

CHAPTER 5

NEWS WORKERS' REFLECTIONS ON DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA AFTER A TERROR EVENT

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ABSTRACT

22 July 2011, saw the biggest domestic terror event in Norway since World War II. On this day, a right-wing terrorist placed a bomb in front of the Norwegian government building, where the prime minister had his office at the time. Later, the same perpetrator dressed up as a policeman and tricked his way into a political youth camp, where 69 mostly young people were killed. The present case study involves the leading national online news provider, VG, whose website, VG Nett, was Norway's most-read online news site at the time of the attack. The study addresses the research gap of how news



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workers and managers see the potential of the affordances of digital media during crisis events. Furthermore, the study looks at how two different discourses of professionalism, the occupational and the organisational, informed journalists' use of technological and social media affordances during this terror event, and at how online journalists and management reflect upon and continue to refine these approaches five years later. This study stresses the importance of a clear understanding of the decision-making processes that actually guide the handling of those affordances during a crisis event. Ultimately, this study questions not the perceived tension between the two discourses of professionalism, but their relative impact upon domestic crisis journalism in the technological realm.

Keywords: Occupational and organisational discourses of professionalism; crisis journalism; terror; 22 July 2011; online journalism; social media

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of digital journalism, the consequences of a crisis or terror event offer vital insights into how news institutions might prepare to handle such events. This article seeks a better understanding of how two different discourses of professionalism, occupational and organisational, respectively process and implement (and even reject) experiences with technological affordances, within a newsroom and within the news organisation itself, over time. Researchers have yet to look at how news workers and their managers have taken advantage of the potential of the affordances of digital media, such as, for example, interactivity with users, the speed of digital media, social media platforms, real-time chatting and the streaming of video and sound.

Several seminal production studies have emphasised the way in which important lessons are learned during breaking news events (known as hard news; see, e.g., Gans, 2004; Schlesinger, 1978; Tuchman, 1978); all of them also admit that these events are notoriously difficult to typify, as they do not follow any particular pattern. According to Tuchman (1973) and Berkowitz (1992), journalists transfer their experiences from one crisis

news event to another, and Nord and Strömbäck (2006) remark upon the particular facility of certain news organisations in this regard. This facility derives from the organisation's efforts to anticipate what might happen next, and to then link the appropriate technology to the desired outcome. In order for an organisation to gain perspective upon the ways in which it works during crises, it must reflect upon and analyse resonant past events. To this end, Olsson (2010, p. 88) has noted that the lack of clarity regarding the term 'crisis news event' hinders an organisation's ability to 'provide an understanding of what events become a part of news organisations' historical case banks' (p. 87). Olsson seeks to clarify an understanding of crisis news events from an organisational point of view, especially in terms of the learning process and efforts towards preparedness. Along those lines, the present study seeks to gain insight into how an organisation and its actors implement the lessons learned after a crisis news event has ended. To accomplish these goals, the study begins by examining the ways in which two different discourses, organisational and occupational, approach technological affordances, allowing for both discrepancy and overlap between the two. Hence, the study also acquires a better understanding of what distinguishes the two discourses, both during an event and over time following it.

Obviously, a domestic terror event challenges both journalists (occupational professionalism) and middle- and top managers (organisational professionalism), though perhaps in different ways. Using Norway's biggest online newspaper as a case study, then returning to the organisation five years later, this study unpacks the approaches and lessons learned, and then introduces an intervening development, social media, to the equation. Sociologist Evetts (2003, 2006) developed the model of two competing discourses of professionalism. According to Örnebring (2016, p. 21), it succeeds in aligning the processes and practice of journalism with journalism's actors, and he notes the difference in how 'professionalism' is understood by the manager and the managed. Örnebring introduces the further distinction between journalism-as-institution and journalism-as-work: the first one is described as 'shared norms and routines of news production as created and maintained by a set of organisations,' while the second one is described as 'everyday practical activities undertaken by individuals who produce journalistic content' (Örnebring, 2016, p. 15). Negotiation between the two discourses is on-going, and,

at times, the ‘values of organisational professionalism may be absorbed by and incorporated into occupational definition of professionalism’ (Örnebring, 2016, pp. 21–22). The present study extends this negotiation to exceptional news situations, and in particular to the digital coverage of crisis events.

Evetts (2003, p. 395) writes about how sociologists have ‘returned to the concept of professionalism in attempts to understand occupational and organisational change and the prominence of knowledge work in different social systems and global economies’. Aldridge and Evetts (2003, p. 547) have also found that the ‘discourse’ of professionalism is related to a set of values and identities that is mobilised by employers as a *self-discipline*. Julia Evetts describes the two alternative discourses in the following way. Organisational professionalism ‘incorporates rational-legal forms of decision making, hierarchical structures of authority, the standardisation of work practices, accountability, target-setting and performance review and is based on occupational training and certification’ (Evetts, 2006, pp. 140–41). On the other hand, occupational professionalism, the more traditional, historical form, involves a ‘discourse constructed within professional groups themselves that involves discretionary decision-making in complex cases, collegial authority, the occupational control of the work based on shared education and training, a strong socialisation process, work culture, occupational identity and codes’. Örnebring (2009) further notes that there does not *need* to be any antagonism between these discourses, and, in fact, there might even be shared interests.

TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES IN A TIME OF DIGITAL MEDIA

Digital technology continues to transform the affordances that are available in the newsroom, to such an extent that newspapers have not only suffered but even disappeared as a result (Diakopoulous & Koliska, 2017). One reason for this industry upheaval is the new ‘turbo news’ mode that now characterises the newsroom (see Willis, 1994). Scholars have even found that such a discourse of speed (Hampton, 2004) has reached its (logical?) conclusion whereby everything now requires *immediate* dissemination (Sanders & Bale, 2000). Since the turn of the millennium, in any case, news has been produced at completely different speeds

than it was in the years preceding (Rasmussen, 2006). Furthermore, in response to the emergence of online news in particular, traditional journalism has had to develop interactive news features to complement its more familiar fare (Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2005). While digital technology was transforming the newsrooms' affordances, it was also enabling and then hugely expanding the affordances of social media platforms. Now that Facebook is about to introduce video products online (BBC News, 2017), what was once considered a fundamentally social platform for amateur content is now primed to compete with the professional media companies and news organisations. In the wake of the affordance of live-streaming, that is, social media's embrace of video that competes with traditional television, we see yet another step towards the institutionalisation of social media as organisation rather than a platform defined by user interactivity (see e.g. Kalsnes, 2017). Domingo (2006, p. 505) compared online production with television broadcasting and found that the news media are 'shaped by contextual factors that are primarily found inside the media companies'. In other words, changing contextual factors come with the potential to be socially negotiated and are not, like journalists have the tendency to believe, a result of technology (Örnebring, 2010). In the context of the daily practices involving technology and journalism, this kind of social shaping can be understood as 'negotiation' (Örnebring, 2009), or the constructive expression of the tensions, disagreements and conflicts of interest which accompany journalism in the digital age (see also Domingo, 2006; Hartley, 2011; Singer, 2004; Steensen, 2010).

Previous studies (Barland, 2012; Konow-Lund, 2013) have demonstrated the way in which users flock to the online sites during emergencies, often in search of trustworthy information. If the online sites deliver, the users will stay on and turn into regular readers. VG and VG Nett discovered the potential for crisis and terror-event journalism to produce peak numbers of users, but how to exploit this potential remains an under-investigated subject. Following every crisis news event is a phase in which the audience must process emotions, and this phase is an opportunity for both traditional online and social media platforms to demonstrate their value.

Kalsnes (2017) recently extended the term 'social media logic'¹ with affordance. She did this by drawing upon Altheide's definition of media logic: 'the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a

particular medium. This includes rhythm, grammar and format. Format, while a feature of media logic, is singularly important because it refers to the rules or “codes” for defining, selecting, organisation, presenting, and reorganising information as one thing rather than another’ (Altheide, 2004, p. 294). Relatedly, Bucher and Helmond (2017, p. 31) recently extended the notion of affordances. They emphasise ‘how affordances extend across the boundaries of platforms and how both human and non-human users importantly afford something back to the platform’. More traditionally, looking at action possibilities (understood here as how objects come with a possibility for action; e.g. water comes with the possibility for swimming, a floor with the possibility for walking, a cup with the possibility to drink from it) in both online news and social media platforms, Bucher and Helmond (2017, p. 31) argue how such platforms ‘afford different things to various types of users, including end-users, developers, and advertisers; and considers how they are connected through various possibilities for action’. Although there are many technological affordances, the present study focuses upon those that allow for action possibilities that are already inherent in the technological artefacts of online news, and in the traditional online news and social media platforms. When, for example, Facebook creates a ‘safety check’ (e.g., by clicking it, users can mark themselves during a crisis or terror attack) it results in a technological artefact that very well could have been developed by online news sites. In other words, online news could potentially have invented a similar affordance on their own sites. In this sense, the safety check can be said to be a technological artefact. The term ‘technological artefact’ refers to an online item created to solve a sort of practical problem, either for the users’ digital news or the users of social media platforms.

METHODOLOGY

On 22 July 2011, the unthinkable happened in a country that had no previous experience with terror: Norway, the home of the Nobel Peace Prize. A far-rightwing terrorist, Anders Behring Breivik, dressed in a fake police uniform and parked a car close to the government building where Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg had his office. Inside the car was a fertilizer bomb that would destroy not only the government building but a whole

area of the capital around it. Breivik then made his way to a youth league camp under the pretence of being a policeman, hunting down and massacring 69 people, mostly youth, on an island.

Staff members in media organisations (as well as government officials and first responders) later recalled being completely taken by surprise by the event. The present case study involves the leading national online news provider, VG, whose website, VG Nett, was Norway's most-read online news site at the time of the 22 July attack. The newspaper VG was established a short time after World War II. Over the decade preceding the 22 July 2011 terror attack, the printed newspaper had seen a sharp drop in circulation, from a peak in 2002 of 390,510 to 211,510 in 2011 (Høst, 2012). On the other hand, VG's digital platforms (featuring online, mobile, iPad and video content) had been enjoying a huge increase in audience numbers. In fact, VG Nett has always been the most popular news website in Norway, with more than 1,278,912 unique users (TNS Gallup, 2014).

In 2011, I interviewed nine news workers, photographers, desk editors and front editors for over an hour each. The news workers were interviewed from one week after the incident to the beginning of October 2011. In 2016, I interviewed 10 informants, some of whom were the same as in 2011. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. While the informants in 2011 were mostly news workers, desk editors and front editors, several of the informants in 2016 (three) worked as developers. All of these three had either worked from home or were at the office during the incident in 2011.

VG had its offices near the first bomb explosion, and its staff was evacuated during the attack. Its journalists had to find a new place to work in and ended up producing its news content, including online and moving images, from hotel suites during the night of 22 July.

ANALYSES AND EMPIRICAL DISCUSSION

The Biggest Event in Norway Since the World War II: A Background

Everyone was taken by surprise when 22 July happened, so there was no time to scout on social media for technological affordances that could be

introduced into the regular online news coverage, such as safety checks, interactivity graphics or some way to technologically bridge social media and the VG online news platform. The scarcity of time and the way journalists were caught by surprise resulted in journalists focusing upon getting the correct information out to the citizens and mostly trying to avoid distractions in this particular phase.

What did happen, however, was that the traditional roles of the two different discourses of professionalism; organisational and occupational, seemed to dissolve. Örnebring (2016) recently summarised what distinguishes journalism-as-institution from journalism-as-work in relation to organisational and occupational modes of professionalism. While the former is characterised by a need for predictability and infrastructure, the latter is characterised by a need for status and legitimacy. During 22 July, occupational professionalism trumped the organisational discourse. For example, when the VG newsroom, located right across the street from the demolished government building, was shut down and journalists were ordered not to enter the newsroom, a group of journalists and a news editor ignored this instruction and went in anyway (Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2016). The main reason for doing so was to return to a place where it would be possible to access as much familiar and reliable technology as possible, in order to quickly produce correct information. During the event itself, the focus was on traditional content.

Previous studies (Konow-Lund & Olsson, 2016, 2017) have also looked at how news workers retreated to their familiar routines while covering the 22 July event, despite the conditions of the crisis that worked against those routines. But when it comes to investigations on how news workers and managers took advantage of the potential of the affordances of digital media use, for example, interactivity with users, speed of digital media, social media platforms, real-time chatting and the streaming of video and sound, there are research gaps. Instead, existing studies have divided the production of stories such as those related to 22 July into three phases: (1) shock; (2) emotional processing and (3) the development of in-depth explanations and understanding. While the first phase permits little in the way of actual work, the other two have more possibilities for utilising technological affordances, for example. Findings (Konow-Lund, Hågvær Benestad, & Olsson, 2017) demonstrate that, during the emotional process of trying to understand what has taken place in a crisis

event, the use of social media, interactive digital graphics and extended collaborations among platforms was useful but typically happenstance. During the last phase, however, editors and middle managers assigned a special group of journalists, developers and editors to work on a deeper analysis of the event. This phase lasted from a couple of weeks after the event to the trial of the terrorist a year later and took more advantage of the resources and technological affordances that were available.

Previous studies have concluded that news production requires a certain amount of control over the organisation of production. Tuchman (1978) explained in her seminal study on news work that professionalism was a crucial factor in the coverage of the crisis event of the President Kennedy assassination.² She states that sociologists studying organisations and professions tell us that the variability of raw materials, organisational flexibility and professionalism is interrelated – in short, the greater the variability of raw materials, the greater the organisational flexibility, and, accordingly, the greater the professionalism of workers (Tuchman, 1978). Though Tuchman worked in the pre-digital area, news workers very much continue to compensate using flexibility of professionalism when technical capacity is overmatched. Controlling the ‘variability’ of raw materials such as video, sound, text, links, graphics and so on, is vital. The news organisation depends upon individuals’ actual experience and ability in order to control the technical facilities. In other words, in times of crisis events, news organisations depend on the autonomy of the individual worker and that they are able to accommodate the standards and need of the organisations. Would it help, one must wonder, if actors and newsrooms were to reflect on relevant strategies *before* a crisis event?

Occupational and Organisational Approaches to Technological Affordances in 2011

Although journalists were aware of social media platforms and their technological affordances, the priority was to publish the most trustworthy information – Gatekeeping, that is, was essential at a time when nobody knew what was going on. But at least one senior reporter (Senior Reporter, 23 August 2011) stated that Twitter was in fact immensely important to understanding what was going on, though not

necessarily important to use as such. Other interviewees discussed social media as well:

Of course we use social media to a large extent. Twitter, for example, has come to be one of my most important working tools. It has become that way gradually. But it is more and more important. Facebook is also important for journalists, but for me Twitter is most important. Clearly most important. I subscribe to all breaking news services of big houses everywhere and also to some Norwegian politicians. But obviously, I believed Twitter was important to come to terms with what happened. Possibly also Facebook, but for my part I only observed messages on Twitter and how they were retweeted. (Editor/front editor, 23 August 2011)

Even without using social media as tools for story coverage in this specific situation, this news editor points to its importance to users, and, therefore, its impact upon journalism. The terror event shed light upon how users exploited this technology to, among other things, publish material that professional journalists could use as important background source material. Social media also provided a prompt for certain ethical decisions, as when a news editor pointed out the difficulties surrounding the use of photos on Twitter from survivors at Utøya:

We also saw some photos from Utøya that circulated on Twitter. Those photos were, as far as I know, never used in Norwegian media. Obviously we knew right away we couldn't use this. It has never been confirmed that the photo is real, but I guess that it most likely is real. It looks a lot like another photo which has already been used, where you see that he stands with his rifle. Except for this photo where he is closer to the motive. [...] But it can look like he is aiming towards somebody who is lifting their hands over their head [...] in front of their face. Indeed, very distressing. Very, very distressing. (Editor/front editor, 23 August 2011)

It should be noted that the front editor was contributing as a regular reporter on that day, because there were almost no reporters present in the

newsroom during the crisis event. As a result, organisational and occupational journalism were very intertwined.

An Awareness Concerning Effects of the Event

Technology is never just technology, though there are indications that journalists sometimes think so (Marjoribanks, 2000a, 2000b; Örnebring, 2009, 2016).³ The second phase of crisis coverage focused in particular upon the emotional effects of the incident and started the day after the event.

The disruption of everything on 22 July led to a heightened awareness of those technological affordances that would be useful or effective. For example, VG staff members realised that they needed to identify everyone who commented on a news story. While the 2016 manager of social media at VG emphasised that he was not present during the 22 July 2011 attack, he did explain that the affordance concerning users' ability to leave comments anonymously was changed due to that crisis event:

Something important happened that day. [Means 22 July 2011, my comment]. I was not here, but I know what happened. VG had a comment system which certain others still use: 'Discuss'. I believe NRK Ytring for example uses it. And it is a useless system because it is so easy to misuse. It is difficult to find out the identity of the person behind the comment. It is all too easy to set up [...]. If you write something nasty about a person at 'Ytring' and then is being shut out of the system, you can be back ten minutes later with a new account and call yourself [Says his own name] if you like. So it is a useless system, so VG wanted to get rid of it. This was supposed to happen during the following fall. But when the bomb went off in downtown Oslo, it was so chaotic that one chose to turn off the comment system on all stories online. When the system was turned on the day after one had accelerated the shift of system to Facebook comments. Which is the system we are still using. Facebook comments is an isolated system produced by Facebook and which lets you create comments on any online site. [...]. It has

its weaknesses but is far better than 'Discuss'. (Director for Social Media VG, 17 June 2016)

This quote demonstrates that the inadequacies of technological affordances become more obvious during critical moments when they are most needed. In other words, we see how critical events might highlight the need to change a system, which otherwise would have taken longer time to change. VG Nett would most probably have changed the system during the fall as stated by the Director for Social Media, however, the situation highlighted the issue and worked as the testing of the previous system 'Discuss'.

Another example of useful technical affordances took place the day after the incident, when the whole country was in a state of shock and needed to process the emotions associated with the event. At that time, VG developers created the holding-hands interactive graphic, so that people from all over the world could add their nationality, age and gender, and then be added to an illustration of people holding hands. The developers' idea was inspired by the way in which people shared their emotions, nationally and internationally, on Facebook, which demonstrates the alignment and overlap between the online news and social media, particularly during a crisis event.

During the third and more long-term phase of coverage over the six months following the event, management and the mode of organisational professionalism oversaw the organisation of production. During this phase, VG as an institution devoted both time and resources to analysing its on-going production processes. Journalists and the mode of occupational journalism responded by promoting engagement, collaboration and the development of professional competence, which led to more investigative journalism in the year after the event (Warmedal & Hjeltnes, 2012). At VG, interdisciplinary cooperation produced an online system that mirrored social media's technological affordances. Interdisciplinary refers to how news reporters, managers, developers, video photographers and online reporters were collaborating across internal news desks. VG was already quite progressive in terms of live streaming, and as they prepared to cover the terrorist's trial months after the attack, the news organisation introduced the VG live studio, where users could chat with a host, watch video from the trial, find additional news stories and use Twitter-like comment feeds.

Actors representing both occupational and organisational professionalism seemed to agree that there was little strategy in force regarding how to utilise the affordances of both the existing online news media platform and its social media offshoots at the same time. During the 22 July crisis event, VG's approach was more or less intuitive at best, and random at worst. Findings simply demonstrate that the discourse of occupational professionalism overwhelmed organisational decision-making at those times when 'business as usual' falls apart due to a crisis. Ideally, then, organisations must prepare to improvise, in a sense, from the top down and the bottom up. As a clearer strategy regarding use of technological affordances began to emerge in the months following the crisis, managers sought to cultivate the support of the news workers on initiatives such as the live studio, a collaboration between the modes of organisational and occupational professionalism whose outcome benefited both journalists and management.

Five Years Later: 2016

Informants interviewed in 2016 commented upon the subsequent heightened awareness of the handling of the various phases of crisis coverage. One senior developer emphasised how the culture had changed after 22 July. During the Paris attack, for example, news workers even commented that it was 22 July all over again. More precisely, this meant that while news workers voluntarily turned up at work during 22 July and asked whether or not they could help, the practice was established and is presently a part of the VG culture during crisis events.

As a result, we see how a culture of collaboration started during the event 22 July, and turned into an energised culture of collaboration, even around events that were further away. Before 22 July, news workers would experience crisis events which took place far away in a more detached manner, and they would not get emotionally engaged. The change to the culture might imply that news workers more easily identify with a crisis abroad, particularly if it is similar to the one they have experienced domestically. Furthermore, 22 July clearly demonstrated to those in the newsroom what users need during a crisis event. One developer and journalist linked this user awareness to more recent organisational culture shifts at VG:

We have discussed the dynamics during production at such an event, and we see how this is linked with the organisational culture at VG, which can be described as a gutsy sort of will-power. This has, for example, become apparent during the terror in Brussels, and the last terror attack in Paris. People just turn up at work, whether it is a Saturday or a Sunday. They ask if there is a need for them, and they do this without any discussion. At the same time, the management says, 'Anyone who can work, come and work and we'll talk about money and taking time off later. This is not an issue now, we just need to get the information out'. This attitude is very embedded into VG's culture. (Senior Developer, VG Nett, 22 April 2016)

This statement reveals the way in which crisis news events can turn into defining moments for an organisation, and through which lessons are learned and later implemented. No Norwegian news event that took place between 2011 and 2016 compares to the 22 July terror attack, even though reporters and developers noted that such events elsewhere had become a more regular part of their daily news production (senior reporter, 27 April, VG Nett, 2011, 2016; senior developer, VG Nett, 22 April 2016). When such things happen, whether in Brussels, Paris, Stockholm or wherever, everybody now 'knows what to do'. Since 22 July 2011, the VG newsroom has developed a heightened awareness of the appropriate tone to use and, importantly, of the exigencies of the coverage in terms of the audience VG serves (Konow-Lund et al., 2017). News workers in 2016 kept emphasising the importance of generating information both quickly and with sensitivity to the situation. Just half a year after the event on 22 July, the director of social media at VG (interviewed 17 June, 2016) explained how he and a top editor developed a strategy just after the 22 July event. It was based on two goals: (1) social media should strengthen the journalism at VG and (2) social media should help VG become an important part of the Norwegian public conversation. He cautioned, as well, that the *way* this happens is not as important as the fact *that* it happens.

If somebody talks about something we have written, we have succeeded, even if the word VG is not mentioned. This,

however, makes our strategy different from a number of companies' social media strategies – ours is not so easy to measure. This, again, is quite ironic, when we know that VG is a very commercially driven organisation. (Director for Social Media VG, 17 June 2016)

The journalists now try to utilise online news affordances in accordance with what users need and what the atmosphere dictates. Interestingly, during 22 July, VG's interactive graphic installations were so quickly developed and installed that the parent media house, Schibsted, could not sell them or transfer them to other online newspapers in Europe – their codes were too random, thanks to the newsroom's need to publish so fast. There was simply no time to plan ahead and anticipate how a new graphic installation might be reused.

Five years later, the news editor noted the importance of having developers code in such a way that their features can be reused or sold (senior developer, VG Nett, 22 April 2017). The news editor and present editor-in-chief in 2016 reflected upon how technological affordances have changed the way journalism works:

Since 22 July 2011 things have changed. First, you have got larger tools, or larger journalistic toolboxes. They have become unlimited, sort of. Presently, it is rather unlimited what you can code and how you can present things. Second, we have got the dialogue with the users—namely, the issues concerning crowdsourcing, which again comes with a huge power—a power the media can utilise, and that social media exploit. To inform, to spread, to distribute, to let it go viral, to receive feedback, all this has altered things from how they used to be. This has to do with how we have gone from informing one-way communication to a two-way communication. [...] My point is that a very unique event - in other words, a news crisis - leads to how you need to change and expand viewpoints on what journalism is. How journalism works. This is what we have seen by looking at a number of historical events. For example, the first invasion in Iraq changed how we watched live TV. And any American election campaign comes with changes for journalism. It also becomes a journalistic effort. Clearly, during 22 July

every journalist who worked for Norwegian newsrooms worked on the same story, with the same efforts to try to communicate that story in the best possible way. Obviously, you will then get so much dedication, which then might lead to innovation. (News Editor/presently Editor-in-Chief, 4 October 2016)

The news editor emphasises how technological affordances such as social media, as well as the dialogue that is made possible by technology, are increasingly impacting the ways in which stories are reported. Furthermore, as this quote points out, the crisis event has a profound effect on the mingling of the goals of both management and news workers.

While the news editor looked at the technological affordances in terms of how they have influenced journalism writ large, the journalists themselves turned to how the organisation had been changed. One senior reporter, for example, noted that editorial developments had led developers to become more ‘distant’ than before:

We are bigger now. There has been an editorial development which has been efficient. But the developer-team has become far more distant than we were during 22 July. At that point we were located together, but we are not anymore. [...] More recently the developers are part of a big news machinery, less streamline and far more management-driven. (Senior Reporter, 12 May 2016)

Asked to elaborate, he added that the organisation had become more streamlined and more carefully controlled by management:

It's less ad hoc, and that's better and worse. As an organisation, our approach to ethical issues is clearly more professional, and we also plan better. But things move slower, and it's less playful. (Senior Reporter, 12 May 2016).

He attributed this huge change in the biggest online newspaper in Norway to how the news organisation had come to view and relate to the news:

Originally, the newspaper VG wasn't necessarily the first choice for news. It was an evening newspaper you grabbed in the shop or at the newsstand, brought it with you home and read it after having read the local newspaper and heard or watched Norwegian

Broadcasting. The advantage with this was the fact that we [the news workers: author's comment] could set the agenda for the news day ourselves. (Senior Reporter, 12 May 2016)

This quote demonstrates how news workers see the exploitation of affordances as part of bigger developments in their business and craft, rather than something due entirely to the choices made by their own management. Journalists also demonstrated a thorough understanding of the dilemmas faced by both the organisation and the management. The senior reporter also pointed towards the way in which digitisation produced a shift in the control over agenda setting, because its dialectical nature enabled more audience participation (Kalsnes, 2017). Ultimately, in the current digital and social media climate, news organisations have found themselves with less control over their own agenda setting, but they compensate for this through various enhanced forms of news presentation, such as interactive graphics that allow users to engage and contribute their emotions or opinions to the model. Graphic displays of timelines, locations or people can also offer a better overview of an incident.

Although both regular news workers and managers are now paying more attention to what the technological affordances at VG should be, the actors representing these two professional discourses also agree that now they are competing with external platforms and multimedia technology companies such as Google. While news workers continue to aim for quality within journalism, they have also seen their colleagues give up on the profession, retire or be laid off. Managers even worry about whether they will have a chance to compete on their own terms with social media platforms and tech companies. Recurrent notions in the interviews include 'relevance' and 'importance' – terms used to frame how online journalism might be able to survive today. At the same time, management looks for financial opportunities by both learning from social media platforms and collaborating and innovating with and alongside them.

CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED BEFORE ANOTHER EVENT TAKES PLACE

The findings of this study indicate that a crisis news event bridges the two discourses of professionalism via technological affordances. At first, the

collaborations are intuitive and exploratory. Over time, the order between the organisational and the occupational is restored, but new alignments between them arise around the need to keep up with the social media – fuelled expectations of the public.

For both news workers and media managers at VG, the lessons learned from crisis event coverage emerge from reflections, analyses and initiatives related to taking charge of what was, for many years, the random exploration of digital tools. Both news workers and managers still struggle to anticipate what comes next, and 24/7 online production, particularly during crisis news events, makes it very hard to stop and analyse what individuals and organisations actually gain in terms of insight following experiences of major breaking-news events. Hopefully, the insights in this study will contribute to filling that gap in information.

NOTES

1. This term uses Altheide and Snows concept of ‘media logic’ (1979) as a point of departure. They have referred to media logic as a ‘set of principles or common-sense rationality cultivated in and by media institutions that penetrates every public domain and dominates its organizing structure’ (For an overview of the concept and discussion see [Kalsnes, 2017](#), pp. 25–26).
2. [Tuchman \(1978\)](#) stresses how conditions for news production in the aftermath of the assassination were difficult. There were technical difficulties, chains of command were ignored and channels of communication were abbreviated. Tuchman points out professionalism as a compensating strategy when there is a variety of raw material (during production, e.g., having to go live during demonstration, having to record, print, broadcast, etc.).
3. [Henrik Örnebring \(2016:25\)](#) for example writes in his recent study: ‘Journalists in general view technology as an inevitable, impersonal force that directly causes many of the changes taking place within journalism’.

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