Understanding the Global Journalist: a hierarchy-of-influences approach

STEPHEN D. REESE

University of Texas at Austin, USA

ABSTRACT   *Globalization of media organizations has brought accompanying debates about the proper education and professional standards for the journalists who work for them. These journalistic and press performance issues have attracted a correspondingly global community of scholars to conduct often transnational, comparative studies. In this article, I consider the issues raised in examining these "global journalists" from a sociology-of-media and a cross-national comparative perspective. I propose a "hierarchy of influences" levels-of-analysis model to help clarify and address such questions, including the problematic nature of "professionalism". From micro to macro, these levels address what factors shape media and news content, and include the individual journalist, news routines, organizational, extra-media, and ideological, with each carrying a different view of the professionalism issue. While many studies, comparative and otherwise, have been conducted at the individual level, often using surveys to examine the views and characteristics of individual professionals, this model requires that we take into account the larger structure within which these journalists function. More important than national differences may be the emergence of a transnational global professionalism, the shape of which will greatly affect how well the world's press meets the normative standards we would wish for it.*

KEY WORDS: *Journalists, Professionalism, Media Sociology, Comparative, Levels of Analysis, Press Performance*

Introduction

We study journalists and their profession to find insights into the ultimate shape of their work. We find this group worthy of our interest and research because of the crucial role it plays in the quality of the world's press. Particularly now, with the globalization of media through major corporate conglomerates, the professionalism of these journalists may be crucial in preserving standards of journalism. Although it is not often explicitly stated, many media scholars would share the conviction that there should be an international standard of journalistic professionalism with basic shared values. The global media have attracted a similarly global group of media scholars who study them. The European Union movement, in particular, recently has inspired a strong interest in collaborative media research that cuts across national boundaries. Shared theoretical perspectives allow these scholars to address comparative research issues as they bring their own national experiences to these questions.

Another factor leading to the popularity of journalists as a research subject is the rise of professional journalism

and communication education, which has become more firmly established in the United States and elsewhere. Not only does this represent an important phenomenon for research, but it means increasing numbers of scholars have been trained in these areas as their home discipline. Thus, it is natural that they want to know more about journalism professionals and have begun to approach this study systematically. It is also natural that these scholars attribute social importance to journalism and wish to enhance its status as a profession. This transnational view of the profession has found the social survey a natural methodological approach, allowing scholars to make general descriptive statements about the nature of these journalists and their adherence to certain professional tenets. Indeed, the attraction of this survey approach is that it is easily exported, making it tempting to apply it without sufficient conceptual attention to different cultural settings.

In this article, I will consider the issues raised by this increasing research interest in global journalism and propose a model to help guide these studies. This "hierarchy of influences" model proposes important distinctions between levels of analysis and locates the individual journalist within a web of organizational and ideological constraints. Such a model is particularly important in comparative research, because it helps to place the phenomena of interest within a structural context. Understanding journalism through these levels of analysis helps untangle many of the critiques of press performance, identify their implicit normative and theoretical assumptions, and suggest appropriate kinds of evidence. Ultimately, press practices must be viewed against normative standards. A multi-perspectival approach helps us sort out how different press professionals, practices, and systems work to advance these basic social goals and reminds us that professionalism is a problematic concept, consisting of many values held in tension, which different national groups balance in their own way.

The issues I take up here may be broadly described as a sociology-of-media view, which considers how media power functions within a larger social context. More narrowly, "media sociology" is often equated with the newsroom ethnographies carried out by many scholars trained in the sociological discipline. I mean it more broadly, as I think scholars in Europe and South America would as well, to refer to a broader social structural context of press practice. Although no phrase is entirely adequately, "media sociology" certainly suggests that we must tackle the structural context of journalism, moving beyond the more narrow attempt to psychologize the media through the attitudes and values of individual practitioners. By this phrase, I do also mean to distinguish my questions of interest from traditional audience-and-effects studies. In agenda-setting terminology, for example, researchers have frequently considered how successful media are in setting the agenda of the public; in the media sociology view we are more interested in those forces which set the media's agenda (Reese, 1991). Because it is such a crucial concept with regard to international journalistic practice, I will first review the notion of professionalism within a media sociology framework, before considering some issues raised in comparative media research. I will then present and explain the hierarchy of influences model as a way of addressing these issues.[1]

The Problematic Concept of Professionalism

Before we consider how best to understand and compare the work of journalists, we must consider more carefully the profession to which they belong. Fundamentally, our assessment of journalism is based on its contributions to a democratic society. Is journalism indeed a profession? It does not resemble the traditional learned professions with required credentials and licensing procedures, but does have many professional features. It aspires to an important social role and ascribes to ethical codes of conduct. To that extent journalism benefits from its practitioners laying claim to professional membership. Indeed, the idea of professionalism is highly normative. As McQuail (1992) discusses, we evaluate media performance against the major social values of freedom, equality, and order. We assume that journalists must have a high degree of professional freedom and autonomy to carry out their function, and we gauge their work against some standard of fairness, or equal representation of relevant social features. Ethically, we trust that journalists will observe standards that do not violate expectations of social order. We wish that journalists would adhere to certain roles and ethical conduct because we think that doing so benefits the larger society. Thus, an important objective of our analysis is to find the conditions that either encourage or threaten the professional conduct and press quality that we would desire.

I have argued elsewhere that "professionalism" is a problematic concept, with attempts to define it often linked to specific interests. In journalism education, for example, the news media wish to play an influential role in encouraging universities to train students in a "professional" sense. As the prestige of the journalism profession slips in society, the media are driven to shore up their prestige through a number of channels, including by exerting influence on university campuses. Important journalistic foundations, such as the Freedom Forum (established with an endowment derived from the largest US newspaper chain), have taken a much more proactive stance in shaping future faculty-hiring and curricular decisions. The media industry might prefer workers trained with basic entry-level skills, but university education must construct a broader professionalism of civic engagement if students are to contribute effectively to a democratic society (Reese, 1999; Reese and Cohen, 2000). Thus, professionalism is a contested terrain, and continually being renegotiated in response to social shifts.

Hallin (1992), for example, considers how US journalism reached a "high modernism" stage, characterized by the independent insider, a journalistic role with its model in the national security corespondent. This role broke down with the collapse of political consensus and economic support for media reporting, to give way to an interpretive, but largely technical analysis, role. He recommends that a further role shift is needed from a "mediating" position to one that assists in opening up the public sphere. So far I have been discussing professionalism within my own American context. To what extent are these same issues applicable cross-culturally?

In recent years more attention has been devoted to universal principles of human rights. Is it similarly possible to establish principles of journalistic practice acceptable to the diverse world nations? Many studies certainly have proceeded with that implicit assumption. US government and media initiatives have worked to encourage the adoption of the "objective" press model in the emerging democracies of South

America and Eastern Europe. They implicitly assume that US-style journalism is a natural and inevitable world model. This movement has been viewed by many Third World nations, however, as a thinly disguised attempt for the multinational communication firms to dominate the flow of media products, a threat to indigenous media production, and often contrary to nation-building goals. The post-Cold-War environment has brought a more receptive climate for internationalizing the concept of press professionalism, making it especially important that we monitor the shape it is taking.

Freedom is perhaps the most vigorously articulated international professional value. The Freedom Forum, among other groups, has worked to promote press freedom around the world, especially in emerging democracies. The Interamerican Press Association, for example, has developed a basic principle of journalistic freedom, which they promote to the world community. The 1994 Declaration of Chapultepec states that "no law or act of government may limit freedom of expression or of the press whatever the medium". The Declaration is based on the idea that a free press is necessary to enable societies to function as effective democracies. Often this emphasis on official restraint may simply translate as the ability for the news organization and its employees to go where they want and transmit information across national boundaries. Less often emphasized is the freedom of journalists to follow their own professional dictates against organizational pressure.

Thus, our initial concern should be with the problematic issue of professionalism itself. What interests are implicated in supporting one view of professionalism over another. What normative goals are professional practices designed to achieve, and are they meeting those goals? What functions does professionalism serve from differ-

ent perspectives of the media system? To what extent do professional characteristics of journalists affect the way they shape media content? A model is needed to help us sort out these questions, which are brought into sharper focus when considered cross-culturally.

Comparative Research on Journalists

As mentioned above, the global media are studied by a correspondingly global group of scholars. Multi-country studies and collaborative research have become more common, making it all the more important that we have a clear model and well-defined set of research questions to guide these investigations. Studies of professional journalists have been perhaps most easily adaptable to comparative analysis. Survey methodology permits replicating the same questionnaire in a variety of national settings, yielding results that can be located within a comparative framework. As indicated in books like Weaver's (1998) *The Global Journalist*, surveys of professional attitudes have proved a successful export to many countries. By contrast, media sociology more generally may be criticized for its overemphasis on explaining specific national, usually North American or British, systems—that is, focusing on a single case and context. The newsroom ethnography studies that have come to exemplify this style of research have been done primarily in US media organizations. A more comparative approach would be useful in calling into question the features of these systems: what is common versus idiosyncratic? If research is to be comparative, however, we must be clear about how this comparison is to be carried out. A brief discussion of the issues raised by comparative research shows the importance of the model I will introduce below.

"Comparative" refers to research

"across two or more geographic and historical (spatially/temporally) defined systems, in which the phenomena of interest are embedded in a set of inter-relations, relatively coherent, pat-terned, comprehensive, distinct, and bounded" (Blumler et al., 1992). In one sense we are always comparing people and groups based on their location on various social measurement scales, but that doesn't mean that the compari-sons are necessarily at the appropriate, macrosocietal systemic level. Compar-ing across systems yields different in-sights than comparing within and calls for crucial distinctions between the phenomenon of interest and its sur-rounding structural context. It considers the interplay of theories about sub-stance—the phenomenon of real inter-est and theories about organization of systems—the surrounding context (Blumler et al., 1992).

Thus, the first task of comparative media sociology is to clearly define the media system in which journalists of interest work. Comparative research in-cludes two important kinds of ques-tions. First-order questions ask "how much?" and "how many?" in various systems, which are by definition less interesting for being atheoretical. Se-cond-order questions move beyond the frequency of things to ask about the relationships among them. Establishing these relationships allows us begin to theorize about causal connections rather than transitory features. What is being compared in comparative re-search? Most common is the most ba-sic, comparing things. Less self-evidently available to the re-searcher would be structures formed by things, processes within structures, and, finally, functions of seemingly dif-ferent things, structures, and pro-cesses (Blumler et al., 1992).

Comparative media research is often equated with being cross-national, where the nation becomes the "defined system" and the basis for organizing analysis. Kohn (1989, pp. 22–24) identifies four main approaches to cross-national research based on the role the "nation" plays in the analysis: as object, context, unit of analysis, or as component of a larger system. These can easily be related to media sociology research.

When the goal is to understand the nation system itself as the object and its closely related media system, we may find analyses such as Sigal's (1973) comparison of reporting prac-tices in the United States and Britain. Hallin and Mancini (1994) have pro-vided a similar comparison of US and Italian journalists in their orientation to the state. The nation is perhaps most frequently viewed as a context for some other phenomenon of interest, as with the studies by Weaver and colleagues, mentioned above, of professional attitudes in a number of countries (Weaver, 1998). In this approach, the journalists' host country takes a secondary position, as a marker of certain factors of interest that can help explain comparative differences in journalists. Little empha-sis is placed on explaining how the national press system and its special historic and cultural role—although these may be described in passing—are connected to professional prac-tices.

Nations may become the unit of analysis in a broader examination of media patterns. Nations, for example, may be organized along a continuum of press freedom to examine its predic-tors. Finally, we may view nations as components of a larger system. In-deed, media will increasingly be oper-ating across national boundaries, forming systems that have less and less to do with specific national cul-tures. Scholars have begun to examine the "global newsroom", to consider how decisions made in supranational news

organizations in cities like London affect coverage of other countries.

This discussion suggests that when conducting comparative research it is tempting to rely on the nation system as the natural organizing principle. We need to carefully consider, however, how we are viewing journalists and their professional systems as relating to these national contexts. If we do choose to compare on a national level, we implicitly assume that countries are relatively homogeneous internally, that the variation in the phenomenon of interest is greater across rather than within countries. Increasingly, however, the stratifications of professional conduct may be more varied within than across countries, as a global media professionalism continues to emerge. The results of the Weaver studies, for example, show as many differences as similarities in professional features of journalists. These differences argue against emerging professional standards, as Splichal and Sparks (1994) have argued based on an analysis of journalism students in several countries. Elite journalists will likely have more in common with each other, across national boundaries, than with many of their more localized compatriots. More interesting questions may involve considering how this emerging class of "cosmopolite" journalists shares a common standard and understanding of journalism. As transnational commercialism grows, exemplified by firms like McDonald's and Disney, a common monoculture is developing, with media products moving easily across national borders. Global journalism is part of this development, supporting increasingly common understandings of what constitutes the international news agenda.

Comparative research should also make us cautious in assuming that the meaning of basic concepts is self-evident and comparable across cultures.

The meaning of "professionalism", for example, needs to be understood in relation to its specific cultural context. Other media features and practices may be less problematic, but in each case an attempt to specify the structural pattern within a given system helps to guard against prematurely assuming that something means the same thing in one cultural setting as another. Indeed, the interesting question may be not how professional one country's journalists are compared with another's, but how professionalism comes to mean something different in different cultures, or how different journalistic practices are employed to accomplish the same normative goals? In addressing these questions, it is useful to identify the available perspectives, and so I turn now to describing a model that provides such an orientation.

Hierarchy-of-Influences Model

I have found it valuable to consider the forces that shape media messages as a "hierarchy of influences", a model that is the basis for the book *Mediating the Message: theories of influences on mass media content* (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). This volume, developed with my colleague Pamela Shoemaker, establishes a theoretical framework for analyzing media based on levels of analysis, which help classify influences operating both separately and in conjunction with each other. In brief, these levels range from the most micro to the most macro: individual, routines, organizational, extra-media, and ideological, with each successive level viewed as subsuming the one(s) prior. This model helps to meaningfully organize a vast array of eclectic research by considering the level or perspective at which explanation is primarily sought.

The hierarchical aspect draws atten-

tion to the idea that these forces operate simultaneously at different levels of strength in any shaping of media content. While it is tempting to gravitate toward monocausal explanatory models, depending on one's political and disciplinary leanings, reality shows that in a web of interconnected forces our analytical choices are a matter of emphasis. Thus, theoretically we must ask which explanation is most parsimonious and successful in making sense of media phenomena. Empirically, this hierarchical model suggests that the investigator's task is to determine under which conditions certain factors are most determinative and how they interact with each other. And it reminds us that the evidence presented in support of empirical propositions should be appropriate to the level of analysis. Inferences must be ventured carefully when made at a lower or higher level of abstraction than the level of measurement.

Individual Level

At the individual level, we view the attitudes, training, and background of the journalist (or media worker more generally) as influential. Conceptually, we would locate here the many studies that attempt to describe the individual characteristics of this occupational group, perhaps the most common approach to conducting research on professional issues. At one time, little was known about journalists compared with other professionals. Hindering this systematic study was the tendency in the United States for journalists to encourage a certain mythic image of their distinctive role in society, while, paradoxically, the objectivity concept implied that the nature of these workers mattered little to their actual product. Viewing this product as a construction, like those produced in any other com-

plex organization, was antithetical to the ostensible goal of the media to reflect reality and tell the truth.

In a politically based counter-perspective, much energy has been expended in the US policy arena by conservative thinktanks and advocacy groups to establish the (liberal) bias of the American journalist. For these groups, the tendency of journalists to favor Democratic over Republican candidates is sufficient to explain what in their view is a leftward slant in news content. Critics on the left, however, are more likely to view this bias as lodged elsewhere, especially in the power of media ownership. Indeed, the individual level provides an attractive explanatory perspective for both the public and journalists alike. News consumers may prefer to put a human face on their views of media power, while the journalists' biographical genre must attribute to themselves enough influence to make a fit literary subject.

Rosten (1937) was perhaps the first to try to describe journalists in his study of Washington correspondents, but not until the 1970s did sociologists begin to apply the same occupational and organizational insights to this as to any other professional group. Johnstone and colleagues are frequently cited as the first major empirical effort to describe US journalists as a whole (Johnstone et al., 1972). Since that time, the work of Weaver and Wilhoit (1991) has inspired a host of other efforts around the world to examine journalism professionals empirically. These country studies were sufficient to inspire regular presentations at international conferences and a recent volume, *The Global Journalist* (Weaver, 1998). These surveys are large-scale and difficult undertakings and have provided valuable empirical description. They have provided a valuable counterweight to those who would make sweeping generalizations about jour-

nalists based on a few high-profile but unrepresentative cases.

At the individual level we can see that this choice of the population sampled becomes especially important. US conservative media critics, for example, have focused on the sociopolitical views of members of the so-called "elite" media concentrated in the northeastern major urban centers of New York and Washington. Lichter and colleagues (1986), for example, concluded that journalists were more likely to vote Democratic, to express left-of-center political views, and to be non-religious than the American public as a whole. Of course, their sample was not of elite journalists, as they claimed, but journalists employed at elite media (defined as including the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and the major television news networks). This obviously urban and northeastern sample showed predictable differences with the nation as a whole. More academically based surveys, such as those by Weaver, have examined the professional views of a broader population, showing that American journalists, across the entire country, are much more like the American public than the Lichter study would suggest.

As seen above, this level allows easy comparison of journalists and the public at large, providing the unsurprising finding that they do differ in many ways. Supporting these comparisons, is often an implicit normative assumption that journalists should be socially representative, reflecting the beliefs of the public. No other profession is held so strictly to this evaluative standard, which even if met would still leave larger forces affecting media quality unaddressed. Although, studies like these may be criticized for being overly descriptive and largely atheoretical, we may see that an implicit theory does underlie all of the research described above. Whether political or academic, power to shape news is held by the individual journalist, and journalist studies attribute great importance to individual characteristics in shaping the news product. Even so, these individual predictive factors are not often linked to specific outcomes.

While choice of population must be evaluated in considering research claims, the probability-survey approach has its general tradeoffs. These studies treat journalists as typically undifferentiated with regard to their location in the organization, and the influence of elite journalists and key gatekeepers is understated by the attempt to emphasize the broad occupational features of this group. The "group" quality of this survey perspective means attributing the major influence to its professional features rather than to the power of specific individuals within the group who have advantageous structural "gatekeeper" locations.

Routines Level

Individuals do not work alone, however, or use rules they invent themselves. The routines level of analysis considers the constraining influences of work practices. 'Routines' are patterned practices that work to organize how we perceive and function within the social world. Thus, here we look to those ongoing, structured, deeply naturalized rules, norms, procedures that are embedded in media work (e.g. Reese and Buckalew 1995). We recognize that individuals do not have complete freedom to act on their beliefs and attitudes, but must operate within a multitude of limits imposed by technology, time, space, and norms. We naturally are often led to view these routines in a negative light, as constraints on individual agency, but they can just as appropriately be viewed as

inevitable features of any human activity. Creativity is exercised through the structure made available through these routines, which in terms of Giddens' notion of "structuration" may be viewed as both constraining and enabling.

Analysis taking this perspective often finds the ethnographic method valuable because it allows the impact of these practices to be observed over time and in their natural setting. We assume that journalists are often not aware of how their outlooks are so "routinely" structured and would be unable to self-report honestly about it. And indeed we assume that much of what journalists provide as reasons for their behavior are actually justifications for what they have already been obliged to do by forces outside their control. Because field observation also allows these practices to unfold over time, it suits our concern with the ongoing and structured rather than the momentary or sporadic. The routines attracting most interest have been those involving frontline reporters. While everyone faces routines in their work (publishers, owners, etc.), the routines of newsworkers themselves are perhaps more visible, and more open to scholarly access and attention. This routine structuring of the newsgathering task also gives us important clues about how the media have chosen to deploy their resources, telling us something about the rest of the media structure as well.

Organizational Level

At the organizational level we may consider the goals and policies of a larger social structure and how power is exercised within it. If the routines are the most immediate environment within which a journalist functions, the organizational level considers the imperatives that give rise to those routines and how

individuals are obliged to relate to others within that larger formal structure. The major questions addressed at this level are suggested by an organizational chart, which maps the key roles and their occupants and how those roles are related to each other in formal lines of authority. The chart additionally suggests that the organization must have ways to enforce and legitimize the authority of its hierarchy and calls our attention to the organization's main goals (economic in relation to journalistic), how it is structured to pursue them, and how policy is enforced. Editorial policy, in particular, allows the organization to shape what stories are considered newsworthy, how they are prioritized, and how they are framed.

Newsroom studies often contain elements of both the routines and the organizational perspective, which are clearly related. This more macro level, however, reminds us that news is an organizational product, produced by increasingly complex economic entities, which seek ever more far-reaching relationships in their ownership patterns and connections to non-media industries. While journalists have long needed to be concerned with business considerations influencing their work, now these concerns may stretch far beyond their immediate organization. As news companies become part of large, global conglomerates, it is often difficult to anticipate the many conflicts of interest that may arise, and journalists find it difficult to avoid reporting that has a relationship to one or more aspects of their parent company's interests. Thus, this level has within it a number of layers that may need sorting out depending on the case: the news organization itself, the larger company to which it belongs, and the still more complex ownership network of firms (media and otherwise) that may subsume both.

The organizational level brings differ-

ent challenges for analysis than the previous two levels. Organizational power is often not easily observed and functions in ways not directly indicated by the formal lines of authority described in accessible documents. As Breed (1955) emphasizes in his classic observation of social control in the newsroom, power is not often overtly expressed over the news product because it would violate the objectivity notion, that news is something "out there" waiting to be discovered. Enforcing policy about what the news is to be would contradict this principle. At this level we are curious about how decisions are made, and how they get enforced. By definition, we are concerned with power that is exercised periodically, implicitly, and not overtly, and, as a result, is not so readily available to direct observation. Indeed, a journalist anticipates organizational boundaries, the power of which is manifested in self-censorship by its members. Thus, journalists may accurately state that no one told them to suppress a story. This self-policing is more effective than direct censorship, however, because outsiders are often not even aware that anything has taken place. Thus, the analyst must be careful to fully understand the organizational structure and its control mechanisms in order to make an accurate assessment of how news is shaped.

Extra-Media Level

At the extra-media level we consider those influences originating primarily from outside the media organization. This perspective considers that the power to shape content is not the media's alone, but is shared with a variety of institutions in society, including the government, advertisers, public rela-

tions, influential news sources, interest groups, and even other media organizations. This latter factor may be seen in the form of competitive market pressures. From a critical perspective, the extra-media level draws our attention to the way media are subordinated to elite interests in the larger system. While individual journalists may scrupulously avoid conflicts of interest that may bias their reporting, maintaining a professional distance from their subject, their employers may be intimately linked to larger corporate interests through interlocking boards of directors and other elite connections.

At this level, then, we assume that the media operate in structured relationships with other institutions that function to shape media content. We further assume that these relationships can be coercive but more often are voluntary and collusive. Normative concerns at this level are for press autonomy, assuming often that it is not desirable for the media to be so dependent on other social institutions. Conceptually, this level encompasses a wide variety of influences on the media, but we are particularly concerned with those systemic, patterned, and ongoing ways media are connected with their host society. Here we can see that the vantage point of the researcher makes an important difference. Observation from within the news organization may lead one to conclude (as does Gans (1979), for example) that news sources and associated public relations efforts exert great influence on the news agenda; a similar analysis from the vantage point of the public relations organization may suggest that most of their efforts do not have an immediate payoff. Judging the result depends on against whose professional standards (public relations or journalistic) they are being evaluated.

Ideological Level

Each of the preceding levels may be thought to subsume the one before, suggesting that the ultimate level should be an ideological perspective. The diverse approaches and schools of thought in media studies that may be deemed "ideological" make them difficult to summarize. Here we at least are concerned with how media symbolic content is connected with larger social interests, how meaning is constructed in the service of power. This necessarily leads us to consider how each of the previous levels functions in order to add up to a coherent ideological result. In that respect, a critical view would consider that the recruitment of journalists, their attitudes, the routines they follow, their organizations' policy, and those organizations' positions in the larger social structure work to support the *status quo*, narrow the range of social discourse, and serve to make the media agencies of social control.

Perhaps we need not take a critical view to examine the media as ideological institutions, but typically that is the case. Ideological analysis involves assumptions about power and how it is distributed in society. In the liberal pluralist tradition, this power is viewed as spread around such that a balance is maintained. If elites are favored, then those elites will circulate actively enough to minimize any concerns about concentrated power (e.g. Reese, 1991). A critical view is more likely to be concerned with how power is exerted by the natural workings of the media system, creating a process of hegemony which may be defined as the "systematic (but not necessarily or even usually deliberate) engineering of mass consent to the established order" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 253). At this level we ask how a system of meanings and common-sense understandings is made to appear natural through the structured relationship of the media to society. In a broader sense this level resembles the "culturological" approach outlined by Schudson (1989), which is concerned with the relations of ideas to symbols. The "cultural air" thus provides the larger environment that journalists and their institutions occupy. In this sense it may be seen to encompass more questions than are typically associated with the "ideological", especially the ideological viewed as a particular process within late capitalism.

Hierarchy of Influences and Professionalism

Having identified the five levels of this model, it may be helpful to return briefly to the concept of professionalism and consider some of the questions and issues raised by these different perspectives. Here the interesting questions may become definitional issues, as we ask what different functions are served by professionalism at each level? The hierarchical model also helps identify a variety of causal factors that may be more explicitly tied to professionalism and ultimately to the shape of professional work.

The idea of professionalism, for example, can be considered an individual-level value that journalists espouse, and an occupational calling to which they belong. Codes of ethics are ultimately guides to individual action for those who call themselves "professionals". Individuals value their profession to the extent it provides protection from unwarranted interference and a shared sense of socially desirable goals. Here we might ask, to what extent are expressions of professional roles meaningful to the individual and beneficial in helping resist other pressures?

Alternatively, to the extent that it embodies a set of procedures on how to report a story, professionalism may be viewed from a routines perspective. Tuchman's "strategic ritual" of newswork shows that journalists are considered professional to the extent that they are following accepted practices, adhering to deadlines and getting the work done. To the extent that objectivity is a core professional value, she shows how it may be routinely satisfied by attributing opinion to sources, handling quotations correctly, and other basic practices (Tuchman, 1978). Following the procedures provides a defense against audience and peer critics.

Within the organization we can ask how professionalism is a negotiated set of values that must be worked out to satisfy the organization's needs. Commercial ownership and individual bias are both rendered less threatening to credibility by the invocation of professionalism in what Hallin (1992) called the fully rationalized "high modernism" of American journalism. As less overtly political US journalists have self-selected into the profession, and as owners have become less partisan, and more corporate and managerial, the internal clashes over what professionalism properly requires have become less direct. Here we might ask questions like the following: What organizational changes have worked to value different professional norms? How is professionalism negotiated within an organization to facilitate both owner and journalistic needs? To what extent are organizational goals in harmony with the professional norms of individual journalists? How does the increasing complexity of media organizations affect the definition of "professionalism"?

Weaver and Wilhoit (1991) have proposed three major roles that may be said to characterize journalists: adversarial, interpretive, and disseminator.

Many changes in these roles that they observe can be understood in relation to changes in the organizational setting. The disseminator role appears to be most on the rise and is most consistent with the current nature of corporate journalism. Finding that less importance is now given by journalists to analysis, challenging government authority and investigative reporting, is consistent with the greater emphasis given by mainstream news media to entertainment and celebrity journalism. Finding that journalists have given increasing value to getting information to the public quickly is not surprising given the neutral quality of that professional value. Speed is a feature of news that transcends any cultural setting and suits the global nature of newsgathering with its emphasis on speed and commonly accepted understandings of news, but the global newsroom has taken a professional step backward when speed is the ascendant value compared with more interpretive and adversarial functions.

The extra-media level reminds us that professionalism is worked out at many levels. The independence of the reporter may be offset by the close relationships of owners with other institutions, through elite networking, common board memberships, and so forth. As news organizations have increasingly been merged with other even non-media conglomerates, invoking some vision of professionalism works to protect their unique claim to societal protection. To some extent I have this level in mind when I consider how the media in general, in a way similar to other corporate sectors, have sought through their philanthropy, subsidies and other institutional ties to affect how universities define and pursue being "professional", namely, to better serve the needs of industry and the private sector (Reese, 1999). Here we might ask what aspects of professionalism

are invoked by audience and interest groups to criticize the press. In addition, we must question whether these professional roles make sense in isolation, or whether journalists are always positioning themselves relative to specific other social institutions. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), for example, discuss whether journalists adopt a "sacerdotal", or priestly, attitude toward government officials as opposed to a more pragmatic view. The former perspective would be more likely to accept the institution's right to speak for itself.

From a critical ideological perspective, we may see that the professionalism of journalists often leads them to accept the conservative critique of their work, which blames their biases for the shortcomings of news coverage. While they may not appreciate being criticized, it would be professionally unacceptable for them to embrace their critics on the left who view them as subservient to the powers-that-be with little individual autonomy (e.g. Reese, 1990). Thus, the predictable ideological result is that more energy is spent responding to critics on the right than on the left, a process that Herman and Chomsky (1988) refer to as "flakking". At this level we may ask, for example, how tenets of professionalism are used to justify media ownership patterns?

Seeing how professionalism varies in meaning across levels alerts us to challenges in making comparisons across systems. As suggested earlier, the comparative perspective as applied to such journalistic issues encourages us to think across levels, and to consider the systemic context of our phenomena of interest. As Blumler et al. (1992, p. 8) note, comparative research

creates a need to think structurally, to conceptualize in macro terms, to stretch vertically across levels and horizontally across systems … to adjust to the embeddedness of phenomena within a sys-

tem, to keep an eye out for the relevant principles of its organization.

Thus, the model described above helps in this process. I have already suggested that a comparative view calls us to not take our national context for granted, as a static and universal feature. It requires us to be especially clear about those things we are comparing and whether they mean the same thing in different contexts. Cross-national studies should carefully consider what routines and organizational differences, for example, the country contexts represent. Where possible, comparative cases can be chosen to show contrasts in some features (e.g. cultural, normative traditions) while holding others constant (e.g. media systems). Considered cross-nationally we may question in which setting a particular level is strongest: in which country, for example, are professional dictates more likely to override organizational business pressure? A levels-of-analysis approach also may draw our attention to relational differences. How do journalists relate to their employers in one setting compared with another? How do organizational routines differ in the ways that they relate to professional values? What seemingly different national press practices may serve the same function of maintaining professional autonomy for journalists?

Conclusion

My goal in this essay has been to pose some important questions for research questions on journalism and the professionals who practice it from a media sociology perspective. The hierarchy-of-influences framework is presented not as a complete theoretical explanation, but as a model that helps sort out the crucial concepts and identify connections that research questions

may address. I have suggested a number of questions to show how these levels of analysis lead to pursuing different kinds of research. Of course, this conceptual work is in some ways the easy part, considering the time and resources required by large-scale empirical research. On the other hand, time and effort are well spent ensuring theoretical precision and avoiding effort wasted by prematurely jumping into the data-gathering process.

It is a positive development that so many scholars around the world are pursuing research on media professional questions. The great interest in the multi-country studies of journalists mentioned earlier suggests that we will see a continued rise in this style of research. The many opportunities available for cross-national research have the potential for providing important new insights into global journalism, particularly as US and British media sociology is compared and tested against experience and evidence from other systems. This comparative approach should also valuably highlight the normative aspects of press performance, which are often implicitly embedded in research. Especially in the ethnocentrism of US research there is a strong tendency to take such values for granted.

Few discussions of international news can avoid acknowledging the economics of transnational corporations, which have worked to concentrate increasing power in the hands of fewer and fewer organizations. The study of professional journalists cannot take place without recognizing these realities, and indeed an authentic professionalism (as opposed to one manufactured for the purpose of media image management) may be one of the most important counterweights to the economics of global newsgathering. The joining together of journalists in support of desirable democratic goals can be an important movement, worthy of our attention and monitoring. Ultimately, if we want to connect professional features to professional work, it will mean relating the "hierarchy of influences" factors to textual and content analysis. This may mean considering effects of various factors on the press agenda (its emphasis on various issues and features) as well as on how issues are "framed" (how social life is organized, visually and verbally) (Reese et al., 2001).

As we begin to link these individual and structural factors to media content, this examination of the work professionals produce will also be highly normative. We need better understandings of what may be taken to represent journalistic "quality" in these agendas and frames. We need to be concerned also with what is underreported or kept out of the news, in addition to the content that is available for us to measure. Finally, from a cross-national perspective, each country may be considered a different laboratory for press performance, as we evaluate the conditions that contribute to enhancing professional autonomy and good journalism. Clear definitions, questions and a systematic framework for comparative research will ensure that research in this area is cumulative and contributes to both better understanding and good social policy.

Notes

[1] I will immodestly refer to a number of my own works in this essay to illustrate some topics that have appealed to me in my own efforts to tackle these issues. Although my work has dealt with US media and issues, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to explore these questions in recent years with colleagues and students in a number of countries, including Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, The Netherlands, and Spain. As I have taken on administrative positions within journalism education, I have thought particularly

about professional issues, especially as they relate to higher education. I especially appreciate the opportunity to work with the faculty at the University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain, where in the summer of 1999 I taught a doctoral seminar. This time with faculty and students gave me the opportunity to explore further some of the

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