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What is press freedom? A study on journalism students' perception of press freedom

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Abstract

Press freedom applies to journalists working in conditions where press freedom is denied or threatened, as well as to journalists who feel the pressure of downsizing of news staff and polarized opinions. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the aim of this paper is to examine how journalism students in France, Palestine, Uganda and Norway define press freedom. We find that the students' definitions were in line with the historical and liberal roots of the concept, and that in all four countries the professional work, the role of journalism and journalism's autonomy were highlighted. They recognized the complexity of press freedom as well as the difference between an ideal situation and real conditions on the ground.

Keyword: Press freedom, role in society, limitations and pressure, journalism, journalism students

Introduction

Some journalists convey news in countries where press freedom is taken for granted, and, although debated, journalism is seen as a carrier of information and a means to democratic

rights.

Other journalists struggle with access to information, or censorship and safety for their sources and themselves. Five days into 2019, an Afghan citizen journalist, Noori Javid of Radio Neshat, was killed, and on January 16, Ghanaian journalist Ahmed Hussein-Suale was shot down in Accra, Ghana (RSF, 2019a/2019b). Yet, 2019 turned out to be a year with a historically low number of journalists killed (RSF, 2020). The International Federation of Journalists states that, “There can be no press freedom if journalists exist in conditions of corruption, poverty or fear” (IFJ, 2006). However, the concept of press freedom includes a variety of aspects besides safety and good working conditions. There are reports of a decline in press freedom, if one looks at aspects such as impunity, fake news, repressive laws, commercialisation leading to less diversity, or the decline in global freedom and democracy 13 years in a row (Brandt et al., 2019). The conditions for press freedom apply to journalists, and editors, as press freedom is the foundation for journalism. That is not only true for journalists working in countries where press freedom is denied or threatened, but also applies for journalists who feel the pressure of downsizing of news staff or polarized opinions from hyper-partisan online mobs (Shahbaz & Funk, 2020).

The aim of this study is to explore how journalism students in Palestine, France, Norway and Uganda define press freedom, after they have learned about press freedom through a pedagogical tool, the Rig, on press freedom. First, we explain what this pedagogical tool is, before stating the research questions, presenting and discussing the literature review, methodology and findings.

Starting point

The Rig on press freedom

In order to teach journalism students, the meaning and significance of press freedom, a pedagogical tool – called the Rig on press freedom – was created at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo Metropolitan University in Norway in 2008. The Rig is a practical, journalistic project. After lectures on topics related to press freedom and a fact-checking assignment, the students work in groups, with each group scrutinizing the conditions on press freedom in a particular country. The students apply journalistic methods of gathering information and, at the end of the project, their news stories featuring different aspects linked in some way to conditions of press freedom are published. So, each group publishes several stories about the country in question and the stories of all groups are rigged, or linked, together. At Oslo Metropolitan University, as well as journalism departments at other universities where the Rig was conducted, there is an important demand that the students should not (only) see the world through the narrow view of their home country. The students should seek to find and emphasize the views and opinions as well as facts from the country in question, which leads to using sources and first-hand information from that country. Collaborating with each other and working with a teacher in the group in a process towards publishing, resembles the work in a newsroom. Hence, an important aspect of our pedagogical approach is to stimulate learning journalistic skills and methods while dealing with abstract concepts.

Research question

This study takes its point of departure in the Rig on press freedom, where bachelor’s students in journalism in Palestine, France, Norway and Uganda investigated the conditions of press freedom around the world. Since the Rig was created to help students grasp the concept of press freedom, our research investigates the students’ way of seeing the concept of press freedom. So, our research question is: After doing the Rig on the conditions for press freedom, how do the students define press freedom?

Press freedom

Press freedom is linked to other freedoms, especially to freedom of speech, and they both derive from

ideas that man is able to reason, think, form an opinion and express it. These ideas were expressed by John Milton to the English Parliament in 1644, opposing licencing of printing in a document of the period called Enlightenment, Milton argued for reason and for religious and political freedom. He wrote: “Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions, for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making” (Milton, 1644:38). Truth and understanding cannot be monopolized by the church or the state, the priest and poet argued. Knowledge is not to be licenced, nor to be handled “like our broad cloath, and our wooll packs” (Milton, 1644:28). Free writing and free speaking are liberties that Milton compared to “the breaking forth of light” (Milton, 1644:31-32), moving the society and its people forward. With the liberal idea of press freedom, “truth is no longer conceived as the property of power” (Sibert et al. [1956] 1969:3) and the press is seen as a partner in the search for truth (Sibert et al. [1956] 1969:3).

With the kings’ and the church’s loss of control of regulating what was written and printed, the press grew into a fourth estate, bearing the means to control those in power, without being censored. Free media and freedom of expression have been, and still are, battlefields about power and control. The struggle for press freedom and fight against state licencing of printing grew from the new bourgeois class’ critical attitude towards the ruling classes. The transformation of the press from lapdog to watchdog was a process slowly moving forward from the time of the Enlightenment period up until this day, and it still continues. Being a watchdog is an ideal for many journalists globally, although being a watchdog towards political and economic groups is not usually found in non-Western societies (Hanitzsch et al., 2010). Also, monitoring the government is a challenge to journalists in most countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2016). Being a watchdog when relating to power is highly regarded among journalists, especially in the Western world. For instance, it is highly valued in Colombia as well as Norway (Frey, Rhaman & El Bour, 2017:88), but not so much in Tunisia and Bangladesh. In the latter two countries, the notion of being neutral to any power is more important (Frey et al., 2017:59). This finding is in agreement with Hughes et al. (2017) who argue that journalists in insecure democracies feel pressure and influences about their work more intensely. However, Muchtar et al. (2017:568) found that journalists in Muslim countries stress the importance of scrutinizing political leaders, and as such act like a watchdog.

Press freedom is freedom from governmental control (Sibert et al, [1956] 1969). That the state does not have monopoly of ideas and information is what Picard (1985) would call negative press freedom. He also points to the aspects of positive press freedom, such as individual persons using the media. Curran (1996) divides between the classical liberal focus on the freedom to publish, and the radical democratic perspective that the media should redress the imbalances in society. Splichal writes that in modern democratic societies, “where the people rather than different estates legitimize all the powers” (2002:xiv), reforms of political, economic, and social regulatory practices are needed for equalizing citizens use of reason and access to the public sphere. This ties into the right of access to information stated in the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Breunig (1991), however, found that nations that guarantee freedom of information in their laws did not necessarily provide for more freedom.

Another aspect of press freedom that is important when it comes to imbalances in society, is diversity. Diversity of power in a society, diversity of media ownership and diversity in voices being heard and hence, media content pluralism is highlighted by Czepek (2009:41). In order to freely cover events and secure that a variety of voices and opinions is transmitted to the public, plurality of media outlets and media owners are vital (Frey et al., 2017, Czepek & Hellwig, 2009). Structural conditions may foster or hinder the dissemination of diverse ideas and opinion to large audiences (Weaver, 1977, Rozumilowicz, 2002). Thus, Hachten (1987) points out that press freedom also has to do with political development, as well as fighting illiteracy and poverty, and building political consciousness. Journalism and media systems are “rooted in the institutions of the national state” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:13), and structural conditions such as legal, economical, social, cultural, and religious issues play important roles (Czepek & Hellwig, 2009).

The belief that man is reasonable and hence should be free to think and express himself, is a notion directly linked to the idea of democracy. Therefore, and also because of the hegemony of the Anglo-American press model, also called the Liberal model, a free press is often connected to democracy (see more in Frey et al., 2017, de Burgh 2005, Curran, 2011). As Ash (2016:183) puts it, “a free press is a defining feature of a free country, while censorship is a defining feature of dictatorship. A democracy cannot long survive without the former, a dictatorship without the latter.” However, the press itself cannot create democracy, Schudson argues (2003:197–198), as the state has to tolerate criticism and permit some degree of self-government to the press. Self-regulation of media ethics is one mark of autonomy of the press, as is media accountability, and acting according to the Code of Ethics. Effective self-regulation and high professional journalism standards could promote values of freedom of expression and media plurality (Richter 2018-2019). Opposite is

state regulating the media with fines, closing of media outlets, and imprisonment, which are dimensions of censorship.

Pressure on media freedom takes on different forms, including economic pressure, bad working conditions and low salaries for the media staff, that could, for instance make them open to bribery. The absence of safety for journalists is another. Intimidation, threats, imprisonment, attack on and killing of journalists to ensure power is upheld, is ultimate censorship by those in power, being the state or different stakeholders. As Høiby and Ottosen (2017:2) state, the lack of safety and security for journalists ultimately “are issues of freedom of expression, press freedom and democracy.” Still, as Merrill (2009:10) writes, there are cacophony of “muttering worldwide about press freedom” – even when obstacles and restrictions are numerous.

Methodology

Sampling

Our starting point was the Rig on press freedom, as conducted in four journalism departments in four countries. These are the only departments where the Rig has been done. As such, we thought it interesting to include all four departments that have used this pedagogical tool. So, our research population is the 188 bachelor students doing the Rig during the period December 2017 to June 2018.

Department and Institution	Place and country	Time of this Rig	Number of participating students	Countries examined during the Rig	Previous Rigs at the department
Department of Print and Electronic Journalism at An-Najah National University	Nablus, Palestine	December, 2017	63	Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Norway, Saudi-Arabia, Tunisia, Qatar	0
Cannes School of Journalism/IUT, University Côte d'Azur	Cannes, France	March, 2018	24	Italy, Iran, Japan, Switzerland	3
Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo Metropolitan University	Oslo, Norway	May, 2018	66	FYR Macedonia, Jordan, Kenya, Russia, The Netherlands, The Philippines, Venezuela	9
Department of Journalism and Communication, Makerere University	Kampala, Uganda	June, 2018	35	Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia	0
Total N:			188		

Table 1: Sampling of 188 journalism students. N = student

All participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire with seven questions related to the Rig on press freedom. Three of the questions were on the Rig itself, while four sought background information. Almost every sampled student in Kampala (97 per cent) and Nablus (95 per cent) responded, but in Oslo and Cannes, the response rate was only 59 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. Out of a total of 188 students there was an overall response rate at 72 per cent. It has to be taken into account that fewer students in France were involved in the Rig than in the other countries, and only half of them answered. Their responses constitute only eight per cent of all answers. The students from Palestine, contributed 41 per cent of the responses, while contributions from Norway and Uganda made up 27 and 23 per cent of the overall responses, respec-

tively. The next two tables show the gender and ages of the students who participated in the survey.

Institution	Female	Male	Total N
An-Najah National University, Nablus	42	18	60
University Nice-Côte d'Azur, Cannes	5	7	12
Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo	27	12	39
Makerere University, Kampala	22	12	34
Total N:	96	49	145
Per cent	66	34	100

Table 2 Gender of students. N = student.

In Oslo, all the students were in their first year of their bachelor study, and in Cannes they were in their second year. In Nablus, students from second, third and fourth year participated in the Rig. Still the majority of them were in the youngest age group, 20 years or younger. In Kampala, the Rig was conducted directly after the students had finished their fourth and final year of the bachelor studies. None of the students was 20 years or younger, and most of them were between 21 and 24 years old. The majority of the students in Oslo also belonged to this age group, although they were first-year students. Table 3 shows the participants' age groups.

Institution	20 years and younger	21-24 years old	25 years and older	Total
An-Najah National University, Nablus	48	12	0	60
University Nice-Côte d'Azur, Cannes	9	3	0	12
Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo	10	23	6	39
Makerere University, Kampala	0	30	4	34
Total N	67	68	10	145
Per cent	46	47	7	100

Table 3 Age groups. N = student.

Data collection and analysis

As a first step, we decided to use a survey to collect our data from 188 students. As a survey is recognized as a way of reaching a lot of people with the same questions, we asked the students to answer a questionnaire in their language. Mostly, members of the research team translated the questionnaire and the answers, and in one case used the help of a translator.¹

Taking into account that we desired to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches, we designed the survey with closed and open-ended questions, as well as cross-off options for answers and space for open answers written in the students' own words. There were four questions on background information, i.e. the students' gender, age, in which year they were in their journalism studies, and which country they investigated during the Rig on press freedom. To explore the students' perceptions on the concept of press freedom, we asked them to define press freedom in their own words, which is the focus of this paper.

To reach the students at campus directly after the Rig, and hoping for a maximum response, the questionnaire was handed out as hard copies to students in Nablus, Oslo and Makerere. In Cannes, the students were invited to fill in an online questionnaire, which was the most convenient way for their schedule. As noted above, 145 of the 188 students answered, which is 72 per cent.

To answer our research question, we combined quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. Combining the two approaches gives a richer set of data and analysis. To quantitatively analyse answers from the survey we used SPSS, an advanced program for statistical analysis. In the quantitative analysis we performed cross analysis to test for possible influence from different variables, for instance gender, home country, how long the students had been studying journalism and so on. So, the quantitative data from the survey provide a

¹ Thanks to Bashar Farran in Palestine

basis for exploring any differences in variables.

For the responses to the open-ended question, we needed a more qualitative approach. In regard of true qualitative methodology, we closely read and re-read the students' answers to the open-ended question and interpreted them using Nvivo, a program for qualitative text analysis. Within the answers, we looked for elements, words, expressions and concepts. The material itself then provided raw findings with patterns leading to different categories of aspects of press freedom and its conditions. For instance, pivotal aspects concerning journalism's role in society is linked to the journalists' duties and their ethics and epistemology. So, answers relating to these issues form one category, which we called "Journalism ethics and the role in society".

However, an answer from a student held different elements of the concept of press freedom, that fed into different categories. For example, this answer "[press freedom] is the guaranties that the government must provide so as the journalists have the freedom of expression and [to] gather and publish information without restrictions" (respondent 6) got into five categories that emerged through our analysis: "Societal framework and politics", "Journalism ethics and the role in society", "Human rights and freedom of expression", "Journalistic work" and "Limitations and pressure".

Furthermore, we did not categorize in terms of dividing positive or negative correlations. That means that the same category includes answers pointing at danger and pressure threatening journalists as well as answers focusing on safety and the absence of pressure. Also, there were some references to democracy, and we had to discuss which category these mentions belonged to. We decided to include words like democracy and democratic into the same category as human rights, although it could be argued that so-called democratic societies also violate human rights.

Results

In this section we present the empirical findings of our research question: How do the students define press freedom?

We got a response rate at 72 per cent on the survey, which is good. However, the response rate in Oslo and Cannes were much lower. Also, the number of students varied from Rig to Rig. Due to the response rate, the students from The Middle East and Africa outnumbered the European students: The biggest group of students (60) who answered were from Nablus, then Oslo (39), thirdly Kampala (34) and finally Cannes (12). When testing for differences, we did not find divisions along the lines of variables such as the students' home countries, their age, gender or which year they were in their journalism studies.

The students got to define press freedom in their own words when responding to the question in the survey, How do you define press freedom? Please, write in your own words here. Since it was open-ended, the question yielded a multitude of answers. First, we observed that many of the students' definitions of press freedom were normative. Some students defined press freedom as they thought it ought to be, while others defined it by mentioning what it should not be. So, there were many negatively or positively loaded words and concepts in the students' definitions.

Then, as stated in the methodology part, we scrutinized all answers and systematized the multiple elements into different categories, a total of seven categories. We called the most comprehensive category "Journalism ethics and the role in society". Aspects of autonomy, the rights and duties of journalists, journalism's ethics, and journalism's role in society were mentioned 144 times in the 145 answers. This category has to do with journalism's professional frames, its epistemology, and the role of journalism in society and its role as a watch dog, which were named as positive aspects of press freedom. Here, the students for instance stressed the need to work within the boundaries of the ethical guidelines of the profession. We also found mentioned 11 times the aspect of being critical, which underlines the importance of asking critical questions, critically analysing facts and the sources as a part of doing journalistic work, and criticising without fear of the consequences. The words autonomy or editorial independence were highlighted 46 times as important elements in the definition of press freedom. (the liberal aspect of press freedom). Also, several students stated the journalists' ability and the possibility to seek and tell the truth. As such, this category bears an ideal task of professional journalism.

The second largest category "Limitations and pressure" consists of limitations of press freedom such as for instance censorship, pressure, intimidations, threats, detainment and violence towards journalists and editors. Again, we found the duality between presence and absence. Many students used negative correlated

words combined with the word without. Thus, without restrictions, limits and constraints, being punished or restricted, consequences, monitoring or political pressure, financial censorship, being controlled or influenced by others, negative sanctions from the authorities, being controlled, regulated or limited by the state, and finally interference. We also saw that censorship is mentioned as something that should not exist in countries with good conditions for freedom of the press and that it is present in weak conditions for media freedom. Furthermore, censorship was seen as an instrument of control against the media. Many respondents pointed towards obstacles and restrictions that the state exerts, for example pressure and harsh regulations. However, censorship is not merely executed by the authorities, some students wrote in their definitions. Pressure from others with power, including politicians, criminals, religious institutions, commercial interests and so on, was also labelled as censorship, and often leads to self-censorship, the students pointed out.

The third category was "Journalistic work", which consists of the workings process of gathering information, having the right to access to information, be out there covering incidents and processes in society and report on whatever happens, and then publish the news. Words and expressions feeding into this category were mentioned 88 times in the 145 students' definitions of press freedom. Here, we also found references to reliable information, fact-checking and being accurate as parts of the journalistic working process.

The fourth category we called "Human rights and freedom of expression". 52 times, the respondents mentioned key words that form this category. The main word was freedom of expression/freedom of speech. The students accentuated a liberal aspect and made the connection between press freedom and freedom of expression, mentioning not only the journalists' right to express themselves, but also the right to freedom of speech for anyone, ordinary people and the sources of journalism stories. In the category, we saw references to human rights besides the right to freedom of expression. As discussed in Data collection and analysis, we choose to include mentions of democracy; highlighted in theory and not so much by our students, in this category.

The fifth category was mentioned three times less often than the fourth category. This category we gave the name "Societal framework and politics", mentioned 49 times. It consists of liberties given by the authorities, that is to say guarantees provided for the press by the authorities, such as governmental incentive for an independent and free press. Furthermore, it deals with constitutions and other laws which provide a legal framework for journalism, such as media laws and penal law. Included here as well are aspects tied to national security. Only two students referred to national security, one from Norway and one from Palestine. They, however, took opposite stances. The Norwegian student pointed out that journalists should challenge national security (respondent 93), while the Palestinian student specified that press freedom is the ability of the journalist to access information, especially if it is the right of the public to know about it, but without affecting national security (respondent 9).

The sixth category was only referred to 26 times. We called this category "The public". Here, the students raised the general interest of the people, the public's right to receive truthful and factual knowledge about what is going on so that people do not receive biased or wrongful information. It has to do with enlightening people through transmitting information and opinions that are of interest to the public.

The smallest of the categories was "Variety of media". This seventh category points towards conditions and premises for journalism regarding plurality of opinions and different types of media and platforms, for instance that print, online media, radio and television, as well as news agencies cover and publish news.

Concluding discussion

The students took their point of departure in liberal theory. The radical democratic perspective which includes reforms against imbalances in society and equalizing citizens' rights (Hachten, 1987, Curran, 1996, Splichal, 2002) were not stated clearly. These perspectives were mentioned only as (underlying) elements in the categories, and not highlighted as a tool to change society. However, in liberal theory, there is also a strong element of a free search for the unmonopolized and true knowledge so that freedom of learning will thrive and people will move forward (Milton, 1644:32).

In the largest category, namely "Journalism ethics and the role in society", the students were preoccupied with journalism's epistemology, its frames, ethics and its role in society, as well as the duties and rights of journalists. Journalism's autonomy from outside forces was highlighted by the students. So was the critical and independent position as a watchdog which pursues factual and true knowledge. Both elements

tie into the journalists' duties and their rights, as well as their professional journalism standards (Richter, 2018-2019) and ethics. So, in their definitions of press freedom, the students were strongly influenced by the profession's epistemology and by liberal theory. Although the students come from different parts of the world, they shared several of the ideal tasks of professional journalism, which was emphasised in 144 of 145 answers. Furthermore, in their definitions, they expressed an understanding that journalism has its limitations, for instance when it comes to following ethically grounded principles within the profession. This however, was paired with independence from outsiders, and often self-regulation was stated by the students. The respect of ethical, professional principles and their universal validity is in line with Frey, Rhaman & El Bour (2017) and Hanitzsch et al (2010). This as well apply to the notion of being a watchdog, such as our students stated in their definitions of press freedom (Frey et al., 2017; Hanitzsch et al., 2010).

The second largest category, which was "Limitations and pressure", also revealed that the students evoked liberal theory when they included freedom from restrictions, pressure and censorship in their definitions of press freedom. That being said, the students showed that they recognize the difference between an ideal situation and the complex conditions on the ground. Practically, press freedom is situated in a local or national context, although its ideas seem to be universal, the students expressed in their definitions. The students perceived the complexity of press freedom: In dictatorships, some information may be given, and in democracies, there exist restrictions. In all societies, there is still a fight to gain more freedom or to improve the status of press freedom. On the other hand, the students emphasised existing danger, threats and limitations of press freedom and "... the lack of safety and security for reporters" (Høiby & Ottosen, 2002:2). The students were concerned with danger and restrictions imposed on journalists. Here, we also found traces of references in their definitions to the authoritarian theory. These references however, were mentioned as negative features. In addition, negative elements that threaten press freedom are not necessarily derived from the authorities, but could have their outspring from political, violent or religious forces. What we did not find in our students' definitions, were "muttering worldwide about press freedom" (Merrill, 2009:10). Rather, we observed that the students were concerned that "the media are still controlled in most parts of the world" (Curran, 2011:14).

Also, many of our students focused their definitions of press freedom on how they think it should be, and stated that press freedom in its pure form is free of censorship. It is a conventional definition, that "press freedom is defined as an absence of state intervention in media activities" (Czepek & Hellwig, 2009:9). So, the students highlighted a basic definition, which in addition is an ideal. Though in many places, the ideal is not yet materialized, it is there to strive for. So, the students showed in their definitions that they comprehend the gap between the perception of press freedom and the different empirical practicalities depending on the local and national context.

As we saw in the largest category, the students were concerned with their future role as journalists and the role of journalism in society. Being bachelor students in journalism studies, it may not be surprising that the third largest category found in their definitions of press freedom included the practical, journalistic working process. "Journalistic work" enclosed their future work; the right and necessity to gather correct information, to cover events and processes in society and then publish to an audience. The three largest categories were intertwined, and it is unlikely to imagine one without the others: How can a journalist get hold off and freely process and publish factual, unbiased and ethical news without being independent from pressure, bribery or restrictions? Also, the next four categories fed into this way of thinking. The fourth category found in the students' definitions was mentions of free speech for the sources as well as the journalists, human rights which stipulate anyone's right to seek information and to express themselves, and democratic liberties and rights. As the focus of the Rig is press freedom, it may not be strange that the students accentuated press freedom more than freedom of expression, although they derive from the same origin that man is able to reason and think and freely express opinions (Milton, 1644).

The fifth category was grouped around elements in the students' definitions concerning legal framework, and guaranties given by the authorities. As Breunig (1991), several of the students mentioned a discrepancy between the legal texts and how these laws are used and interpreted. Some students also referred to how different laws contradict each other, which leaves a space for the authorities to manoeuvre in.

The sixth category, "The public", was highlighted more in research than by the students in their definitions of press freedom. However, conveying news to the public is an important, although sometimes underlying assumption, when the students focused on journalists' duties, journalism's role in society and "Journalistic work". Even so, we saw that the students explicitly were more preoccupied with including their own future work rather than their forthcoming audience into the definitions of press freedom. This implies that the students first and foremost focused on socialization into their future profession. It may also be that our four

departments do not emphasise the public as much as we could do in our teaching. Also, the last category could be the smallest due to the same reasons as mentioned above. Because another important issue highlighted by research is the importance of variety and diversity; different voices being heard, pluralism in media content, variety of topics, diversity of media outlets as well as plurality of media ownership. This was not mentioned in the students' definitions more than six times out of the 145 definitions. However, as stated by Czepek, Hellwig and Nowak, "... press freedom, pluralism and participation are by no means concepts clearly defined and universally agreed upon" (Czepek & Hellwig, 2009:12).

Our conclusion is that the journalism students agreed on important parts which go into a definition of press freedom. We could say that their definitions were in line with the historical and liberal roots on press freedom. Hand in hand with the thoughts of Milton, the students highlighted the professional role, journalistic values and the work as journalists in their definitions. While this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how journalism students define press freedom, we acknowledge some limitations. First, the literature is mainly Western based, even though we looked for theory on press freedom in our four countries and the different parts of the world that we represent. When testing for differences due to the students' nationality, gender and age, we did not find significant differences. That the same learning tool is used in four different departments, could be one reason for finding joint understanding of what press freedom means. Another aspect is that during the Rig, the students investigate the conditions of press freedom in several countries, but not in their own country. So, this learning project in itself encourages the students to seek opinions and statements about press freedom globally, although routed in specific countries. Hence, our study points in the direction of these journalism students having the same basic opinions on press freedom and journalism, which indicates that journalism is an universal profession that still needs to fight for the principles of press freedom. However, future research is encouraged to encompass societal and educational context, as well as the students' comprehension of press freedom before they do the Rig. As such, our study could be the starting point of further research.

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‘A modern-day equivalent of the Wild West’: preparing journalism students to be safe online

Jenny Kean, Leeds Trinity University and Abby Maclure, Yorkshire Evening Post

Introduction

Online abuse has today become something of a norm for many in the public eye – whether for members of the royal family (Davies 2019, The Royal Household ND), footballers (Rashford 2021) or pop stars (Hyun Young Li & Sangmi Cha 2019).

Holton & Molyneux (2017) note that traditionally, journalists had not had to develop a direct audience-facing identity, with most working in relative anonymity. But with a changing economic environment in journalism and the move to digital and online, they report a shift towards individual and organisational branding by journalists. Brems et al (2017) also highlight the demand for personal branding amongst journalists, particularly on Twitter, and this is reinforced by Wolfe (2019) who says that journalists are increasingly being required to have an online presence and to interact with their audiences. ‘This is identified by media owners as a way of engaging more “eyeballs” and potentially driving up profits.’ (ibid p.11).

As journalists have been forced more into the public eye, so too have they become more a target of abuse online (Costa-Kostritsky 2019; Chen et al 2018; NUJ 2020; Amnesty International 2018) - often simply for doing their job reporting on events. The backlash against the media after the death of TV presenter Caroline Flack was just one example, with publisher Reach plc offering guidance to its reporters as a result (Mayhew 2020). But Brexit, COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter have all been the backdrop for attacks on journalists as well. According to Samantha Harman, Newsquest Oxfordshire editor, ‘it reached a boiling point this year [2020] during coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement, with reporters having to deal with abhorrent, disgusting and racist comments on stories.’ (Behind Local News 2020).

The issue has increasingly become the focus of academic research (for example Gardiner 2018, Ferrier 2018, Chen et al 2020) – but how are we, as journalism educators, to prepare our journalism students for entering this world? Online safety for journalists is something that is increasingly required within our training (Employer A ND, Employer B ND), but how exactly should we be advising our students? As a journalism lecturer and as a Masters graduate now working in the frontline as a reporter, the researchers felt we had a valuable joint perspective to bring in the search for some answers to these questions.

Aims and Methodology

Our aim, therefore, was to take the research that has been done into the fact of the abuse itself a step further to:

Explore how journalists and employers are responding to it

Identify some practical help that could be offered to trainee journalists

Create a shared resource of guidance and tools for supporting students going into digital journalism.