

How to Identify Journalists? Developing a Theoretical International Foundation for the Operationalisation of a National Comprehensive Survey of Journalists in Austria¹

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A dozen years ago, journalists in several countries, the US, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and more, were precisely counted and socio-demographically analysed. Today there are no comparable current national surveys of journalism. For a recount of journalists - nation-wide in Austria - we now have to re-define whom we are searching for. Yet, a clear assignment of who is actually a journalist is not merely necessary for noble research purposes, but also for very pragmatic reasons: Being a legitimate journalist accords prestige and credibility, gives access to information, funding, legal rights, and more institutionalised privileges. We assume that it is the protracted discussion emphasising the boundaries of journalism which complicates the reflection about the core of journalism and the identification of journalists. Accordingly, we considered it necessary to first re-think the nature of journalism, closely linked to international research, and to formulate the research questions very generally, in order to develop a basis for a comprehensive survey 2019 in Austria: What is journalism? What defines a journalist today? How can journalists be identified- and then recorded? Answers will, ideally, not only serve as a starting point for the new survey of Austrian journalists but will also provide a basis for discussion of journalism researchers in other countries.

Keywords: Austrian journalism reports, comprehensive survey of journalists, definition of journalists, intercultural studies, quality of journalism.

Introduction

In the summer of 2018, Jay Rosen sent a letter to Germany's journalists, which was featured prominently in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Rosen, 2018). It was the result of three months of observations and 53 interviews focusing on the development of the profession and the growing insecurity felt by German journalists when practising their occupation. Almost immediately, German scholars and journalists voiced criticism of Rosen's letter, describing it as too "fuzzy" and

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"ambiguous" (see, e.g., Meier, 2018). Of equal, if not greater interest than the questions about self-conception in journalism – Rosen calls this "presstink" – and about intercultural ambiguities, is the question that asks who such a letter, addressed "to the journalists", is ultimately directed at. Who is this, who makes up this group?

We have dealt with this question for the practical implementation of a comprehensive survey of journalists in Austria in 2019. For the first time such a field study was carried out more than 10 years ago. At that time, it was able to orient oneself on internationally comparable studies such as those conducted in Germany (Weischenberg, Loosen, & Beuthner, 2006), the United States (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007), but also in smaller nations such as Switzerland (Marr, Wyss, Blum, & Bonfadelli, 2001). In Austria a series of *Journalism Reports* (Kaltenbrunner, Karmasin, & Kraus, 2010, 2013, 2017; Kaltenbrunner, Karmasin, Kraus, & Zimmermann, 2007, 2008) established the transnational comparability of data on journalism.

We must acknowledge that even more than a decade ago definitional problems were already apparent. It was far from simple to narrow down and delineate the research topic in a precise manner. The "blurring boundaries" of journalism (Weischenberg, 2003) were already a prevailing issue in the international discourse. Settling on a clear definition proved challenging: "The borders, yet to be defined, between the journalism system and its surroundings are neither distinct nor 'natural'; they have to be constructed" (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2007, p. 161).

The trends, which became apparent a dozen and more years ago, have since wrought a radical transformation of public communications – and also seem to have unsettled journalism research: Attempts to find more recent international comprehensive surveys about journalists in various countries and media cultures that have been defined along similar lines (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), in order to learn and to achieve comparability, is currently doomed to fail. According to our current knowledge, no new studies have been published claiming such aspiration for a complete sociodemographic overview of a country for more than a decade.

Certainly, extensive and highly differentiated literature and works from theory and practice do exist concerning the developments in the media landscape, which address social media and other new, digitally effective protagonists.

However, as mentioned above, our research observations reveal that there are no up-to-date comprehensive surveys of journalism as a profession at the respective national level giving guidelines for such a clearly defined basic population useful in an international context. At the same time, the debate about the boundaries of journalism has gained constantly in intensity during the last decade. We assume that it is precisely this protracted discussion concerning the differentiation between PR, public engagement, advertising, citizen journalism, and journalism – often also referred to as professional, real, or quality journalism – which complicates the reflection about the actual nature of journalism. In many cases, we primarily consider the boundaries, rather than the core of journalism. The question is the same as one decade ago: Who – in an era of citizen journalists, bloggers, and

audience engagement experts – is still a genuine journalist? Consensus remains elusive.

Not even Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014, p. 7) focusing on the "elements of journalism" offer a concrete starting point. On the contrary: "While once...the word *journalist* described a group of organized professionals...now it describes anyone who might find him or herself producing news and who aspires to do it ethically and responsibly". How to find and how to count them with such vague coordinates?

The paper at hand does not presume to seek out the absolute and ultimately valid answer about the nature of journalism. However, our recent research requires a workable definition for the pragmatic operationalizability of an advanced study that comprises all of Austria's journalists. This new comprehensive survey of journalists in Austria 2019 is designed to allow a meaningful data comparison, simultaneously revealing in greater detail the evident, profound changes of the profession. More than 300 media companies in Austria are examined. In a first step, journalists are recorded following the definition developed here. This is done in different ways: Firstly, questionnaires with according criteria are sent to all media companies. Secondly, interviews are conducted with CEOs, human resources managers and other media managers from larger media companies. Thirdly, data from existing lists, for example the media handbook of the VÖZ (Association of Austrian Newspapers) as well as information on editorial members of the media themselves (in particular on websites) are checked and registered. This general survey will provide socio-demographic data such as number, gender, age, income, academic degree of Austrian journalists. In a second step, in-depth interviews (CATI) will be conducted with 500 Austrian journalists on topics such as role models and self-image, political self-assessment, changes in everyday working life, workload and job satisfaction.

The definition developed here will, ideally, not only serve as a fundamental starting point for our survey in Austria but also as a useful base of discussion for comprehensive surveys in other countries, following adaptation to the respective national specific requirements.

It might help to bring the discussion about the characteristics of journalism back to where it belongs. Interestingly, the vigorous debate on the topic is currently "driven by practitioners, pundits, and scientists from other fields. Journalism studies, on the other hand, seems largely absent", as Nielsen (2018) states after following the vivid discussions at the Perugia Journalism Festival in spring 2018. Accordingly, we formulate the questions in a general manner:

- What is journalism?
- What defines a journalist today?
- How can journalists be identified and recorded?

Given the historical context, our initial hypothesis is optimistic. It must be possible to concretize the term journalism. After all, journalism, its structures and framework conditions have already been through changes in the past. Even the question about its boundaries was previously raised prior to the twenty first century:

"Who truly is a journalist?" – was the subject of a debate as long ago as the Third German Journalists' Day in Berlin in 1868. As they stated: "If we want to include everyone who has ever published a few articles or correspondences in journals, then this number will be quite unlimited..." (quoted in Requate, 1995, p. 131).

More than 150 years later we approach and discuss this problem by starting with an overview of the most important current debates regarding journalism. In the main part we deal with the question "What is journalism" and work out a definition: Firstly, an outline describes the problem, also from a historical perspective. Subsequently, we present fundamental ideas of international research on task and nature of journalism and contrast this with the specific situation in Austria. We identify and discuss different levels for determining journalism: its democratic-political task; indispensable principles of practice; occupational and organisational nature. As a result of the discussion, a definition of journalism is developed, which on the one hand will serve as a starting point and manual for a complete survey among Austrian journalists and on the other hand shall provide a basis for discussion for comparable studies in other countries.

Literature Review

An increasing number of studies deals with the distinction of journalism from other forms of public communication or the characteristics of journalists as opposed to other protagonists in the media-related public sphere (see e.g., Carlson & Lewis, 2015a; Grubenmann & Meckel, 2015; Neuberger, 2017; Örnebring, 2013; Shapiro, 2014; Young & Carson, 2017), while others are concerned with the determination and measurement of quality in journalism (García-Avilés, Carvajal-Prieto, Lara-Gonzalez, & Arias-Robles, 2016; Gertler, 2013; Lacy & Rosenstiel, 2015; Weischenberg et al., 2006), and yet other significant research efforts tackle issues surrounding production, organisation, digital transformation and management (Küng, 2015; Wyss & Keel, 2016; Kaltenbrunner, 2017).

Furthermore, there are comparative studies for various countries, such as, in particular, the *Worlds of Journalism* studies, which also integrate surveys conducted in Austria (see, e.g., Lohmann & Seethaler, 2016; Seethaler, 2017). These studies, which have gained broad recognition due to their extensive international scope, permit highly diverse concepts of journalism in each of the 67 countries. "Journalism culture is taken as the starting point of comparison, because culture itself is a process of continuous change, renegotiation and redefinition" (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

Some definitional vagueness and "cultural" flexibility in this regard facilitates comparative studies from Albania via China and Sierra Leone to the US. Naturally, it puts comparability into perspective, particularly in those countries, where no national surveys employing transparent terms are available, defining who, precisely, the journalists are, who should be interviewed – and who should not.

Methodology

The development of an international standard-compliant theoretical foundation for a complete survey of Austrian journalists is based on two qualitative approaches:

- (a) Extensive literature research: Analysis and discussion of international literature, both current research work and older standard works dealing with the nature of journalism and its differentiation from similar forms of communication. Comparative discussion of recent research with international researchers coming from different media-cultures (e.g., US, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Spain). From this, the main lines of different international concepts of journalism were filtered out.
- (b) Field research: The theoretical approaches found in international literature were juxtaposed with our findings about Austrian practice in journalism. The necessary knowledge of data/characteristics of the Austrian practice are based on various preliminary studies and debates with practitioners.
 - Interviews with 120 local and regional journalists from print, radio, TV and online-media on their work situation in the digital era.
 - Listing of 16 theses on "What is Journalism?" in cooperation with the "Forum Journalismus und Medien" (Fjum and Medienhaus Wien, 2017), an Austrian training academy for journalists. Those 16 assumptions were also discussed with journalists in the traditional Austrian press club *Concordia* and with the readers and users of the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* (Austria's largest online community)².
 - A nationwide study based on qualitative interviews with editors in chief and managers in all 14 Austrian newspapers in 2016/2017 gave an overview of digital developments and integration-processes in the newsrooms and changes in professional attitudes.

Results of the studies were summarised (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2017) and delivered to all the participants and discussed at the *Global Editors Network* summit 2017, where 800 editors from all continents had assembled.

What is Journalism?

Starting Point: An Open Profession in Search of its Borders

In most western countries Journalism has always been an open profession. Although training and continuing education for journalists has become established

²See, e.g., <https://ces.to/DglqiO>.

in Europe after World War II, often following US examples, at universities, universities of applied sciences, and in vocational training institutions, no formal or legal provisions exist that might limit access. This is a marked contrast to academic careers such as those in the fields of medicine and law, or to technical professional qualifications, such as training to become an electrician. "Anyone who wishes to do so can call themselves a journalist. The job title is not protected; there is no prescribed job profile, no minimum qualification requirements, nothing", Hooffacker and Meier (2017, p. 1) observe generally in relation to the German-speaking world.

One of the few exceptions in Europe, where access to the profession is tied to formal criteria, is Italy. Here, only those who are registered with the professional chamber are considered to be journalists, and this requires the completion of an 18-month internship or of a recognised journalism college or respectively, a relevant university degree.

In Austria, our field of research for a new national survey, only some rough framework and definition of journalism is given in an almost one century old "Journalistengesetz", approved in 1920. This early law, worded after monarchy, war and centuries of censorship embraced the idea of journalism without restraints and without formal obligation for membership in chambers, unions or similar organisational bodies (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2007, p. 11).

Open access as in Austria or in the US, in Germany or in Scandinavia was also one of journalism's historic qualities. The freedom of the press in Europe and the USA evolved, according to George, to protect the "bloggers" of the early days of journalism: "the partisans, the ideologues, the lone pamphleteers" – individuals, who were not backed by a political lobby ("Who is a journalist?", 2008, p. 129). They did not know any professional ethics codes and they had no journalistic training. The claim to independence and objectivity only developed fully over time and these were not significant at first.

In America, journalistic standards were first officially set out in 1923: It was then that the American Society of Newspaper Editors published its *Code of Ethics*. "The key terms were factuality, independence, impartiality, and public service" (Kaplan, n.d., p. 34). Then, too, the classic media felt unsettled by new protagonists in the public communications sphere and attempted to dissociate themselves from the up-and-coming public relations industry by means of such quality standards: American journalists "felt a need to close ranks and assert their collective integrity in the face of their close encounter with the publicity agents' unembarrassed effort to use information (or misinformation) to promote special interests" (Schudson, 2008, p. 298).

Even so, formal, legal access barriers were never implemented. For many decades, this individual, open access to the profession, unencumbered by regulations, was upheld by the protagonists themselves; the free, informal character and the diversity of journalists were defended as innate principles. Now it seems that competition in the digital era is increasingly causing long-serving journalists to close ranks. Evaluating a survey of journalists in six European countries, Örnebring (2013) discerns a marked emphasis of the collective character of journalism, which

he regards as a result of the digital upheavals. This is not merely to be understood as a distinction from citizen journalists, whose individuality and whose lack of institutional ties is considered problematic. This is also contrary to the traditional view of journalism with its pronounced claim to "*individual* freedom" and "*individuality of expression*" (Örnebring, 2013, p. 48).

However, this new self-conception also fails to offer a consistent definition as to what, precisely, journalism is. Shapiro justifies his study on *Why democracies need a Functional Definition of Journalism now more than ever* with the great discordance among practitioners as well as scholars concerning the nature of journalism. In doing so, he refers to Zelizer, who recognized, in the year 2004, that journalism was in the process of becoming "a whole of various contradictory parts". Even "key definitional issues" such as the occupational nature, are contested, according to Shapiro (2014, p. 555).

What is more, however: The challenging debate about true journalism often misses the actual issue or, rather, the definition is confused with an evaluation. Discussions frequently revolve around *good* or *bad* journalism, even before there is agreement on what actually defines journalism: "The differentiation between quality journalism and journalism is an avoidance strategy, as it blocks out the question of what deserves to carry the label journalism, and what does not. People speak about quality journalism in order to avoid talking about journalism" (Arlt & Storz, 2016, p. 11; see also Shapiro, 2014). Furthermore, the image of journalists as an occupational category is poorly regarded in almost all European countries. One of the more recent surveys, for example, conducted in 2013 by the Spanish Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), notes: "Journalists are the occupational group that is least regarded by the Spanish, with only 59.09 points on a scale that ranges from 0 to 100" (García-Avilés, 2015, p. 215). In addition, the image ratings have continued to decline at a low level in many countries for some time now. This low esteem is exploited by politicians and spin doctors, who systematically disparage well-informed but uncomfortable journalism as fake news, and libel journalists as participants in a mendacious press.

This powerful societal headwind is one reason why quality journalism is a particularly fiercely discussed topic today, but in terms of research, it already started to shift into the focus of scientists' interest in the early 1990s. Denis McQuail (1992) was among the first to address the issue of quality in journalism. His normative approach focused on the "public interest", which journalism was supposed to serve. The Dutch scholar Irene Meijer-Costera (2001) also developed a "normative framework". In the German-speaking area, Stephan Ruß-Mohl (1994a), in particular, was one of the first to look at quality in journalism. In his view, quality depends in the first instance on the production process and the infrastructure. He considers it to be dynamic and changeable, and calls for an understanding of the "multiplicity of qualities" (Ruß-Mohl, 1992, 1994a, 1994b; see also Gerard-Wenzel, 2017).

The discussion, which has since been held at various levels, attempts to reason how quality in journalism can emerge and persist under economic pressure (e.g., Karmasin, 1996), how this quality can and should be measured (e.g., Bucher,

2003), develops appropriate criteria in the 1990s (e.g., Göpfert, 1993), uses quantitative and qualitative content analyses in specific fields of media to measure (e.g., McLachlan & Golding, 2000), and asks how quality criteria can be applied in new, digital fields, in online journalism, after the turn of the millennium (García-Avilés et al., 2016; Quandt, 2004).

And yet, we can only determine how good or how bad journalism is, once it is clear what journalism is. It is essential to heed this distinction. For, all too often, that which carries the label of "journalism" does not contain journalism – and this trend is set to continue, as the Swiss Media Commission surmises, which has also addressed the issues of subsidising media and journalism from a practical perspective: "Already today and especially in the future, however, there are a variety of alternative forms of content generation and dissemination that are similar to and compete with professionally run journalism" (EMEK, 2017, p. 13). In its 2017 position paper, EMEK argued for a clear separation. After all: public engagement, native advertising, corporate publishing, content marketing, citizen journalism, entertainment, blogs – many want to partake in the image of journalism without adhering to its standards. That is not bad journalism, but rather it is not journalism at all.

An unambiguous attribution is not merely necessary for noble research purposes, but also for very pragmatic reasons: "Definitions matter, because *how* we think about the issue of boundaries has real consequences. [...] Being deemed a 'legitimate' journalist accords prestige and credibility, but also access to news sources, audiences, funding, legal rights, and other institutionalized perquisites" (Carlson & Lewis, 2015b). In the research field of Austria, where we specify and measure journalism, this privilege has a long-standing tradition: In order to protect their sources, journalists are allowed to invoke the reporter's privilege, the so-called "Redaktionsgeheimnis". Press credentials are issued at the suggestion of the owners' associations and the journalists' union and are endorsed by the Ministry of the Interior. This is designed to help with investigations, including research conducted at public agencies. A number of special tax regulations apply individually for journalists. To identify such journalists in Austria, we have to ask: What is actually journalism?

International Approaches to the Search for Identity

The transformative changes brought about by digitization have been a dominant topic in journalism research for years, and the discussion about quality is a part thereof. The characteristics of the new journalist, the new protagonists, and the latest trends in the media world are currently being sought in Australia as well as in the US or Europe (see, e.g., Young & Carson, 2017; Grubenmann & Meckel, 2015; Meyen & Riesmeyer, 2012). This permanent and fast transformation of journalism has attracted research interest from many perspectives, including media management (Killebrew, 2005; Dal Zotto & van Kranenburg, 2008), emerging business models (Carvajal, García-Avilés, & Gonzalez, 2012; Nee, 2013), interactive technologies (Gynnild, 2014), the new relationships with active

audiences and social media (Singer et al., 2011), and media innovation (Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013), to name only a few. We try to understand it with all its manifold consequences for journalism: "The convergence of legacy and online media: a challenging scenario" (García-Avilés, Meier, & Kaltenbrunner, 2017).

Unanimity is limited, strictly speaking, to this: Change never ends. "The only clear conclusion is that boundaries will continue to be drawn, erased, and redrawn" (Carlson & Lewis, 2015b). Accompanying and studying this process in public communication represents a complex challenge, because digital disruption and constant change in daily life are naturally a step ahead of research and the traditional media. This makes a basis, a reference – something akin to an immovable rock amidst the digital surge – all the more necessary, should it exist. After all, other structures, new stakeholders, digital workflows, do not have to imply that journalism itself must receive a new meaning. Similarly, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014, p. 16) also follow this line of argument: "The purpose of journalism is defined not by technology, nor by journalists or the techniques they employ, but by something more basic: the function news plays in the lives of people".

Put in the form of questions: What significance does the transformation in practice have for the theory? Do new technical possibilities and working methods require a re-definition of journalism itself? What, in fact, are the function and characteristics of journalism?

Level 1: The democratic approach. At their core, the definitions of journalism and of its purpose postulated by social science feature a common basic understanding of the same as a service provider for a democratic public.

A comprehensive description of the nature and the mission of journalism, which may serve as a point of departure here, is provided by Meier in his German standard work and introduction to *Journalism*:

Journalism investigates, selects and presents topics that are new, factual and relevant. It establishes publicity by observing society, providing this observation to a mass audience through periodic media and thus constructing a common effect. This constructed reality offers orientation in a complex world (Meier, 2007, p. 13).

English-language studies also place the regular presentation and conveyance of new and significant topics, which allow democratic debate within society, at the centre of their definitions: "[T]he purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 9). We can keep it short and simple, as journalists would do: To regularly provide relevant, truthful information, as an aid to orientation for citizens in a society – that is the mission of journalism, at least in Western-style democracies like our research country Austria.

However, that alone does not suffice for the differentiation from other types of public communication. A political party, a pharmaceutical company might regularly publish news from their fields of interest, as a newspaper, on online

platforms or as a newsletter, where they not only use PR slogans for advertising purposes, but also report facts and figures. Nonetheless, that is not journalism. To verify whether an information product does indeed represent journalism, there consequently also has to be a second level, namely that of the theoretical principles, the *core values* or *core elements*, on which journalistic practice is based, and by the application of which it can fulfil its democratic responsibility. Which principles are these?

Level 2: The principles of practice. The multiple attempts of international researchers to define these journalistic virtues usually lie quite close to one another and have remained the same for decades. For instance, Deuze, referring to earlier works in the English-language realm by Golding and Elliott as well as Merritt, summarised these virtues as follows: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, ethics (Deuze, 2005, pp. 446-447). Similar "broadly valid values" apply in the German speaking countries Switzerland, Germany and Austria: "Unabhängigkeit, Überparteilichkeit, Aktualität, Relevanz, Richtigkeit, Kontrolle, Allgemeinverständlichkeit" (Arlt & Storz, 2016, p. 13; Dernbach, 2017).

The values are formulated as the set of characteristics of journalistic practice which are indispensable. These properties must be understood as ideal-typical; they are never met entirely, but the commitment to do so must be given.

The terms can vary, there might be a distinction between impartiality, objectivity, neutrality, or balance, or the general comprehensibility might be understood as good "narration" (Wyss & Keel, 2016). Other scholars such as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) warn against the use of terms such as fairness, balance, or objectivity on account of their arbitrary nature or their dubious benefits. They call for: truth, loyalty to citizens, verification, independence, monitor of power, public forum, relevance, comprehensiveness, responsibility. In principle, however, despite varying nuances, these terms form a basis, about which there is largely an international consensus.

Researchers who regard journalism as a functional system tend to lean primarily on the actions associated with these virtues, in order to derive a functional definition: "Journalism comprises the activities involved in an independent pursuit of accurate information about current or recent events and its original presentation for public edification" (Shapiro, 2014, p. 561). The occupational nature of journalism is not a prerequisite here (see, e.g., Wyss & Keel, 2016; Shapiro, 2014).

According to the general consensus, the practice of journalism involves working stages such as "investigation, verification, selection and curation of information, its processing and dissemination" (EMEK, 2017, pp. 12-13). However, in regard to these practice-related definitions, the contextual connection with the virtues and the explicit reference to the democratic claim is always essential. If this connection is not adequately established, the concept of journalism becomes blurred. Dernbach, for instance, derives the following definition from the system-theoretical literature: "Journalists collect, process, and publish current and relevant topics (usually arranged into editorial structures and on the basis of specific action programmes [...]), which they make available to the public via media"

(Dernbach, 2017, p. 1). Without an additional explanation of the "action programmes" or a detailed specification of the "media" concerned, this does not permit journalism to be differentiated from public relations and other forms of communication.

We believe that new professional titles, namely PR Journalist as suggested for example by Dernbach (2017), should not simply be attributed to the increasingly heterogeneous occupational field of journalism. At best, they belong to the much wider area of public communication which, in turn, is divided into specific sub-sections such as PR or journalism, and which must accordingly be considered in a differentiated manner. In our opinion, the term PR Journalist is an oxymoron, which suggests that public relations could also be a form of journalism. Thus, it would be best to avoid this term entirely.

The digital revolution has definitely transformed the structures, techniques, working processes, and possibilities of public communication, including those pertaining to journalism. Lohmann and Seethaler (2016, p. 5) state for Austria: "Journalism is currently in a state of change. According to Austrian journalists, the importance of the use of search engines and technical skills had most profoundly changed over the last five years". However, this transformation does not refer to the theoretical basis, neither in Austria, nor internationally: The nature of journalism has remained the same.

Journalism can be disseminated across various media channels – on online platforms just as in traditional newspapers – it can be practised in a variety of business models and organisational forms – independently or as an employee of an editorial office in a traditional media company, in an autonomous editorial office or, if need be, as a lone blogger – as long as certain conditions are met.

In order to ascertain whether we are dealing with journalism, it is necessary to conduct investigations on two levels that are separate but based on one another. These are the two steady rocks we perceive in the digital surge, when we ask who it is that practices journalism:

1. Democratic claim: Does the medium/staff feel committed to the societal mission to regularly provide information as a guide to orientation in the public and democratic discourse of a society?
2. Behaviours of the protagonists: In the practical setting, does the medium/staff feel obliged to the principles of autonomy, impartiality, immediacy, relevance, veracity, control, and general comprehensibility?

Autonomy as a fundamental unique feature. The detailed depiction of the meaning, distinctions, and development of the individual concepts as well as the associated variety of interpretations and discussions – as they apply to the term "objectivity", for instance (see, e.g., Schudson 2008; Tuchman, 1972; Bentele, 2008; Sponholz, 2009; Kaplan, n.d.; Lane, 2001) – goes beyond the scope of this work. However, in view of the objective of our research endeavour – establishing unambiguous criteria for the comprehensive survey of all journalists in Austria – one of the continuously cited features of journalistic uniqueness seems to us to be

crucial and verifiable in research practice: independence or autonomy. This, too, was already discussed in newspaper studies almost a century ago. Bücher (1926), for instance, called for "independence and incorruptibility" in reporting and denounced the pressure exerted on the press by politics (Bücher, 1926, pp. 32, 37).

To date, research cites this as the fundamental characteristic: "Autonomy is the central feature for the distinction of descriptions of reality that are either journalistic or alien to journalism, in the sense of independence from individual communication interests, as they tend to be expressed in campaigns, public relations, content marketing, or advertising" (Wyss & Keel, 2016, p. 3). After all, the argument goes, all other forms of communication can also produce their contents by using the tools of the journalistic craft – thus relaying current, relevant information to their audience in a regular and truthful manner. And yet, the selection and presentation of this information is subject to the individual interests of their owner or purely for the purpose of entertaining the audience, and not for the benefit of a democratic, pluralistic public.

The explicit meaning is this: A medium that orients itself along the interests of a public body, a party, an institution, a tourism association, a private enterprise, etc. – that practices *Umfeldberichterstattung* (ambience reporting), as it is called in Austrian and German journalism analysis – cannot be regarded as a journalistic institution, and likewise its staff are not journalists, however much they adhere to other rules of the journalistic craft. In practice, this distinction can often raise difficulties in individual cases. Let us again give examples from Austria which might well serve as transfer picture for questions raised in many countries: If a parish publishes a church newspaper, according to our understanding, this can be several different things: information for members, public relations, organisational communication, or even corporate publishing. By our reckoning, it is not independent journalism. Yet, there are dozens of that kind of media in our research field. On the other hand: If a medium that is owned by a church or a religious community commits itself to independent reporting in its editorial statutes or in a mission statement, if the editors are independent journalists and not functionaries within the church, then at first glance – presumably – journalists are at work here. Austria is suited particularly well to illustrate this point, with its long-standing tradition of so-called *Katholische Press-Vereine* (*Catholic press associations*) serving as one of the sturdiest pillars of the media landscape: The national, Catholic press agency *kathpress* is – and this is also stated in the imprint – an "ecclesiastical institution" (<https://www.kathpress.at/site/impressum>), the publisher is simultaneously an Austrian cardinal and media bishop. This is no independent medium, and consequently, this is not journalism. For our survey this means that we do not include employees of this press agency.

The situation is different in the case of the Catholic *Styria Mediengruppe*, which is the third largest media company in Austria and belongs to a Catholic media foundation. There, two large daily newspapers, several magazines, broadcasting corporations, and a number of journalistically motivated online portals alongside the exclusively commercially oriented kind, are shaped by journalistic editorial offices, with no direct dependence on churches (<https://www.styria.com/>

de/impressum/). In line with our definitional approach for our survey, we consider the staff members working there to be journalists.

We can also detect various forms of (in)dependence of journalists in Austria in the fastest growing media company with one of the best-known international brand names: The beverage producer *Red Bull* is the proprietor of a national TV station and a large facility for international TV-, movie- and crossmedia-production with a focus on sports, which describes itself as part of and committed to "the brand world of Red Bull". The corporation also produces an elaborate lifestyle "bulletin", an obvious corporate publishing product with massive print-runs in the German-speaking world, which is regularly added to independent newspapers as an enclosure against payment. Both often include well-done reportages, good pictures, interesting topics – yet we see this as a part of corporate publishing. We do not count its content producers as autonomous journalists.

Red Bull's media company also publishes leisure magazines with strong links to nature, where the "ambience journalism" is a priori less obviously perceptible. But lines are blurring: The CEO of *Red Bull* has launched *Addendum*, an "investigative" online platform, within what he terms a "fully independent" foundation framework. Here, dozens of employees investigate topics ranging from international migration to criminal law or social policy. They depend on the foundation's further financing of their work – but explicitly feel obliged to do journalism with autonomy and without any concessions to the *Red Bull* corporate interest.

The complexity and difficulty of differentiation is obvious in most western countries, given strong competition for traditional journalistic legacy media under the framework of globalisation and digitalisation: So called "branded content", paid by third parties, has become part of many channels. In surveys for the "New Worlds of Journalism" the journalists in Austria – and similar in neighbouring Germany – describe how "profit making pressure" has strengthened a lot throughout the last years (Seethaler, 2017, p. 55). For our national research we therefore argue that while seeing media as *composita mixta* of cultural and business interest we have to look even closer, where and how journalism is affected in its independence and autonomy by growing economic pressure.

Level 3: The Question of Occupational Nature. Can only those practise journalism, whose occupation – and living – is tied to this field? The answer to this question is not only highly contentious in practice, among bloggers, professional journalists, and citizen journalists, but also in the theoretical and academic discussion. Taking the system-theoretical perspective, Wyss and Keel in Switzerland believe that "the occupational nature of journalism is no longer self-evident". In their view, "today, the consensus largely prevails that journalism, on the one hand, can no (longer) solely be defined through the job or the profession, and on the other hand, it cannot solely be defined as the activity of producing journalistic performance in editorial offices or media organisations" (Wyss & Keel, 2016, p. 2).

For many years the contrary attitude of the Austrian journalism researcher Hummel can be seen on the website of the Austrian training institution KfJ: "Anyone who, as a citizen, exercises his right to freedom of expression via various media – from the magazine to the Internet – in his spare time, fulfils an important social task in doing so and may even be partially supported by the public sector via press subsidies. But only if one can live from this activity, is it journalism" (Hummel, n.d.). We still share this belief that journalism is a profession. The occupational nature is also a precondition for our survey. However, this point of view is not merely the result of formal and research-pragmatic reasons, in an attempt to keep the number of Austria's journalists manageable. It seems important to us – in theory and in practice – to unambiguously endow this open occupation with its disputed boundaries the definition of a profession.

Our perception of the current market situation in Europe and beyond tells us that it is becoming more difficult to earn one's livelihood as a journalist. The wage and fee level in legacy media is dropping in many countries. Generally speaking, it must also be noted that journalists working in the new, digital media, be they freelance or employed, tend to earn less than their colleagues in the traditional media. On the other hand, there is an increasing demand for digital qualifications. Technical skills and production across various channels are prerequisites even for jobs in small local and regional media, as current industry surveys illustrate in Europe (see, e.g., Luef & Kaltenbrunner, 2018) and the US (Radcliffe, Ali, & Donald, 2017), which investigate digital professionalisation in small-market newspapers.

Those required to achieve all of this must have received training – *vocational* training – that qualifies her/him accordingly, and must also be subject to a professional, industry-specific form of control that monitors the careful handling of journalists' rights and obligations. This core value of control is set to gain importance in the future, if it is to aid the distinction from all media production similar to journalism, which is not journalism. One of the biggest communications science EU projects of recent years placed "journalists and media accountability" (see, e.g., Fengler, Eberwein, Mazzoleni, Porlezza, & Ruß-Mohl, 2014, Eberwein, Fengler, & Karmasin, 2018) at the centre of comparative efforts in 14 countries.

The demands for journalistic responsibility, qualification, accountability, and self-regulation can only be met by the occupational profile of journalism. Thus, the occupational nature – following the democratic mission and the commitment to the journalistic principles – is the third level to serve as a prerequisite for our understanding of journalism.

The Question of Organisational Nature. In terms of system theory, journalism is usually regarded as a socially indispensable function, which can, as a general principle, be carried out by any citizen. Thus, the practice of journalism is not "exclusively linked to the organisational framework of mass media", but rather it can "also be contemplated beyond the boundaries of traditional media organisations" (Wyss & Keel, 2016, p. 1). Even if the occupational nature is defined as a prerequisite, this does not necessarily entail an automatic linkage to an organisation.

This is apparent when we consider the developments of recent years. New investigative data journalism, in particular, which has become established through the digital possibilities, is often performed in smaller, newly founded editorial offices. These use various channels for publication purposes, such as digital platforms, but also traditional mass media. Similarly, it is logical to argue that bloggers or YouTubers who are active on the basis of the three previously described levels which shape journalism should also be classified as journalists. Whether they actually meet these criteria in practice can only be verified in the respective individual case.

Without a doubt, for an individual without institutional ties, without the valuable support and exchange available from editorial desks or offices (which are accessible, albeit in a limited fashion, even to freelancers), or without journalist associations, it is difficult to safeguard the adherence to journalistic principles as well as to ensure an income. However, it is not impossible. In our opinion, institutional integration is therefore not a prerequisite, but it is a significant advantage for doing journalism.

Conclusions and Definition as a Starting Point for the 2018/2019 Comprehensive Survey

Let us glance back to the starting point of our research considerations: In view of sweeping changes in public communications and in the media industry, it made sense to review the criteria that were applied in several European countries and the US for the purpose of identifying, counting and socio-demographically analysing journalists more than a decade ago. This required us to pose the question "What defines a journalist?" anew.

Our assessment criteria for counting journalists in a given country should not only be retrospectively transparent, but from the outset it should be comparatively integrated into the international discourse with a clear research perspective and it should be meaningful for practitioners as well. For this purpose, the work was and is – as is the case in the paper at hand – continuously presented to and discussed with critical members from among the ranks of journalism researchers, as well as journalists and media producers themselves.

We have now defined three levels for the purpose of our survey, upon which journalism is based, and where journalism can be distinguished from other forms of communication. These are:

1. Journalism as a service provider for democracy: There must be a claim to ensure the free formation of opinion in a society by providing information.
2. Journalism as an obligation to comply with journalistic principles: We see these as independence/autonomy, impartiality as no one-sidedness, immediacy, relevance, veracity, control, general comprehensibility.
3. Journalism with an occupational nature: It is practiced professionally as the core of waged employment.

To underline the distinction: Content producers who work for companies whose main purpose is not media production, but another line of business and who publish media solely for the purpose of enhancing their own image, we do not regard as journalists. They are content producers – even if they provide well-researched and well-done stories. In research practice, this has required many more detailed definitions and research steps for the data collection: the interpretation of imprints, editorial guidelines, statutes, mission statements, codes of honour, or the determination of minimum income thresholds for the classification as a professional journalist. As a starting point, we propose a definition of just a few lines:

A journalist is someone who works for a living in or for a medium that appears regularly and that is committed to securing and promoting democracy. To ensure this claim, the activity is structured according to journalistic principles – independence, impartiality, immediacy, relevance, veracity, media accountability, general comprehensibility.

This could serve as a well-founded kick-off to a discussion among scholars in journalism studies, who specialise in examining journalists in a practical setting and who seek to join the discourse on the subject and its future.

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