the individual texts in terms of how (linguistically or symbolically) the domination (of specific social groups, individuals, etc.) appears in them (as in the case of critical discourse analysis, CAD). If discourses constitute symbolic systems and social order, the purpose of discourse analysis is examining their historical and political formation and functioning.

In connection with the above theoretical assumptions, the method adopted in this presentation is a qualitative analysis of selected texts on journalism as a profession in order to reconstruct the dominant discourses regulating the social construction of this phenomenon. Discursive practices (texts) were considered particularly important in this context: codes of ethics, positions / statements of authorities, media texts containing elements of self-description, and finally textbooks and guides⁵.

Theory. Journalism as a profession

There is of course a plenitude of possible definitions of journalism as a profession. At the beginning, some of them are worth discussing, to set up the scene for our argumentation⁶.

Extensive presentation and analysis of various concepts reveals several concepts in this context:

1) In the first and most extreme case journalism is not a profession at all and it cannot be viewed as such, because it is full-time, paid job with highly restricted freedom. According to this, the main obligation of a journalist (defined as a media worker) is to fulfil market needs of his clients/audience, which is contradictory to the general

analysis (DTA), [in:] Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies, ed. J. Flowerdew, J.E. Richardson, Routledge, New York 2017.

⁵ More in: K. Stasiuk-Krajewska, *Dziennikarstwo i media. Struktury dyskursu i hegemonia*, Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, Warszawa 2018; K. Stasiuk-Krajewska *Kategoria prawdy jako element dziennikarskiego samoopisu* [in:] *Mit, prawda, imaginacja*, ed. P. Kowalski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2011.

⁶ Extensive presentation and analysis of various concepts: Ch. Anderson, Journalism: Expertise, Authority and Power in Democratic Life [in:] In the Media and Society Theory, ed. D. Hesmondhalgh, J. Toynbee, Routledge, New York 2008, pp. 248–264 and M. Schudson, M. Anderson, News production and organizations: professionalism, objectivity and truth-seeking [in:] Handbook of Journalism Studies, ed. K. Wahl-Jorgensen, T. Hanitzsch, Routledge, New York 2009. Also: J. Pleszczyński, Etyka dziennikarstwa i dziennikarska, rozdział II: Etyka profesjonalna i stosowana, Difin, Warszawa 2015.

interest of the society as a whole. As I would like to argue, this standpoint is unacceptable, because it is evidently inconsistent with the description and self-description of journalism.

- 2) Second approach to this matter is strictly taxonomic. Here journalism and journalists are described by reference to the list of criteria such as: 1) having special skills, demanding high level of education and training; 2) existence of associations; 3) existence of professional ethics; 4) following the norms of conduct; 4) relatively high level of autonomy and independence in realization of its professional role⁷. Although journalism formally meets these requirements, in practice the realization of many of them raises some doubts.
- 3) It seems that more appealing are these conceptualizations, where the most important category is the category of community⁸. Some authors⁹ recently tend to interpret the journalistic profession as a community of social practices (constituted by mutual involvement, common affairs, shared repertoire of communicative or symbolic activities). "A symbolic community as stated by Kenneth Kong is defined as a meaningful group of social network with shared membership, knowledge, ideology, values, interpersonal positions, activities and resources. These are constructed or mediated by symbolic resources including language, which can be used to identify and socialize a person as a member of the group"¹⁰.

In this sense the "checklist" of profession includes different dimensions, for instance logistic one (regarding typical activity of given professionals and their resources) and social one (concerning mechanisms of socialization, diverse rules and norms applied in case of all members, and also skills needed to be a part of community in the first place). But when we are speaking about journalism, two other dimensions are of particular importance: first, ideological and second, cognitive. Taking into consideration ideology when defining a profession fundamentally changes perspective; not only does it provide some clues that extort more critical approach, but it also opens a way to characterize it discursively. In case of this analysis a specific category of ideology

⁷ Cf.: N. Carpentier, *Identity, contingency and rigidity The (counter-)hegemonic constructions of the identity of the media professional* [in:] *Democracy, Journalism, and Technology: New Development in an Enlarged Europe*, ed. N. Carpentier, P. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Tartu University Press, Tartu 2008, p. 53.

⁸ Cf.: M. Carlson, Metajournalistic Discourse and the Meanings of Journalism: Definitional Control, Boundary Work, and Legitimation, "Communication Theory" 2016, vol. 26, no. 4, p. 349–368 and: Boundaries of Journalism, ed. M. Carlson, S.C. Lewis, Routledge, London–New York 2015, p. 129; E. Wenger, Communities of practice, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998. On other terms that appear in this context cf.: J.P. Gee, Discourse Analysis: What Makes it Critical?, [in:] An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education, ed. R. Rogers, Routledge, London–New York 2011, sp 36 and next.

⁹ K. Meltzer, E. Martik, *Journalists as Communities of Practice: Advancing a Theoretical Framework for Understanding Journalism*, "Journal of Communication Inquiry" 2017 no. 41(3), p. 207–226.

¹⁰ K. Kong, *Professional Discourse*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2014, p. 49.

should be pointed out — "ideology of professionalism" ¹¹. That form of ideology might be described as a system of beliefs and qualities recognized as characteristic for some social groups, especially, but not only, as a process of reproduction of ideas and meaning within a group. In this sense, journalism might be perceived as a form of ideology, which justifies a specific interpretation of reality, which specifically explain its distinguished position and social status. Furthermore, ideology constitutes the identity of particular journalists as professionals.

According to Mark Deuze, constitutive elements of that ideology are certain values, such as: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and a specific sense of ethics¹².

As it was mentioned, to characterize journalism as a symbolic community we need to consider another dimension, namely – cognition. Cognition does not only mean a kind of knowledge significant for a given profession or ways of gathering that knowledge. More importantly, that specific kind of knowledge constitutes profession as such, it establishes its boundaries. In this respect journalism can be treated and analysed as a unique epistemic community, which produces conventionalized type of knowledge, recognized as incontestable. It can be argued that a profession maintain its symbolic power by guarding access to unique sources of certain knowledge. In the case of journalism that knowledge is certain, because it presents itself as objective truth about the world. In the work of journalists it is a matter of all sort of requirements related to acquiring information, verifying the source of information, and processing and publishing them as news.

4) Another notable theoretical proposition sees journalism as a discursive community¹³. The main difference between symbolic and discursive communities lies in a shift from interpreting a community as imposing rules on its members to a community which creates its own norms through discursive practices. Discursive community can be characterized by some sort of linguistic aspects, such as typically used vocabulary or preferred genre. It also has relatively coherent vision of its social goals and values, distinct mechanisms of in-group communication, ways of transfer of information and obtaining consensus and so on. In means that this kind of community provides its members with specific discursive competences.

With this in mind, it is necessary to analyse processes in which journalists prove credibility of their actions and create their self-description as legitimate, for example by mythologizing good and bad practices, telling their stories, or by creating and using their symbols etc. In this way they establish boundaries of discursive community.

 $^{^{11}}$ Cf.: J. Soloski, News reporting and professionalism: Some constraints on the reporting of the news, "Media, Culture and Society" 1990, no. 11.

¹² M. Deuze, *Journalism studies beyond media: On ideology and identity*, "Ecquid Novi African Journalism Studies" 2004, no. 25, p. 279–280.

¹³ J. Swales, *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990 (quoted after: K. Kong, *op. cit.*). The category comes from the concept of speech community by Dell Hymes. Speech community is a community that "shares the principles of making and interpreting speech" (quoted after: D. Machin, T. van Leeuwen, *Global Media Discourse. A critical introduction*, Routledge, London–New York 2007, p. 50).

At the same time this community can separate itself from other discourses. In summary it might be said that journalistic community is a combination of techniques and practices acknowledged as appropriate, negotiated within this social group through acts of communication.

5) The last definition of journalism as a profession is closely connected to the process of modernization and differentiation of societies. This means that the appearing of journalism is a result of progressive specialization of knowledge, especially in its technical aspect, which is embodied in a figure of an expert. In the consequence of growing specialization and differentiation, professions create social fields. Social fields do not exist in isolation, but they are constantly interacting with each other. Therefore boundaries of every single field has to be created by distinction from other fields, using forms of symbolic capital, such as skills, competences, access to knowledge or social status. Classical examples of such fields are of course field of science and art¹⁴. They own specific symbolic capital, which serves to maintain the autonomy and protect the field from the outside influences. Due to this issue, professionalism can be seen as a collective effort to establish boundaries of a profession and to maintain social relevance of these confines. This type of activity is defined as so called "boundary work"¹⁵.

According to this, journalism is a field, which is interacting with the fields of politics and economy, and, similarly to science, has to create and protect its confines and autonomic status. In this instance the essence of professionalization is not the questions related to formal education or institutionalization, but rather activities linked to the process of building social identity and a certain prestige of a group, sustaining the consensus about the definition of the profession, establishing independence from other social fields, and finally, but probably most importantly – creating and communicating an unique rationality, the logic of journalism. In this sense, it is possible to explain the crisis of journalism as a form of disintegration of boundaries, especially if we think about the relationship between journalism and the field of economy.

Journalism and values. Two paradigms

The analysis of journalism in the context of presented possibilities of defining professional identity of journalists makes it clear that the only available thing for journalism to construct its own autonomy is a set of specific ethical values¹⁶. It is evident that the most effective strategy of presenting journalism as a profession is to define

¹⁴ Cf.: P. Bourdieu, Reguły sztuki. Geneza i struktura pola literackiego, trans. A. Zawadzki, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, Kraków 2007.

¹⁵ S. Waisbord, *Reinventing professionalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 11. Also: T. Hanitzsch, *Deconstructing Journalism Culture: Towards a universal theory*, "Communication Theory" 2007, no. 17, p. 369.

¹⁶ Cf: K. Stasiuk-Krajewska, Dziennikarstwo i media, op. cit.

it as an expert system of late modernity¹⁷. But unlike other expert systems (for example law, medicine or science), journalism cannot characterize itself using a reference to any type of knowledge or competences, which are inaccessible for anyone outside of the field. If we are thinking about the work of journalist, a similar set of competences simply does not exist. In the past decades the fields boundaries were based on technical access to the traditional channels of communication (mass media). Thanks to that journalists were providers of knowledge, recognized as certain. But nowadays the Internet has completely changed the situation. The audience does not need the providers anymore; the audience needs a platform like google news that plays a role of navigator – it attracts aggregated attention.

This means that the only way of constructing journalism as a profession as an expert system is to introduce a certain values and axiologically defined set of its aims and functions. In our opinion journalism is not about professional writing or speaking about the world, it is rather about writing or speaking about the world and taking into consideration professional values and professional aims of communication such as truth, impartiality, honesty, fairness and social responsibility.

Therefore, should be noted that journalism might be constituted as a profession thanks to a specific competences enabling realization of aforementioned ethical values. Consequently, both in the description and self-description "good" and "bad" or "real" and "false, unreal" journalist might be distinguished by her or his attitude towards the ethical values.

The category of truth plays a special role in the field of journalism, because as experts journalists differ from other social groups by privileged access to the true knowledge about the world. They are providing information, and news can be identified as an archetype of informative text, as a professional genre of journalism¹⁸.

First of all, an ideal journalistic information has to be based on autonomy, objectivism and respect (for example respect for a reader, which might be correlated with boundaries of privacy). Secondly, journalist has to take into consideration any possible consequences of a new piece of information. In antithesis to this we would have poor information — selective or distorted by a viewpoint of journalist, biased (for instance when a material is created only for financial benefit), without respect for personal dignity, and also regardless social effects (for instance causing panic). It is clear that only the first scenario is describing journalistic truth and professionalism. That is because in the professional discourse of journalism truth has been merged with other values. It is evident when we are analysing ethical codes or any type of handbooks for the future media workers¹⁹.

 $^{^{\}rm 17}$ Cf.: J. Hartley, Popular reality. Journalism, modernity, popular culture, Bloomsbury Academic, Arnold–London–New York–Sydney–Auckland 1996.

¹⁸ Cf.: K. Stasiuk-Krajewska, Kategoria prawdy..., op. cit.

¹⁹ Cf.: I. Hofman, *Czy istnieje jeszcze informacja dziennikarska?* [in:] *Jaka informacja?*, ed. L. Dyczewski, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, Lublin 2009.

The category of information $(news)^{20}$, which is – as I tried to show – the most important category for journalism as a profession is present, both in theory and practice, is also characterized in relation to news values.

There are many definitions and explanations of news values, but the vast majority of them are in fact quite similar. As an example, in this section we would like to use a list of media values presented by Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple²¹

- 1) consonance;
- 2) elitism impact;
- 3) negativity;
- 4) personalization;
- 5) positivity;
- 6) proximity;
- 7) superlativeness;
- 8) timeliness;
- unexpectedness.
 Bell divides news values into three different classes²².
- 1) First, he is writing about values in information texts, such as brevity, clarity and colour.
- 2) Secondly, values in the news process: continuity, competition, co-option, composition and predictability.
- 3) In last category of values we have values in news actors and events: recency, negativity, relevance, proximity, unexpectedness, superlativeness, personalization, elitism, attribution and facticity.

Two models of journalism – cooperation or conflict? Analysis

As we might observe, news values, also recognized as characteristics of information in the linguistic and discursive sense, do not correlate with the understanding of information in the journalistic self-description professionalism and ethics. In many cases they are irrelevant, in other cases they are potentially conflicting.

Let us take a look at the value of consonance. It is easy to imagine two possible scenarios. In the first of them we would have a news about a new, eco-friendly technological device. Of course in this instance we would have a clear consonance, because it will be a reference to well-known stereotypical construction of nature. This news would also be consistent with the set of ethical values, for example social responsibility.

²⁰ Cf.: M Ślawska, Sztuka mediów. O świadomości gatunkowej dziennikarzy prasowych, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2009.

²¹ Cf.: M. Bednarek, H. Caple, *The Discourse of News Values. How news organizations create newsworthiness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017.

²² Cf.: A. Bell, *The Discourse Structure of News Stories* [in:] *Approaches to Media Discourse*, ed. A. Bell, P. Garnett, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 1998.

On the other hand it is possible to imagine a news in which the value of consonance is also present, but this news would be clearly conflicted with ethical values. Here, an example would be an information about crimes committed by members of ethnic minorities, like those analysed in detail by Theun van Dijk²³. Similar to this would be any news from tabloid newspaper.

Taking into account the elitism value, we can — again — imagine in this context both true and false information; socially responsible information, and information that does not fulfil this value. However, in the context of the comprehensively interpreted fractographic pact and the function of the media in democratic societies, it is worth noting that the implementation of elitism value as an important principle may very likely lead to disturbances in the requirement to provide information that is actually socially relevant, and is potentially contrary to the principles of protecting the dignity of a person. It can also lead to negative social consequences, because — as we have been experiencing intensely recently — celebrity statements can be misinformative. At the same time, due to their popularity, they can potentially have a large social resonance. Also, the substantive level of statements by other types of median authorities may raise doubts

The negativity / positivity category refers to the emotional character of a message. Apart from the fact that (in accordance with the well-known principle: good news and no news) probably much more news is negative than positive, it must be stated that each emotional character raises doubts in the context of the category of objectivity. This also applies to a situation where news is selected by gate keeper according to whether or not it evokes emotions in the recipient (assuming, of course, that the ones that evoke these emotions are better).

The personalization category is ambiguous. On the one hand, it can support a professional vision of journalism as a socially responsible activity or as an activity for the benefit of the society. Personalization, if it consists in presenting important problems of individuals or in presenting social problems through the prism of the fate of individuals, seems to be the most legitimate in the context of classic approaches to the function of journalism and media in democratic societies. However, personalization correlating with sensationism, typical for tabloid media, is far from this model.

Proximity seems neutral to the value set of professional journalism. We can even imagine that - with some interpretation - proximity supports professional journalism in the sense that it encourages journalists to take up topics that are really important for a given community, and thus - to build this community.

As it seems, the impact category can be treated similarly. When used with integrity, it supports those media publications that are relevant to the community. In this sense, it does not contradict the values of professional journalism.

Superlativeness, the essence of which is the intensification of the message, is also a potential threat to the values considered constitutive for professional journalism. It is,

²³ Cf.: Teun A. van Dijk, *Racism and the Press*, Routledge, London–New York 1991.

in particular, a conflict with the category of objectivity and the fractographical pact. The intensification of the message is both its interpretation and, on the other hand, a modification that threatens its objectivity.

Timeliness and unexpectedness seem very risky in the context of professional journalism. They obviously raise issues related to the speed of information transfer and the surprise of the recipient more than those related to journalistic reliability, mainly in reference to, mentioned many Times, fractographical pact – firstly, there is no time to check the information, secondly – the final criterion of publication is sensationalism and the criterion of being the first, winning the race.

Summary

In our opinion this situation is caused by the coexistence of two contradictory (or at least conflicting) logics — the logic of provider, which is based on categories from journalistic ethics and professionalization discourse, and the logic of navigator linked with profitability and the market orientation in general. The problem is that journalism tries to construct itself (its boundaries) with regard to both these logics at the same time. In the consequence it is impossible to establish clear boundaries of journalistic profession and we could speak about so called "crisis of journalism".

The navigator does not provide information, but aims to attract the recipient's attention, give it a specific vector, and then address it to a specific direction. More precisely, which sounds even more disturbing, the navigator gives the impression that he/she is providing objective information, but in reality his / her communication is subordinated to other criteria related to managing audience interest in such a way as to meet the market criteria. It is worth emphasizing that this is not actually a problem of individual journalists or media personnel, but a structural, systemic problem. Therefore, the point is not that journalists — as individuals — do not follow the principles of journalistic ethics or the model of professional journalism. The problem is that the current positioning of the media in capitalist societies — as entities competing in the commercial market — forces them to submit to the rules of the free market. Thus, not only do journalists function within the framework of two largely divergent, if not contradictory logics of values, but also the media, as institutions, are located in two social subsystems that regulate themselves according to completely different principles.

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