

Journal of Professional Communication **jpc**

Journalism and public relations

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ARTICLE INFO

Article Type:
Research Article

Article History:
Received: 2017-04-20
Revised: 2018-04-20
Accepted: 2019-01-20

Keywords:
Public relations
Journalism
Press freedom
Right to information
Internet journalism
Monetization

ABSTRACT

The information technology revolution and the expansion of social media have deeply transformed the nature of our interpersonal relations as well as our relationship with our environment. At a time when everyone has become a prolific user, producer, and publisher of content in cyberspace, we must reflect on the relevance of public relations and the new rules of the game. The role of public relations is more important than ever, but it must adapt to significant changes in communications brought about by new technologies. The CPRS College of Fellows launched a collection of essays to contribute to discussion surrounding these issues. This is the first essay in the collection. A previous version of this article was published in French in Versailles (2019).

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It is difficult to calmly explore the relationship between journalists and public relations professionals as it is fraught with conflicting emotions. Several journalists take pleasure in using the term “public relations” in its most derogatory meaning. Reciprocally, what public relations professional does not occasionally experience a fit of rage at the bad faith of some journalists who insist on distorting or ignoring their words? Several books have been devoted to the passionate description of those conflicting feelings.¹ That is not my point in this essay. On the contrary, I will endeavor to identify all the gateways through

1. To give a few examples, journalists John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton have virulently denounced the excesses of public relations for several decades. In 1995, they published *Toxic Sludge is Good for You* and have also co-edited the whistleblowing website PRWatch, funded by the Center for Media and Democracy, which also coordinates several other projects to expose the failings and abuses of public relations and lobbyists. Public relations professionals have been less active in criticizing journalism. Michel Lemay, a Quebec public relations professional, published a highly relevant book in this regard in 2014: *Vortex*. He also regularly publishes about journalism on <http://wapizagonke.com/>.

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which it is possible to build respect and trust between these two professional groups, which are fused at the hip.

Exploring the boundaries between journalists and public relations professionals is a delicate undertaking, but it is unavoidable. Public relations professionals interact with journalists more than with any other group. Sometimes, they work together. Other times, they come into conflict. For better or for worse, their practices blend daily.

I have been a PR professional for over 40 years, however when I entered Laval University in Quebec City, it was to study journalism. I completed a bachelor's degree with a major in this discipline. Communications theory, social psychology, the history of journalism, and the rights and duties related to information occupied an important part of this program. We were about 400 students, and roughly a third of us completed the program each year. We entered a labor market where the number of available journalism positions was much lower than the number of candidates applying to fill them. We were very worried about competition from the CÉGEP² de Jonquière that produced graduates in journalism techniques. Their training focused primarily on practice; would employers prefer to hire these graduates already familiar with the realities of the newsroom rather than candidates rich in academic knowledge but with little exposure to practice?

Available positions were few, and, in my first job, I plodded professionally at a provincial radio station where news existed mainly to meet the requirements related to broadcast licenses granted by the CRTC. Isolated, without professional guidance, I saw no future in that position. So much so, that when the late journalist Jacques Guay, who had been my professor at Laval University, called to tell me of an opening for a press officer in the service of a Government of Quebec minister, I jumped at the chance, leaving the profession where I had barely set foot to enter the world of public relations. The image that comes to mind after all these years is that of walking through a mirror; everything was similar, and yet everything was different.

My government career lasted eight years. I then earned a living for several years as a freelancer before joining Hydro-Québec to take responsibility for media relations. After that I was named vice president for Public Affairs at the Fonds de solidarité FTQ (a Montreal-based major investment fund), then returned to consulting. I worked very closely with journalists for more than 20 years and with varying intensity since. All the while, I maintained my interest

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2. A CÉGEP (*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*) is a uniquely Québécois institution. It corresponds to the last year of high school and the first year of university or college in the typical American or Anglo-Canadian education model.

in their professional practice.

Throughout these years, my university education influenced my relationships with journalists. The many theoretical concepts that we weren't sure would ever be useful turned out to be very helpful. They allowed me to understand the role of the journalist from the inside. I was able to put myself in their shoes; I knew why they were always questioning everything I brought them, and I also knew that I should never expect to see a journalist buy my story without checking and comparing it with those of other stakeholders. I believe this sensitivity enabled me to be a better public relations professional, to build constructive professional relations with many journalists over the years.

I am now at the stage where I want to summarize what I understand about journalism. I write this essay mainly for my PR colleagues, hoping it will be useful to them. Perhaps some journalists will also be interested to read the outlook of someone who understands and respects the importance of their work.

To build better professional relationships with journalists, it is important for PR practitioners to understand the role of journalism in our society, as well as the major upheavals that are rocking journalism. Despite the advent of social media and, indeed, because of social media and its disruptive effects on democratic life, the role of journalism is more essential today than ever — to establish a common base of proven facts and provide a forum for exchanges tempered by an ethic of discussion. The news media is being redefined, and no definitive model has yet emerged. Journalists themselves need to firmly stay the course and set their sights on journalistic excellence.

I hope this essay will contribute to the improvement of the professional practice of public relations in a context of media relations by proposing to my colleagues a better understanding of the nature, role, and constraints specific to journalism.

Journalism and Society

Journalists resist any external intervention in their professional practice. They place a high value on their freedom of speech and liberty of action. This value stems from an awareness of their role as watchdogs of democracy and from an idealistic conception of journalism as free of influence. Reporters want to choose the object of their reporting and to determine the angle they will develop without any interference. The journalist accepts no supervision, other than the one imposed by journalism itself, as expressed through journalistic

institutions such as the Quebec Press Council, the Federation of Professional Journalists, journalists' unions and the newsroom. In an earlier era, journalists' unions also played a key role in the defense of free and independent journalism. Within news organizations, the newsroom is also a locus of power for journalists; it is where the news is collected, analyzed, and prepared for publication.

There are strong historical and legal arguments to support the need for the independence of journalists. The term "fourth estate," often used to describe journalism itself, summarizes the fundamental importance of journalism for the maintenance of a democratic society. Lawyers resist the idea that some rights or freedoms may be more important than others. However, it can be argued that freedom of expression, from which comes the freedom of press, is the first and most important of all. Without freedom of expression, no other freedoms or rights can exist.

Democracy is based largely on a division and balance of powers between three estates: the legislative estate, whose job is to make laws; the executive estate, whose job is to apply the laws and manage the business of government; and the judiciary, whose job it is to arbitrate disputes in society and to sanction those who do not comply with the law. The fourth estate, journalism,³ informs and educates citizens on how each of the three other estates fulfills its responsibilities. At its best, journalism fosters public debate and provides citizens with the information required to make informed decisions. This is the essential role of journalism in a democratic society.

Journalism and democracy

Freedom of speech and its corollary, freedom of the press, were founding concepts of the British parliamentary system and of the Enlightenment in France. Without such protections, the reformers behind these movements would have been subject to the arbitrary nature of royal power and religious absolutism. These fundamental freedoms that we take for granted today were born in adversity, and journalists have been at the forefront of all great struggles for freedom.⁴

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3. This is a modern interpretation. Originally, the three first estates were the clergy, nobility, and the burghers or, in some countries, the people.

4. The view that journalism as an expression of freedom of speech is foundational to democracy is very widespread throughout journalism and most of society. However, there are dissenting voices that contend that freedom of speech and journalism are not at the origin of democracy,

The practice of journalism was gradually forged throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in France and England. Press freedom was formally established in 1641 under Charles 1. Like the parliamentary democracy of which it is an essential attribute, freedom of the press has long remained fragile – sometimes abolished, sometimes tolerated. In 1662, the Licensing Act imposed penalties so severe that only the London Gazette, tightly controlled by political power, was still published. In 1695, the English Parliament decided not to renew the Licensing Act so that freedom of the press would foster an increasingly vigorous debate of ideas. Other laws would periodically mark the attempts of power to control information, sometimes by taxing newspapers to make them unaffordable for the people, sometimes by prohibiting them from covering parliamentary debates. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that press freedom as we know it was actually acquired.

A similar path was followed in France. Press freedom and Royal censorship clashed, from the creation of *La Gazette* by Theophrastus Renaudot in 1631 until the French Revolution a century and a half later, where press freedom was enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights and the Citizen of 1789.⁵ Press freedom would survive more or less unscathed through the political regimes that followed the revolution throughout the nineteenth century and be institutionalized in the Act on Press Freedom of 29 July 1881, which defines a legal framework still in force today, providing freedom of press.

In the British colonies of North America, despite the fierce opposition, censorship, and repression exercised by the colonial authorities, four newspapers were published in 1725. Their number increased to 37 in 1775. The Stamp Act of 1765, which imposed a tax on the transfer of all printed materials – including newspapers – was one of the major causes of the widespread dissatisfaction with the British government and was at the origin of the American Revolution.

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but rather are by-products of democracy. Jack Shafer, in an article published in *SLATE*, August 27, 2009, argues that democracy thrived in the United States in the 1800s: “Between 1856 and 1888, when most newspapers were crap and controlled by, or beholden to, a political party, voter turnout hovered around 80 percent for presidential elections. Compare that with the 55.3 percent and 56.8 percent turnouts in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections. Could it be that deep-dish reporting that uncovers governmental malfeasance and waste... doesn’t promote activism or participation (and) that such exposés end up *souring* the public on democracy and other institutions?” Shafer argues that those who believe modern journalism is indispensable to democracy never bother to provide any hard evidence to substantiate their claim.

5. Article 11 of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizens (1789): “The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: any citizen may therefore speak, write and publish freely, except to respond to the abuse of this liberty in cases determined by Law.”

The authors of the United States Constitution saw in free expression a fundamental value, which is enshrined in the First Amendment of the US Constitution:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Freedom of expression is far from an abstract concept for the founding fathers of the US Constitution. Rather, it is seen as the first and fundamental condition allowing any citizen to participate in public debate and informed decision-making on the affairs of the country. This belief has been repeatedly reaffirmed.

The Hutchins Report

In 1942, Henry Luce, founder of Time magazine, asked the Chancellor of the University of Chicago, Robert Maynard Hutchins, to study the current state and future prospects for the freedom of the press. Hutchins assembled an *areopagus* of the best minds of the time. Released in 1947, the Hutchins Report⁶ is widely recognized as the main founding document of the contemporary North American conception of what should be the role of the news media in society. Eighty years later, it still has a profound influence on journalism.

The report shook the pillars of the temple. According to the Commission, freedom of the press was threatened for three reasons. First, the number of people with real power, as opposed to theoretical power, to express themselves through the mass media was very low. Second, those who held this power did not always adequately meet the needs of society in terms of information. Third, those who controlled or worked in the mainstream media held an unfair advantage over the rest of the population, as they could influence and even decide the content of the media. These three factors resulted in a paradoxical reality: never before had there existed so many media, nor had they ever been distributed as widely, but the number of people who actually had the opportunity to be heard was very limited.

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6. Luce requested "...an inquiry into the present state and future prospects of the freedom of the press" (The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. v). The result was the Report of the Hutchins Commission: A Free and Responsible Press, 1947.

Profoundly convinced of the democratic ideal that should regulate the conduct of media owners and journalists, the authors of the Hutchins report defined five conditions required to maintain a free and democratic press. The media should:

- Report truthfully, completely, and intelligently on the events of the day and place them in the appropriate context for the public to understand their meaning;
- Be a forum for discussion, debate, and criticism and even publish opinions contrary to their own editorial policy to promote better mutual understanding between the various factions of society;
- Be a place of expression for all groups constituting society, again to promote mutual understanding through the expression of different opinions;
- Introduce and clarify the ideals, values, and objectives towards which society as a whole should strive;
- Endeavour to disseminate all the information available to as many people as possible.

The Hutchins report had a deep impact on the press of America and the rest of the world despite a hostile reception from journalists and media owners at the time, who were concerned that the report could be used as a pretext for a government takeover of the media under the guise of facilitating the democratization of information.

Hutchins predicted that it would take nearly a decade for his report to have an impact; it actually took longer. By the 1960s there were critical press reviews, local press councils, academic research, professional seminars, and self-studies by the professional associations. Journalism students around the country learned of the Commission's message of social responsibility through class discussions and assigned readings. Press criticism and analysis became popular in magazines, news weeklies, and some newspapers. Editorial and publisher's viewpoints columns sometimes took up criticism and response in the 1970s and 1980s. The ideals of the Hutchins commission sparked a social responsibility movement internationally... Through the understanding of social responsibility, journalists worldwide are more committed to such values as international understanding and world peace. The efforts of the Hutchins Commission in the 1940s contributed toward the way professional press criticism is practiced and viewed today. (Hutchins Commission, 2009, para. 7)

In 1956, on the basis of the Hutchins Report, Theodore Peterson, Professor of Journalism and Communication at the University of Illinois, elaborated a theory on the social responsibility of the media which stated that they must both educate and enlighten the population, preserve individual freedoms, serve the political and economic system, entertain people, and ensure their own financial health. For Peterson, free expression is a moral right and media operators are obligated to make sure they represent all significant viewpoints of the citizenry, and see that all ideas deserving a public hearing will be shared (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956).

This theory flourished, its influence flowing beyond US borders. With it, Hutchins' ideas established themselves in a deep and sustainable way. Hutchins directly inspired the creation of press councils, the strong tradition of journalistic criticism by journalists themselves, and the news media tradition of openness to debate and to the confrontation of opinions. The curricula of university studies in journalism programs, journalistic codes of ethics, and professional conduct are still inspired by the Hutchins Report to this day.

Quebec and Canada⁷

These great traditions are present in Quebec and the rest of Canada. It must be noted, however, that the Francophone media have developed a much more militant tradition. English Canadian newspapers generally followed the North American tradition to favor information and advertising and based their prosperity on an alliance with the business community. The newspapers of French Canada, by contrast, were much more controversial in their content and supported a sometimes virulent debate fueled by the themes linked to the survival of a minority people; their prosperity depended on the support of secular and clerical elites.⁸ A very committed activist press existed in Quebec until the 1950s, where large dailies openly supported one or the other major political parties and sometimes even belonged to them.⁹ Beyond these differ-

7. We summarize here in broad strokes a story that deserves to be known but that would take us too far from our purpose. For Quebec, see in particular the book published by the Petit musée de l'impression, quoted in the references, as well as the first pages of the book published in 2016 by Claude Robillard, *La liberté de presse, la liberté de tous*, also quoted in the references.

8. On this topic, see Chapter 1 of the report of the *Royal Commission on Newspapers* (Kent, 1981).

9. The tradition has continued in an ephemeral way, with the experience of *Le JOUR*, a Montreal newspaper managed by a resolutely separatist society of editors which published from 1974 to 1976. For a brief overview of this subject, see *Réflexions et mises en contexte de la situation créée par*

ences, however, all Canadian newspapers embraced ideas from Hutchins and Peterson from the mid-twentieth century onward.

In Canada, press freedom and freedom of opinion are enshrined in the main legal texts that define our country. Article 2b of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) gives everyone “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of press and other media of communication.” Freedom of opinion and expression are also recognized in Article 3 of the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These Canadian legal instruments are inspired by documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, in which Article 19 reads: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”¹⁰

Freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression allows everyone to develop their own beliefs and to express themselves freely. For our ideas to travel beyond our immediate circle of friends, we need to publish or disseminate them. That is why these freedoms include freedom of the press, which allows the infinite variety of media of all kinds that solicit our attention daily. In totalitarian countries, only media allowed by the government can publish, which necessarily restricts the range of available content and opinions. Thus, freedom of the press complements freedom of thought and opinion by allowing everyone to express themselves.

Journalism and other powers

Journalism plays an essential role in maintaining democracy by disseminating information without which it is impossible for a person to exercise responsible citizenship in an informed manner. This does not mean journalists can exercise this role without constraint. Indeed, journalists continually encounter strong resistance from other authorities that wish to orient the content of the media, in the fields of information as well as in entertainment or culture. Journalists are constantly struggling to preserve their autonomy.

l'élection de M. Pierre Karl Péladeau (Brin, Giroux, & Sauvageau, 2015), pgs. 11-17.

10. See also the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, adopted in 1950, which entered into force in 1953. Here is a relevant excerpt from Article 10: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom of opinion and freedom to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.”

I am not talking about the resistance that can be expected of a person or institution opposing the publication of information which is unfavorable to them. Such constraints are commonplace and are relatively easy to overcome, at least for the major media that have the means to involve their lawyers as needed. Beyond this form of resistance, journalists must deal with constraints that occur most often in a much less obvious way and that influence the general nature of journalistic content more than the specific items of information reported.¹¹

Journalism and other powers

The most fundamental constraint on journalistic freedom is linked to ownership of the publishing tool. Freedom of the press belongs to each person. Two options are available to a person who wishes to speak publicly. First, get a news medium to publish their opinion; it is up to the owner of this medium to decide. Second, choose to self-publish, which is a convenient option for anyone with the material means to do so. While early newspapers revenues depended solely on newspaper sales, the appearance of advertising in the nineteenth century helped turn newspapers into commercial enterprises whose operating costs increased continually.

One requires significant resources to purchase a press and print and distribute printed material. For all practical purposes, as Hutchins noted 80 years ago, press freedom could only be exercised by a small number of rich people; the situation remains the same today. In these companies, the journalist is an employee, and it is their employer, the owner of the newspaper, who decides what will be published.

News media owners, while conceding autonomy to journalists in terms of news coverage, have always wanted to maintain their prerogative to shape the information policy and the editorial direction of their publication. This situation is expressed in various ways. Thus, the owner will hire or promote a person who shares their views to a management position. In collective agreements, the concept of “management rights” gives the owner the right to guide

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11. The following paragraphs are closely inspired by *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. The French translation of the book was used (Chomsky & Herman, 2008). See also, for Quebec: *La liberté de presse, la liberté de tous*, where Claude Robillard (2016) describes at length the attacks on freedom of the press. See also, for Canada: *National Freedom of Information Audit 2015* (Vallance-Jones & Kitagawa), published by Journaux canadiens / Newspapers Canada.

editorial policy and news coverage in a broad sense. This reality applies to radio and television as well as to print media as well as most new Internet-based platforms.

Widely distributed ownership media is less problematic for democracy, since it allows the expression of a wide range of opinions across a society. However, the situation is very different when the concentration of media ownership reduces or threatens to reduce the diversity of voices. Ownership concentration has continually increased over time, particularly since the 1980s.

In the US, about fifty giant firms dominated nearly all media in 1980. There remained only 23 in 1990 and nine in 2002: Disney, AOL-Time Warner, Viacom (then owner of CBS), News Corporation, Bertelsmann, General Electric (owner of NBC), Sony, AT&T-Liberty Media, and Vivendi Universal. These media empires possessed all of the major film studios, television networks, record companies, and a significant share of cable channels, cable networks, magazines, television stations, and commercial editing houses.¹²

The situation is no different in Canada. The Royal Commission on Newspapers noted that “three chains account for nine-tenths of the circulation of Francophone dailies, while another three share two thirds of the circulation of English-language newspapers” (Kent, 1981, p. 1). The trend towards consolidation has since continued. Carleton University’s Canadian Media Concentration Research Project found that in 2014, five conglomerates (Bell, Rogers, Shaw, Telus, and QMI) account for 73% of market revenues (Winseck, 2015). These “vertical integrators” are active in content production (except for Telus) and offer internet services, telecommunications, and broadcasting. The same team also demonstrated that the concentration of ownership in this area has grown faster in Canada than elsewhere in the world between 2005 and 2013 and was higher in 2013 than in the 28 other countries studied.

In 2015, in French-speaking Quebec, different measurements of circulation (audience ratings, time spent by readers or listeners) vary somewhat, but all point in the same direction: behind the apparent multiplicity of print titles and radio and television stations, a small number of large groups form an oligopoly. Quebecor accounts for about a third of printed market and over 75% of the television offer (Brin, Giroux, & Sauvageau, 2015). The Gesca group, Quebecor, and Media Capital Group combined hold about 90% market share of the Francophone press (Brin, Giroux, & Sauvageau, 2015). Cogeco Group, Bell Media, and the CBC account for over 90% of the radio offering (Brin, Giroux, & Sauvageau, 2015).

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12. For an in-depth discussion of media concentration in the US and its effect on journalism, see Chomsky & Herman, 2008, p. 28-46

The commercial imperative

As the media have become exclusively commercial entities and as their dependence on advertising has increased, they have been subjected to indirect constraints that may influence the direction of press coverage. Advertisers, including governments, discreetly exert real power. From a commercial point of view, the media owner wants to increase its circulation to provide the widest possible audience to advertisers, hence the perpetual temptation to offer not the information content required for the enlightened exercise of citizenship responsibilities but the most popular content. From the editorial point of view, the media owner wants to please – or, more accurately, not to displease – the advertiser. This can lead to self-censorship.

The cost of information

Large institutions can also exert some control over the media by providing a stable and continuous flow of information. The collection and analysis of information requires time and resources. This is especially true for investigative journalism that is likely to shake up the status quo. Even the largest media have limited means, which they must deploy where information is abundant: in parliaments and city halls, for example. Similarly, big companies are reliable sources of information, in quantity and regularity. Besides the information itself, major institutions also offer spokespersons and experts that are always available. All of this means that information from official sources in government and big business costs much less to the media than the information they would otherwise find themselves by conducting independent investigations; “In effect, the large bureaucracies of the powerful subsidize the mass media, and gain special access by their contribution to reducing the media’s costs of acquiring the raw materials of, and producing the news” (Chomsky & Herman, 2008, p. 59).

Finally, the recalcitrant media can also be called to order by various pressure tactics, such as letters, petitions, lawsuits, and advertising boycotts.

The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news ‘objectively’ and on the basis of professional news values. Within the limits of the filter constraints they often are objective; the constraints

are so powerful, and are built into the system in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of the news are hardly imaginable. (Chomsky & Herman, 2008, p. 26)

These are not purely theoretical considerations. During the campaign leading up to the Canadian federal election of October 2015, Postmedia group owners ordered the 16 dailies owned by the group to publish an editorial favorable to the Conservative Party, despite opposition from more than half of journalists and publishers of these newspapers. External influences on information are rarely manifested so openly. They are difficult to observe on a daily basis, but they produce results. As Chomsky and Herman conclude, behind the apparent barrage of criticism addressed by the media to the powers that be, "What goes unnoticed (and which is the subject of no criticism in the media), is the extremely limited nature of such criticism" (Chomsky & Herman, 2008, p. 25). In other words, while the malfunctions of the system may be criticized, the system itself cannot be. The media that openly challenge the established order are starving, and their audience is rickety. Truly dissident views occupy a very small place in the overall media coverage.

While these constraints usually escape most citizens, journalists themselves are acutely aware of them. That is why, historically, journalists worry obsessively about the concentration of the press, fight against the interference of advertising on information, and seek to enfranchise the power of journalism from the power of the editor. This fight largely takes place in the field of the public right to information.

The public's right to information

The debate on the scope of freedom of the press is as old as the basic texts that ensure its existence. While there is a right to publish one's opinion, is there also a right of the public to receive this information? Journalists respond affirmatively without hesitation and cite multiple supporting sources in international law, beginning with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations that we quoted in the previous chapter: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

The scope of this text has been debated for decades as the international community tried to formalize it with binding legal instruments. These debates

were undermined by significant ideological differences between North and South, and between the East and the West in the context of the cold war. For various reasons, states have been reluctant to place the right to information on the same level as freedom of the press. Despite the efforts of international institutions such as the Human Rights commission of the United Nations and UNESCO, the public's right to information has never become as fully and clearly legally entrenched as the freedom of the press was.

So much so that "the right of the public to information" is ineffective, inefficient for any practical purposes, as pointed out in a 2015 study by the Center for Media Studies of Laval University (Centre d'études sur les médias):

Integrating the public's right to information in the panoply of enforceable judicial rights poses difficulties. The Quebec legislature has chosen to recognize it by including it in the section on economic and social rights of the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As such, the right to information, although proclaimed, is not enforceable, contrary to press freedom. We cannot demand anything of a person simply by invoking this notion. The courts may strike down laws in the name of press freedom. They cannot force the government, or anyone, to act or refrain from acting by invoking the public's right to information. They cannot force the media to publish a news item. (Brin, Giroux, & Sauvageau, 2015, p. 42)

Debate on the actual scope of the public's right to information

We will devote the following pages to understanding why journalists defend with such energy the right of the public to information, usually in tandem with press freedom. Thus, we read in the preamble of the ethics guide for journalists of the Professional Federation of Quebec Journalists (FPJQ, 1996): "Knowing that a free press acts as an indispensable watchdog over authority and institutions, journalists must defend the freedom of the press and the public's right to information..." (para. 3). Similarly, in the foreword of the document entitled "Rights and Responsibilities of the Press," published by the Press Council of Quebec (Conseil de presse du Québec, 2003), it is stated that the Council "has a dual mission: to protect the freedom of the press and the public's right to information" (p. 4).

The public's right to information appears elsewhere. It is mentioned in a 1938 judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada: "freedom of the press to consider public affairs as well as the right of the Dominion citizens to be informed

of these issues" (Reference re Alberta Statutes, 1938, pp. 145-146). The report of the Kent Committee, published in 1981, noted in the first paragraph that "Press freedom is not the preserve of media owners. It is a right of the people. It is part of the right to free speech, inseparable from the right to information" (Kent, 1981, p. 1). Despite these precedents, jurisprudence still falls short of journalists' expectations. Journalists hope that the courts will eventually go further and confer the same scope to the public's right to information as that of freedom of the press.

This conception of the public's right to information is compatible with the tradition created by Hutchins and Peterson as well as the tradition of European and North American journalism. Logically, the right to information is as essential to democracy as press freedom; freedom to disseminate information is meaningless if there is no similar equivalent to receive it.

The problem is that, with the exception of documents and statements from journalists themselves, the public's right to information is not identified or defined anywhere in Quebec and Canada's charters of rights and other similar documents, at least in the very broad sense understood by journalists.

One area where Canadian courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, have clearly recognized the existence of a right to information is that of legal information. "To exercise their freedom of expression, the public must know what happens in the courts," summarizes Claude Robillard (2016), who quotes the *Edmonton Journal v. Alberta (Attorney General)*: "The public has a right to be informed of that which relates to public institutions and particularly the courts. (...) It is through the press only that most people can actually know what happens in the courts (...) [T]hey are entitled to this information" (p. 132).

Everywhere else where it is mentioned independently (that is to say, without being attached to freedom of the press), the public's right to information has a much narrower scope.

The right to information has been interpreted, essentially, to provide for freedom of access to administrative documents, to information made public by governments. Thus, the concept is recognized by UNESCO, which defines it as "the right to access information held by public bodies" (UNESCO, n.d., para. 1). The concept is present in the legislation of many countries: the Freedom of Information Act has been on the books in the US since 1966; a law of the same title is in force in the UK since 2000; in France access to administrative documents is provided for in the Act of July 17, 1978.

Article 44 of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, states that "Everyone has the right to information, to the extent provided by law"

(Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'accès aux documents des organismes publics et sur la protection des renseignements personnels et d'autres dispositions législatives, 2006, p. 13). Both Quebec and Canada have access to information laws. The exact title of the Quebec Act is "An Act Respecting Access to Documents Held by Public Bodies and the Protection of Personal Information." It applies to documents held by public bodies, including government departments and agencies, municipal organizations, school organizations, health facilities, and social services, as well as professional bodies. It is accompanied by numerous provisions to protect the personal nature of the information contained in public documents. The title of the federal law is "the Access to Information Act." Its purpose is "to provide a right of access to information in records under the control of a government institution in accordance with the principles that government information should be available to the public" (Access to Information Act, 1985, p. 1).

Reframing through ethics

Journalists criticize the restrictive nature of these laws, and they certainly are restrictive when compared to the journalistic definition of the public's right to information. Thus, one can read the following in the preamble of the new version of the Code of Journalistic ethics¹³ published by the Quebec Press Council in November 2015:¹⁴ "Whereas the public's right to information is the legitimate right of the public to be informed of what is in the public interest..." (Quebec Press Council, 2015, p. 5). This definition is much broader than the actual legal definition quoted in the preceding paragraph.

This Code of Ethics marks a new stage in the perpetual attempt of journalists to free themselves from any external control and to tailor a "public's right to information," which introduces the right of journalists to distribute, in complete independence, information of public interest. To understand this, it is necessary to study the content of the preamble of the Code of Ethics.

The first two paragraphs of the preamble of the Code of Ethics conform to tradition and the great founding texts. The first affirms the fundamental importance of the free flow of information for freedom and democracy (Quebec

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13. The French title is "Code de déontologie." To our knowledge, as of May, 2018, this document is not available in English. The Quebec Press Council itself, on its website, systematically refers to "déontologie" in French and to "ethics" in English.

14. We translate here from the French document, as an English translation was not available at the time of writing.

Press Council, 2015, p. 5). The second states that “press freedom stems from the fundamental freedoms of thought, speech, expression and opinion, recognized in various legal documents at the national and international levels, and that no one can dictate to the news media the content of information” (Quebec Press Council, 2015, p. 5).

Note the slight shift which is introduced early in the third paragraph of the preamble (emphasis added):

- c. Whereas press freedom requires that the news media *and journalists* enjoy editorial freedom and therefore that the choices related to the content, form, and time of publication or dissemination of information falls within the prerogative of the news media *and journalists*. (p. 5—emphasis added)

Recall that we demonstrated in the previous chapter how journalists, even if they are invested, as anyone, of the right to express themselves conferred by freedom of the press, are subject, as employees, to the rights of the owner of the media, which alone holds the legal right to decide the content that will be printed or broadcast by the media that is their property. The Press Council calls here for an “editorial freedom” and the ability to choose the content for journalists themselves.

Then comes the introduction of the concept of public right to information:

- d. Whereas the public’s right to information is the legitimate right of the public to be informed of what is of public interest and that, to ensure this right, the fundamental role *of journalists and the news media* is to independently search for, collect, verify, process, review and disseminate information of public interest. (p. 5—emphasis added)

Freedom of the press, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, is explicitly linked to human rights and legal documents; the public’s right to information is introduced without any link to such democratic or legal foundations, nor without establishing a formal link with freedom of the press, except in the implicit connection created by the sequence of paragraphs. Furthermore, journalists now precede the media, and this order of presentation will remain throughout the document.

After this shift, the public’s right to information has become the equivalent of freedom of the press, and the journalist is now freed from the publisher. It is no longer the institution of the press (the editor) that is free, but

the journalist who produces content for the newspaper. In fact, this freedom is justified as necessary to ensure the quality of information available to the public.

From this point, the public's right to information becomes the central point of reference throughout the document. This right "takes precedence over all other considerations" (p. 5).

What's more, it "founds the ethics of journalism" (p. 5).

The historical opposition between journalists and publishers

Freedom of press is a double-edged sword for the owner or publisher. The one edge serves as a defense against the outside, but the other is turned inward. It is the difference between enterprise and the duty to inform... In general, the closer one gets to the business side, the farther one is from the profession and from purely journalistic ideals and principles. Consequently, the owner tends to think more of profit as the criterion for evaluating a newspaper than of conformity to ethical and intellectual principles. (Kent, 1981, p. 27).

The Kent commission highlighted a reality that remains unchanged: for the newspaper owners of the time, and for all of today's news media owners, the primary responsibility seems to be to survive. "Profitability is understood as a duty since, without profit, the business could not survive and, consequently, could no longer provide this public service known as news... They (media owners) are loath to admit duties that prevail over economic responsibility" (Kent, 1981, p. 27-28). On behalf of these economic obligations, publishers naturally tend to listen to the desires of their audience and to give them what they want, rather than trying to communicate information that would be more in line with their needs as citizens, but that might be less highly touted.

The journalist, in contrast, "likes to see himself as a pure seeker of truth, from which nothing or nobody can divert him. He is devoted first to facts and to the reader; loyalty to the paper takes second place... At heart, every journalist believes that the press, despite its ups and downs, constitutes the foundation of all freedoms and that he is one of the principal supports. If he is prevented in any way from reporting an event or from commenting on it as he sees fit, in his eyes democratic society could be threatened with shaking on its foundations" (Kent, 1981, p. 30). The Kent report itself acknowledges, however, that this view is idealistic and that reality is more complex. Some journalists, mostly clustered in the media addressing the elite, are loyal to

this idealized conception, while others, working for media aimed more at the masses, are more sensitive to popular tastes and desires, which “draws them very close to the company’s managers” (Kent, 1981, p. 30). The fact remains that, overall, journalists have always wanted to free themselves from the company employing them so that the mission of public service would prevail over commercial interests.

The phenomenon is more pronounced in Quebec than elsewhere. Coming from a tradition of struggle for survival, Francophone journalists have traditionally accorded more importance to collective rights and social responsibility of the media than elsewhere in North America. During the 1960s, the rise of trade unionism and left-leaning beliefs in newsrooms brought on the emergence of a current of Marxist-inspired thinking according to which it is impossible to reconcile the interests of media companies with those of the public.

Claude Robillard recalls that FPJQ pleaded in 1975 for the integration of the public’s right to information in the human rights section of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and had “felt compelled to consign to the dustbin of History this old thing that would be press freedom” (Robillard, 2016). Note that this is not the position of the FPJQ nor of Mr. Robillard today.

The Kent report sums up the aspirations of journalists on the subject:

In general, journalists’ unions and associations tend to think that the press is first and foremost the concern of journalists. They argue first that the journalist, better than anyone, is able to defend the public’s right to information, and assure a true diversity of opinion in the press; second, they argue that the managers and even the owners of newspapers should be journalists whenever possible; third, that the ideal solution would be for an editorial association to take over the business or at least manage the editorial side. (Kent, 1981, p. 32)

This explains the change in perspective desired by journalists. By creating – rather, by taking note of – a moral equivalence between press freedom and the public’s right to information and then building the entire edifice of journalistic ethics on the right to information, the journalist takes the place of the newspaper company’s owner at the center of the device; they become the watchdog of our fundamental freedoms.

Given the history of the evolution of the freedoms that we have summarized in broad strokes, this approach is part of a historical continuum and is based on an indisputable democratic legitimacy.

The journalists’ struggle for the public’s right to information might seem

quixotic in the context of a free and open society such as Canada. However, we do not always recognize how fragile our rights are. Beyond their differences, all mainstream political parties in Canada share an allegiance to strong, common values that bind the country together. Freedom of expression is never really challenged, and even if some newspapers are closer to one political or ideological family, all of them make it a point to allow a diversity of opinion. Political leaders might strongly disagree on some of the media coverage, and we have seen in recent years attempts to keep the media at bay, but we have never witnessed in Canada a frontal assault on the media. To understand how quickly this can change, one need only look south of the border, where ideological divisions have steadily enlarged between the two main political parties. The current American President campaigned against the mainstream media as a candidate and has maintained his unprecedented assault since taking office, labeling as “fake news” anything he disagrees with, lying repetitiously, and verbally attacking those media who call him out on it. This cleavage is spreading dangerously and has reached the media itself. Breitbart and Fox News strongly support the President, while other media, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN to name a few, are much more critical.

This polarized context has opened the door to renewed attempts to control the media. President Trump has hinted that he might want to change the law to make it easier to sue the media. There is also strong evidence to suggest that some media group owners are imposing their views on the newsroom, replacing journalists’ views and opinions with their own. A case in point is the Sinclair Media Company, one of the United States’ largest groups of media, reaching some 40 % of the nation’s households. The company sends to all its stations short editorial videos known as “must-runs,” which the stations are required to air, or written opinions that they are required to read. In a particularly glaring example in March 2018, literally dozens of news anchors read the same prepared script (Fortin & Bromwich, 2018). Many journalists were uncomfortable with this practice, and some even resigned. This has nothing to do with whether they agreed with the opinion they were requested to read; the fact was that unbeknownst to local viewers, a large corporation they probably do not even know exists was using the considerable means at its disposal to impose its opinion on the nation, at the expense of whatever opinion local journalists might have deemed appropriate for each media outlet. The population only found out about it because journalists told them.

But surely, this could never happen in Canada? Guess again. It happened in 2015, when Postmedia CEO Paul Godfrey ordered all 16 major Postmedia papers across Canada to support Stephen Harper. Each paper was allowed to

write its own editorial, but the conclusion was preordained. John Honderich, Chair of the Board of Torstar Corp., called him out on it. While publishers of individual papers have the prerogative of editorializing the way they see fit, “to dictate the choice across an entire chain – and nation, that is an entirely different tale... The reason, of course, was self-evident. What was important or relevant to readers in Vancouver might not be so in Montreal, Ottawa or Windsor” (Honderich, 2015, para. 7, 10).

As citizens, we must recognize that journalists are at the forefront of a never-ending struggle between the natural tendency of governments, organizations, and powerful individuals to keep important information to themselves, and the need of all citizens to be adequately informed to perform their civic duties. Progress is never definitively acquired in this domain. A case in point is the recent evolution of Quebec’s Access to Information law. When it was first passed in the early 1980s, this law was widely recognized as setting a new standard as for transparency in public administration. The law did introduce a measure of transparency, but over the years, it was amended many times in a restrictive manner, and public administrations systematically interpreted it narrowly. This forced citizens and the media to resort to the courts to get access to information in legal battles that sometimes stretch out over months and years. Furthermore, in over 35 years, it has never been modernized. In the provincial election of 2014, Liberal candidate Philippe Couillard, who subsequently became Premier, pledged to review the law, saying that his government would be the most transparent Quebec had ever known. Nothing happened for four years. Then, in February of 2018, the government tabled a bill¹⁵ that *reduced* the scope of the law by allowing some documents that were then public to remain private for 25 years.

Journalistic ethics and the journalist’s work

The roots of journalism are vigorous, and journalists are very aware of their role in society. They constantly debate this matter not only before the Press Council but also in their professional associations. They give themselves the tools to guide their practice. In Quebec, journalists can also rely on the

.....
15. An Act respecting access to certain documents held by the Conseil exécutif or intended for the Conseil exécutif, SQ 2018, c 3.

Federation of Professional Journalists (FPJQ), which publishes a strong Ethics Guide that clearly defines their role and strongly affirms their ideal.

What the code of ethics says

Here are some excerpts from the Preamble of the Ethics Guide of the Federation of Professional Journalists:

The role of journalists is to accurately report, analyze, and in some cases, comment on the facts that help their fellow citizens understand the world in which they live. Complete, exact and diverse information is one of the most important guarantees of freedom and democracy... Knowing that a free press acts as an indispensable watchdog over authority and institutions, journalists must defend the freedom of the press and the public's right to information... (Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec, 1996, para. 2-3)

The FPJQ Guide of Ethics therefore not only affirms the duty of journalists and their role in society but also the way to fulfil this role: report accurately; analyze and comment; and produce information that is complete, accurate, and pluralistic. The same Guide defines the core values of journalism:

The fundamental values of journalists include: a critical viewpoint, so they methodically doubt everything; impartiality, so they research and expose the diverse aspects of a given situation; fairness, so they view all citizens as equal before the press as they are before the law; independence, so they maintain their distance from authority and lobby groups; public respect and compassion, so they demonstrate moderation; honesty, so they display a scrupulous respect for facts and are openminded. This in turn demonstrates a receptiveness to unfamiliar realities, and an ability to report on these realities without prejudice. (para. 12)

The same spirit is found in the "ethical guidelines" of the Canadian Association of Journalists. Here are some of the many highly detailed rules of behavior to be found in the guidelines (CAJ Ethics Advisory Committee, 2011).

Table 1
CAJ Ethics Advisory Committee guidelines

Accuracy	<p>Accuracy is the moral imperative of journalists and news organizations, and should not be compromised, even by pressing deadlines of the 24-hour news cycle.</p> <p>We are careful to distinguish between assertion and fact.</p>
Fairness	<p>We give people, companies or organizations that are publicly accused or criticized opportunity to respond before we publish those criticisms or accusations.</p> <p>We do not allow our own biases to impede fair and accurate reporting.</p>
Independence	<p>We serve democracy and the public interest by reporting the truth.</p> <p>Defending the public's interest includes promoting the free flow of information, exposing crime and wrongdoing, protecting public health and safety, and preventing the public from being misled.</p>
Transparency	<p>We generally declare ourselves as journalists and do not conceal our identities.</p> <p>We independently corroborate facts if we get them from a source we do not name.</p> <p>We do not allow anonymous sources to take cheap shots at individuals or organizations.</p>
Accountability	<p>We are accountable to the public for the fairness and reliability of our reporting.</p> <p>We serve the public interest, and put the needs of our audience at the forefront of our newsgathering decisions.</p> <p>We clearly identify news and opinion so that the audience knows which is which.</p> <p>When we make a mistake, we correct it promptly and transparently, acknowledging the nature of the error.</p>

These quotes from guides written by journalists themselves emphasize the role of the journalist as a reporter of the facts who must first and foremost deliver information that is complete, accurate, and pluralistic. However, essential as it is, this dimension does not by itself epitomize the role of the journalist in society.

The journalist as a participant in social debate

Far from being only a messenger, journalists are full participants in social debate, adding their own vision of reality to those offered by the protagonists. Journalism is, as the saying goes, a fourth estate whose main task is to describe the actions of the other three and of all other social actors. It is up to the journalist to go everywhere and talk about everything. They describe, interpret, decode, analyze, and contextualize the information from all sources. Journalism must also confront itself, delivering different visions or interpretations of the same events.

It is more often than not through journalism that abuses and excesses are denounced and that the questions that raise larger social issues are debated. Should we tolerate cultural or religious accommodation? What is the potential impact of a bill or a policy? Are the economic benefits of a project greater than its environmental impacts? The media give life to debate, flush out corruption and incompetence, and provide a voice to those without power. They report the facts, but they also color them, as every journalist has their own beliefs, perceptions, and values that will make them pay more attention to some views than others. Hence, the importance of the diversity of media voices. Freedom of the press and even freedom of speech are inconceivable without a minimum diversity of information sources. They do not exist in single-regime countries where the only publications are those controlled by the government.

The diversity of voices is expressed firstly by the multiplicity of media; it is also expressed by the multiplicity of voices within the same medium, a particularly important feature in societies unable economically to support a large number of media. The newspapers of the nineteenth century were mostly yellow newspapers – they belonged to a political group they defended fiercely. This practice has gradually given way in the twentieth century to fact-based journalism. Most major newspapers today define themselves as “generalists” and claim to reflect a diverse array of views.

More recently, opinion journalism has developed and quickly invaded our media to the point that, at times, the boundary between news and opinion blurs. This allows journalists who have spent years reporting on certain events and activities to share their informed perspectives with those of us who do not have time to inform ourselves. A prerequisite, however, must always be respected to prevent demagogic excesses: the story should always distinguish clearly between fact and opinion, and the opinion itself should be based on solid facts. This is of great importance, as many people do not always see the difference between facts and opinions.

The new Code of Ethics of the Press Council recognizes this reality by identifying two types of journalism: factual journalism, which reports facts and events while placing them in context, and journalism of opinion, which expresses a point of view, comment, opinion, position or, criticism. However, the guide clearly states that the journalist of opinion cannot do without the facts: “[T]he opinion journalist exposes the most relevant facts on which they base their opinion... The information they provide is accurate, rigorous and comprehensive in its reasoning,” (Quebec Press Council, 2015, p. 18). In other words, it is accurate, thorough, impartial, balanced, and complete. As the American saying goes, everyone has the right to their own opinion but not their own facts. Opinion must always be supported by facts.

“To be informed is to be free,” said René Lévesque, who was a widely respected journalist for 25 years before entering politics. Free, plural, and abundant information, combined with the mechanism of compulsory elections every 5 years, is the ultimate safeguard against any abuse of bureaucratic systems by those with power. Two highlights of our recent history attest to this. In the sponsorship scandal of Ottawa, the obstinate work of a few journalists brought to the attention of the public the extent of illegal excesses committed by the political power in the name of Canadian unity. In Quebec, it was also the stubbornness of some journalists – and the support of their employers in some courageous organizations, including the CBC – that resulted in finally lifting the veil on endemic corruption in the construction industry. Unflinching journalism and editorial forced the creation of institutional mechanisms needed to shed light on these acts and prevent their recurrence. Beyond these spectacular examples, journalism is essential to inform the public by providing reports and opinions on how our economic system, community, political institutions, culture, education, and health, are faring.

Brothers, enemies, or conjoined twins?

A well-known Montreal journalist told me that, when she asked her desk editor what the best possible relationship a journalist should have with public relations is, the response was only two words long: “No relationship” (personal communication). This caricatural reaction remains unfortunately too prevalent and is the opposite of reality. Journalists and public relations professionals are conjoined twins who need one another to live, who process the same information but are regularly placed in conflict by their very different roles. It is important to further explore the true nature of the relationship be-

tween these two groups.

How journalists see public relations professionals

A good way to begin this exploration, from the public relations perspective, is to understand the fears the practice inspires in journalists. One of the most obvious is the feeling journalists have that they are vastly outnumbered by public relations practitioners and end up overwhelmed by hordes of mercenaries in the pay of all those who have an interest in controlling information.

Although debatable, this assertion is not unfounded. First, one must note the immense disproportion between the number of journalists and of the communication services of governments and large organizations. The journalist is fed daily by information flows so abundant that they can, if they so desire, fill their columns or news bulletin entirely with this content. The temptation to take this approach is made even greater by the fact that newsrooms employ fewer journalists, who must feed the 24/7 news media in a highly competitive environment based on the "scoop." But even though these constraints are real and important, they do not negate the primary responsibility of the journalist to question, investigate, and contextualize information. Most still do, especially in the larger media; it is true that the size of the media, the existence of a union representing journalists, and the public or private ownership of the media largely determine the ability of journalists to remain independent and critical of official sources. Moreover, not all persons who work in communications and public relations work with the media. The majority never deal with the media, because they work in a wide range of functions, such as internal communications, investor relations, government relations, or marketing support. Finally, media relations practitioners must also deal with a large number of journalists and researchers and are far from feeling in a position to impose their message; more often than not, they feel it is the other way around.

Multiple studies conclude that journalists present a simplistic and cartoonish face of public relations practitioners by reducing their function only to "free publicity" or by associating them systematically to the manipulation of public opinion. Coombs and Holladay (2007) identify many of these studies and have summarized the main criticisms of public relations by journalists:

- The very essence of public relations is unhealthy manipulation. The origins of public relations actually coincide with those of applied social sciences, both in terms of the surveys (the measure) and influence

(propaganda). Joseph Goebbels, the great master of Nazi propaganda, was inspired by the book "Propaganda" of the "father of public relations," Edward Bernays himself.

- Public relations is responsible for the inordinate power exercised by large companies, governments, and large lobbies. Public relations maintain the population in ignorance of what is "really" happening. The public is systematically fooled by public relations handlers paid to protect big business and governments.
- Public relations is in the pay of the rich and powerful, and it undermines democracy. It is undemocratic by nature because it allows the perversion of real popular sentiment.
- The power of public relations can be restricted if the population is educated about its misdeeds. People must learn to distinguish "truth" from public relations (which are anything but the truth in the eyes of these critics).
- Public relations is nothing less than disguised advertising. Its only function is to deceive the vigilance of citizens and consumers.

This last point raises an interesting convergence between journalists wary of public relations and marketing experts who advocate greater use of public relations: both insist on recognizing a single function for public relations, that of "publicity,"¹⁶ that is to say the visibility – often called earned media – which amounts to free publicity, arising from mention of a trademark or business in the editorial content of a publication. Journalists do this by associating this "publicity" to manipulation. The marketing experts do it by stating that the central function of any business is marketing and that every other function must answer to it.

Reality is more complex. First, public relations is performed by all kinds of organizations that want to communicate in a legitimate manner. Second, it has been largely accepted at least since the time of Abraham Lincoln that you cannot fool all of the people all of the time. Organizations pay a price when they are found at fault. Finally, to summarize public relations to the conceptions described by Bernays is to ignore all the theoretical and practical developments that have occurred in the discipline for a century.

Furthermore, public relations is often attributed only to big business. In reality, it is used by organizations of all sizes and all types, including governments, community organizations, NGOs. It is interesting to note that some

16. "Publicity," as defined by Grunig (1992), equates to free visibility in the editorial content of a medium, as opposed to advertising, which must be paid for.

journalists who are fiercely critical of public relations often find the practice to be legitimate when used by these groups, even as they condemn their use in big business (Stauber & Sheldon, 1995).

The nature of the relationship between journalists and public relations professionals

The vast majority of journalists and public relations professionals who practice media relations work with each other every day. They are linked in an interdependent relationship. This relationship is the object of a deceptively simple rule set within the Code of Professional Standards, and it must be observed by all members of the Canadian public relations society: "A member shall deal fairly and honestly with the communications media and the public" (CPRS, n.d.). As simple and straightforward as this rule may seem, it addresses a very complex professional relationship. For this relationship to be constructive, mutual expectations must be realistic. The journalist and the PR professional feed off one another; they use the same information to different ends. It is not realistic for PR professionals to expect journalists to act simply as mouthpieces.

Public relations professionals sometimes rely exclusively on journalists to relay their message to target audiences, thereby committing two errors. The first is to confuse dissemination and communication. To establish a relationship with our audiences, we must genuinely communicate, which is to say, create conditions allowing information to flow in both directions; we do not do this when we simply trust the media to relay information. The public relations professional must always seek to communicate directly with their audiences rather than to rely on the media to relay information.

The second error lies precisely in this expectation toward the media to act as torchbearers of our information; this is not their role. Journalism exists autonomously and responds to its own logic, which we have described above and which is not that of public relations, even if the two fields complement one another in the context of the free flow of information.

Linking organizations with their environment occurs in several stages. On the one hand, there is the information provided by the organization's public relations team directly to its publics. On the other hand, there is the journalist's understanding of that information, which will also be received by these same publics. Most of the time, the journalistic vision is different from the vision of public relations — which is why it is so common and natural for these

conjoined twins to have a hard time understanding one another.

Media are places of confrontation of different visions of reality and different values underlying these visions, but journalists are not neutral witnesses. They participate in the creation of social consensus as much as they reflect it. When they transmit the information, the journalists give it a meaning that is not necessarily the one intended by the primary source of the information. Merely emphasizing one piece of information over another is already a form of interpretation.

Organizations and public relations professionals, as we have emphasized, should communicate directly with their audiences, but they have no choice but to also play the game of public information through the media. The media represent the best bulwark against attempts by organizations to conceal the facts unfavorable to their cause or take advantage of a situation to unduly consolidate their power; in so doing they also act as a filter that can completely distort communication between an organization and its publics. At the end of the day, the public receives two messages, two interpretations of reality: that which is emitted directly by the organization and that which is relayed by journalists. Sometimes they agree, but they also often diverge.

The constraints and different expectations of journalists and public relations practitioners are a perennial problem of communication between the two. Public relations professionals tend to believe that what they say deserves to be reproduced in full and are often disappointed to see their thinking summarized very succinctly or contradicted by another source a paragraph later. Journalists are required to summarize a subject in very few words, to exercise critical judgment about what should be retained or not, to consider all of the positions expressed, the general context of the article, the audience it is intended for, and also some very practical details, like the number of lines or the time available.

I have often experienced this during my career. I can think of many occasions when I gave an in-depth interview only to find almost nothing I said in the story. Sometimes, the only statement that made it into the article was the one used by the journalist to conclude their own demonstration. Other times, the journalist used me to support a position contrary to my own. In such a situation, one must ask: Has the journalist recounted the facts correctly? If they express an opinion, is it based on verifiable facts? Did they distort our declaration? Have they changed the nature of our words? Have they used them in a context inducing the reader to understand that our position is different from what it actually is? If the answer to these questions is "no," the journalist's work remains legitimate—even though the use made by the journalist of our

words does not match our expectations. This is because their job is not to serve as a mouthpiece for one or another of the parties but to deliver their interpretation based on the understanding that they derive from their many contacts.

If the vision of the journalist does not suit us but is honest, in the sense that it comes from a valid, fact-based argument and does not distort the meaning of our words, then it behooves us to work towards changing the journalist's vision through dialogue. If we feel that the reporter misunderstood the facts, we must work to explain them.

The main danger in this situation lies in the potential aggression it generates. Two people who know one another little or not at all, when placed in an ambiguous situation, are very likely to misinterpret one another's intentions. The same goes for two people coming at the same reality from different angles. In these situations, it is easy to yield to misunderstanding, to cast hasty judgments, to formulate charges and so to lock a relationship in conflicting attitudes. This is harmful for both the public relations professional and for the journalist.

The problem is further amplified by the fact that the average journalist, as we have explained, feels they are entrusted with a mission. Robert Maltais, an experienced journalist and director of the journalism program at the University of Montreal, notices a particular mindset among journalism students: "I hypothesize that the profession attracts mainly rebels and idealists, sharing values of social justice" (Maltais & Cayouette, 2015). I fully share this hypothesis, having myself had many opportunities to draw the same conclusions. Conversely, public relations professionals can also be immodest and impatient before anyone who does not accept their argument.

Our professional responsibility as public relations professionals is to understand these mechanisms and learn how to defuse our own negative reflexes as well as those of journalists, to maintain the dialogue without which it is impossible to form an understanding between the two sides. That is why it is so important to develop professional relationships with journalists that include regular, direct contact. Trust is built over time, and it facilitates communication. Opposing views are always expressed with more respect by interlocutors who have learned to know one another in the context of a sustained professional relationship. Respect is the first step towards opening.

The establishment of such a relationship is the opposite of "communication" via social media. No form of electronic communication is as effective as the meeting of two people in the flesh. The physical presence of another person always induces a minimum amount of respect. It is harder to be disrespectful in person than online. When people communicate face-to-face, they

use non verbal cues to better express themselves. If your conversation partner is using body language that indicates disagreement or confusion, you can adapt the content or the tone of your message accordingly. It is much harder to notice these things when communicating online. We must invest time to build a real relationship of trust. Ultimately, both the reporter and the public relations professional will benefit.

Journalists are reluctant to meet public relations professionals on a regular basis for several reasons. First, they are overworked and do not have time to waste in meetings that are not directly useful. They are also wary, knowing that the public relations professional promotes special interests. It behooves the public relations professional to convince the journalist that such a relationship is mutually beneficial. For this, the recipe is well known and has not changed since I started in practice almost 40 years ago: know the interests of the journalists; know which ones have an interest in our content; expand this content so as to add value from the perspective of the journalist; and ultimately convince the journalist of the rightness of our arguments.

Note, however, that journalists' reluctance to trust or build relationships with public relations does not exclude, once a professional relationship is established, mutually fruitful exchanges. When assured that the information communicated to them is accurate, complete, and therefore useful to their work, journalists appreciate the work of public relations.

The public relations professionals and journalists share an interest in defending the free flow of information and expression of all views. They come at this common interest, however, from different angles. Journalists develop their own point of view, forged in contact with different opinions, while the public relations professional presents the position of an institution, company, or person.

This configuration generates opposition and even conflict for many reasons. To truly assume responsibility as a spokesperson, the public relations professional must fully understand and even become intimate with the content of their file. They must always provide a response appropriate to the context rather than a prefabricated response. This implies a high degree of identification with the view advocated - sometimes too high, causing them to become incapable of critical distance. The same trap can spring on the journalist; despite the precepts of their codes of ethics requiring them to always keep an open mind, the risk still exists that personal convictions will lead them to close their mind, to refuse to hear valid arguments that could undermine their certainties. There is inevitably a high risk of both the journalist and the public relations professional "going personal" in the sense that both can view criti-

cism of the position they have a mission to defend (in the case of the public relations professional) or that they truly believe in (in the case of the journalist) as an attack on their personal integrity, hence the sometimes surly tone of exchanges.

Moreover, the public relations professional often works for an organization that does not always understand the need for dialogue and that can "apply pressure" to "sell" (*viz.* impose) their position or project rather than to engage in the sometimes lengthy work of information and explanation which alone can really convince.

It is necessary here to explore the concept of objectivity, observing first of all that the following remarks apply equally to public relations professionals and journalists. They are both subject to the perpetual debate on what constitutes the truth.

Perfect objectivity requires the ability to know everything about a subject, which is very difficult. One might assume that the public relations professional is better placed than the journalist to know everything about the organization they represent, and in this sense, the journalist should accept the explanations given by them. On the other hand, the reporter's professional duty is to question the validity of all claims that are proposed to them. Moreover, journalists are often in a better position to understand the impact of the organization on its external publics because these publics are open to them, hoping to convince them of their own point of view. For these reasons, the public relations professional must genuinely listen to the journalist before trying to convince them.

Perfect objectivity requires the ability to detach completely from any point of view, which not only borders on the impossible but would render the information meaningless. The interest of any information is its potential impact on our immediate situation, beliefs, and values. We always interpret information through what Grunig (1992) called our worldviews. The same goes for journalists. Their world view is necessarily different from the public relations professional because it was forged from a different vantage point - from outside the organization rather than from within - and the journalist's own values, which vary from person to person.

This issue of objectivity is always strongly debated by journalists, much more than in public relations. Is it possible for a journalist to cast a totally detached look on a situation, to describe the facts without any influence from their values? The challenge is impossible. Objectivity, like truth, is an ideal towards which we must strive unceasingly while being aware of the many pitfalls that stand between us and perfection. Better to speak of sincerity, clar-

ity, and honesty. Journalists often refer to the concept of journalistic honesty.

In summary, the tension between journalists and public relations is inevitable. It is in the very nature of the relationship embodied by these two actors in social dialogue. The constant challenge is to express it constructively rather than destructively. Even when they conclude in disagreement, exchanges of perspective characterized by sincere listening and a respectful and well-informed expression of legitimate opinions are constructive. They help to build mutual respect, to maintain open lines of communication and opportunities for dialogue, and they serve the public interest.

Training and professional supervision of journalists

The journalist holds a formidable responsibility: to define what constitutes the truth according to them or the citizens whom they purport to serve. But the truth, as we have seen, is multiple, and no one can dictate their worldview to any journalist. Because they command the means of massive diffusion, journalists are powerful and potentially dangerous persons when ill-informed or when choosing to place themselves at the service of a cause. A journalist can have convictions, but they should never allow their convictions to blind them to the facts.

Freedom is antithetical to control. It is impossible to control from the outside the journalist's thought or their work without limiting their freedom. The internal structure of the media – notably the newsroom – exercises some control by peers and may limit individual abuses. Ultimately, nothing can substitute for the judgment of the journalist.

Hence the importance for society of highly-trained journalists, fully aware of their responsibilities and endowed with a solid general culture. That is why university training is so important for journalists; it emphasizes the importance of ethics, history, and the ability to exercise sound judgment rather than simply inculcating candidate journalists with the basic techniques of the trade.

It is amazing how little importance the FPJQ seems to grant a university degree in journalism for journalists in exercise. The supreme values it upholds are the greatest possible freedom in access to and in the exercise of journalism. Quebec journalism resists any form of supervision: no competency exam, no diploma or compulsory internship, no legal recognition, the thinnest possible legislative framework, and a Code of ethics without coercive value.

The vast majority of journalists have always wanted to maintain this freedom, to avoid that journalists form a homogeneous milieu, to ensure that freedom of expression is not restricted to a small group of people, but also so that the press can live in the climate of freedom which is indispensable to it. (FPJQ, n.d.a, para. 13)

This argument has merit, but also some serious drawbacks. While the history of journalism and its interweaving in the advent of democracy, knowledge of its rights and duties, basic concepts in social psychology, and knowledge of the essential elements of communication theory may be less useful for the immediate production of a news bulletin, it is indispensable for effective and ethical journalistic production. University education also has the great advantage of promoting better general knowledge of the world in which the journalist is called to practice. History, geography, philosophy, economics, political science, and even literature and culture, all these so-called “soft” disciplines, contribute to forming well-made minds better equipped to judge the accuracy and relative importance of the facts in the light of a solid general culture. The same goes for science and more scientific disciplines, such as engineering, medicine, law, and the sciences in general. Freedom must be combined with minimal training requirements.

Professional supervision and journalist unions

Journalism has an advantage over public relations: the benefit of a minimal professional and institutional framework. FPJQ, the Canadian Association of Journalists, and the Press Councils are fragile and imperfect institutions. Journalists themselves criticize their lack of power and can choose to ignore them with little or no immediate impact on employment. Nevertheless, they have the great merit of existing, and they exercise power that is real, even if it is limited and not based on the proper legal basis of professional regulatory bodies. They allow for expertise to be pooled, for the profession to be defended, and for journalists to self-criticize, three functions that are sorely underdeveloped in public relations. They speak openly, clearly, and forcefully on issues specific to information, such as the adverse consequences of the concentration of media ownership; the failures of access to information laws; the attempts to manipulate information by governments, businesses, or organizations of any kind; or the deleterious effects of social media on the practice of journalism.

FPJQ is not a union. Created in 1968, it defines itself as “a non-profit democratic association that voluntarily brings together about 2,000 journalists that work in more than 250 print and electronic media” (FPJQ, n.d.b, para. 3), and it intervenes whenever press freedom is threatened. In addition to its daily interventions in support of journalists, it is involved in major public debates. To give these recent examples, it filed a brief dealing with the overhaul of the Quebec Act of access to information, another before the Commission of Inquiry on the Awarding and Management of Public Contracts in the construction Industry (Charbonneau Commission), another about the changes to the Canadian Access to Information Act, and still another before the Commission of Inquiry on the protection of journalistic sources.

There is a similar grouping for journalists from across Canada. The Canadian Association of Journalists self-defines as “the national voice of Canadian journalists” (Canadian Association of Journalists, n.d., para. 1) and, in similar fashion to FPJQ, deals with the issues facing journalism and champions the protection of the public’s right to information and excellence in journalism. The CAJ started in 1978, and it is remarkable to note the major role played by several Quebec journalists within it,¹⁷ even if they were already gathered in the FPJQ. It now brings together journalists from all regions of the country.¹⁸

The Quebec Press Council is of another nature. It is a non-profit, private organization created in 1973 as a joint initiative of journalists and news media leaders, which are associated with representatives of the public appointed following a call for applications. It is a voluntary organization that acts as a court of honor of the Quebec press and advises on various issues related to journalism. Of course, nothing is perfect. Some major newspapers choose not to participate in the Press Council, but its longevity and influence over the Quebec press are remarkable given the purely moral nature of its influence: “In no way the Council can be likened to a civil court, it has no judicial, regulatory, legislative or coercive power; it does not impose any sanction other than moral” (Quebec Press Council, n.d., para. 4) The Council is independent of government authorities. Government does not interfere in its business, but a large part of its funding comes from the government.

The Quebec Press Council has equivalents elsewhere in Canada. Up to the summer of 2015, there still existed five press councils in Canada. However, in September 2015, press councils in Ontario, British Columbia, and Atlantic Canada merged to create the National Newsmedia Council (NNC), leaving two independent press councils, those of Quebec and Alberta. In January

17. This is explained on the CAJ website.

18. We have found no indication of the number of journalists that are currently members of CAJ.

2019, the Alberta Press Council also joined the NNC, leaving Canada with two press councils. These mergers are the result of a long discussion because it was not necessarily obvious to merge these organizations, each rooted in its own regional tradition. But the three councils shared a steady decline in resources that threatened their very existence; newspapers are fewer, and when some decide to boycott, as did Sun Media in 2011, the impact is major. Until 2012, there was a press council in Manitoba whose budget was down to \$17,000 at the time of closing. In comparison, the Quebec Press Council in 2014 received more than \$305,000 in grants from the Quebec government, including an unconditional grant of \$250,000. Elsewhere in the country, press councils have always chosen to refuse public funding to preserve their independence. This desire for independence is as strong in Quebec, but the impact of public funding is obviously evaluated otherwise.

Journalists are also grouped into unions of their own that played a very useful role in the defense of professional claims in the 1950s and 1960s before the appearance of the FPJQ and of the Press Council. At that time, journalists negotiated their working conditions and their professional independence in the same collective agreement.

Finally, journalism largely being a freelance profession, the Independent Journalists Association of Quebec (AJIQ) was born in 1988 (AJIQ, 1988). Its claims are mostly economic. It argues for social and legal recognition of the statutes of independent journalist and researcher that would allow them access to better social protections and collective negotiation of their working conditions (AJIQ, 1988). It calls for the recognition of independent journalists' copyrights, and it denounces the effects of media concentration on the quality of information (AJIQ, 1988).

The contrast between this situation and that of public relations is striking. the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) and its member societies, including the Société québécoise des professionnels en relations publiques (SQPRP), are useful places for assembling and professional development. They offer training and access to Accreditation in Public relations (APR), a professional designation recognized by professional associations of public relations in 14 countries. However, we must unfortunately note that they fail to promote accreditation beyond their members and are absent from the public debate.

This may help to explain why CPRS and its affiliates have great difficulty recruiting new members and very little power and influence. The profession is engaged in a vicious circle where public relations practitioners do not see the point of joining a group that seems ineffective in promoting the profession

and where low membership deprives CPRS and its affiliates of ways to ensure effectively this representation.

The newsroom

In news organizations, journalists are organized around the newsroom, a center of power that is their own, that structures their activity in a professional manner that provides a safeguard against individual professional errors, and that partially immunizes them against the pressures that other powers may wish to exert – economic and political power in particular – from within the news organization or outside of it.

Several journalists of my acquaintance react with astonishment to this notion; for them, the newsroom is simply a workplace. Journalists sometimes reprove the leaders of the newsroom for being more concerned about management and profitability than about the quality of the information. Moreover, the strength of the newsroom is very uneven across media companies. It is real, and it exerts a tangible influence in the mainstream media, especially those where there is also a trade union; its influence is very small, if it exists at all, in the small media where journalists are few and isolated and simply do not have the means to resist pressure by management or by the advertising department.

Nonetheless, the newsroom is a place run by journalists for journalists. It is true that journalists, when appointed to managerial functions, must necessarily also take into account other requirements than information itself, including available budgets and the need to “sell the product.” The fact remains that the newsroom is where the journalistic vocation of the media comes alive, the place where this media is not a business like any other, subject only to the law of the market. The most important and prestigious news organizations distinguish themselves precisely by the high caliber of journalism practiced there. The quality of the information depends not only on the competence of the journalist himself but also on the institutional rigor that prevails there. Again, the power of the newsroom is not always dominant, but it is clear that the journalists do better overall than public relations at maintaining control over their professional practice.

Here we must explain how, for a majority of journalists, the very existence of journalism is inseparable from the organization in which it is carried out. This organization must be independent from outside influence or include an autonomous structure that guarantees editorial independence. Here are

some excerpts of the General Regulations of the FPJQ.

FPJQ, general regulations:

2.01

FPJQ recognizes as a journalist a person who, without exercising parallel trade or functions incompatible with journalism and who is not otherwise in conflict of interest with the practice of journalism, has for principal occupation the regular and remunerated exercise of a journalistic function on behalf of one or several Quebec news media.

A person exercises a JOURNALISTIC FUNCTION¹⁹ when working on the dissemination of information or opinions on topical issues, with a view of public interest, serving the citizens and not special interests. (FPJQ, n.d.c)

To summarize, a journalist is the person carrying out a journalistic act *on behalf of or under the responsibility of one or more news media*.²⁰ Note that the FPJQ feels the need to distinguish between the journalist and the person who exercises a journalistic function, the only difference between the two being whether they are attached to a news medium. The importance of this precision becomes clearer when considering the definition of a news medium. The definition created by the Quebec Press Council (2015) is fairly standard: “a company whose core business is the publication of newspapers and periodicals” (p. 10).²¹ The definition given by the FPJQ is much more illuminating (FPJQ, n.d.c):

- c. NEWS MEDIA means a business that, with a view of the public interest, *seves the citizens and not special interests*:
 1. publishes one or more newspapers or periodicals on current events;
 2. manages a radio station, or a network of radio stations, one or more television channels with an information service or broadcasting programs produced in a journalistic perspective;
 3. manages a private news agency service or public information agency with an autonomous status;

.....
19. The capitals are in the original text.

20. All the emphasis in the following paragraph is added.

21. The definition put forward by the Press Council is longer, as it also covers electronic media, press agencies, and virtual media. The basic definition remains the same.

4. produces one or more news programs or websites covering current events in a journalistic perspective; Corporate publications, and publications published by private or public organizations and associations are not considered news media *unless the corporation, organization or association establishes an autonomous structure and undertakes in writing to respect the editorial independence of the publication in regards to the specific interests of the corporation, organization or association.*

For the FPJQ, a news media is necessarily serving the citizens and not special interests, which excludes corporate publications and those of private and public organizations and associations, unless they are equipped with an independent autonomous structure that guarantees its independence regarding the specific interests of the organization that supports it. In other words, there can be no real news media without a free and independent newsroom. And for FPJQ, there are no journalists if there are no news media.

This model has worked very well for two centuries because newspaper companies—newspapers first, then radio and television—were the unavoidable vectors of information. To learn about the news, it was necessary to read newspapers and listen to the radio and television information; there was no alternative. Thus, newsrooms were the source of revenue of the news media in a symbiotic relationship where the public interest was served in a commercial setting. The powers of information and money coexisted in a mutually beneficial balance, guaranteed by a watertight bulkhead enabling the management of information within the press room by the journalists themselves, free from the interference of economic and political powers that media owners might be tempted to exert.

But nothing is perfect. Tensions have always existed between the public service vocation of the press room and the economic goals of the organizations that finance them, especially in the private sector. But in essence, it can be said that journalists have managed to maintain a relative freedom of maneuver. However, the future looks turbulent.

The future of journalism

In journalism, as in so many other areas, the Internet and the endless possibilities offered by the new telecommunications facilities have put the existing order in peril. The changes are happening so fast in the media world that it is risky to try to predict their future; this chapter may have to be rewritten

in a few months. Facebook, which has been in existence for a little over fifteen years, has revolutionized our ways of communicating, and is already becoming an old media, forsaken by people under 30. Young people quite simply no longer care for traditional media. Advertising revenues have massively migrated from the traditional print and electronic media to the new digital media. The traditional media, especially newspapers, are closing one after the other.

Consider this great paradox: by enabling greater freedom of expression than ever before in the history of mankind, digital media threaten the existence of the press room by removing its exclusive nature as the source of information on which was based the economic benefits of traditional media. It is not just the information that has become free. The newspaper was once a major carrier for all types of corporate advertising, as well as the primary source for classified advertisements, movie and entertainment schedules, and all public service information provided by governments and municipalities. Today, all this information is freely available to anyone with access to an internet connection. From 2006 to 2015, overall advertising revenue for Canadian dailies shrank from \$2.75 billion to \$1.42 billion (The Public Policy Forum, 2015, p. 17-18). Advertising dollars are quickly moving from traditional media to the Internet. There, they are being gobbled up by Google and Facebook, who took in more than 89% of all internet advertising dollars in 2015, leaving less than 11% for all Canadian Internet media (The Public Policy Forum, 2015, p. 22). Clearly, the traditional business model of media is no longer viable, and they are in deep trouble.

As a direct consequence, journalism is going through very difficult times. Journalists today are under assault on several fronts. In Canada, there were 102 newspapers sold per 100 households in 1950, compared to 18 in 2015 (The Public Policy Forum, 2015, p. 15). Between 2008 and late 2016, 169 news outlets have closed outright or were merged into other outlets (The Public Policy Forum, 2015, p. 44).

The same story has been unfolding worldwide. In the United States, in 1940, approximately 35% of the population received a printed newspaper (Kamarch & Gabriele, 2015). This proportion is less than 15% in 2010 (Kamarch & Gabriele, 2015). There were, in this country, about 1,200 daily newspapers per 100 million people in 1945 against 400 in 2010 (Kamarch & Gabriele, 2015). In the last 40 years, the number of journalists per capita has been halved, and the audience of major TV news and radio broadcasts have been constantly decreasing. The only ratings to increase are those of social media, but are we then still talking about journalism? Journalism and journalists are overwhelmed

by bloggers and citizen journalists ever more numerous, with major consequences for the quality of information and the health of democracy.

The rout, which once concerned mainly print media, now also affects electronic media and even the all-news channels, whose golden age will have lasted less than a quarter-century. The 1991 Gulf war allowed CNN to establish itself permanently in the global television landscape by offering a quick response and a sustained attention span significantly higher than that of traditional channels, and other channels followed. But these networks are themselves outgunned today by social media. The new live streaming applications of Facebook and Twitter are increasingly proving to be “killer apps” that displace the traditional sources of media images.

When a crisis occurs, the news channel anchor journalists can do nothing but endlessly repeat the scarce information available to them and broadcast the images taken from afar by their cameramen, who inevitably arrived after the start of the crisis, or, more and more, footage shot “within” the crisis and relayed in real time through their smartphones by people who were there when the crisis occurred. In July 2016, we saw a woman broadcasting live the agony of her companion, who had been shot a few seconds earlier by a police officer; a Black Lives Matter activist filming his own arrest; a truck driven by a terrorist taking dozens of lives on the Promenade des anglais in Nice filmed by someone who was there—all in real time. This unprecedented capacity for immediacy brings journalists themselves, as well as a growing number of their audience, to turn to social media to follow events.

Everywhere, the number of publications and circulation numbers are decreasing, and closures, downsizing, and layoffs are increasing, especially in newspapers. The crisis is real. Eager to maintain profitability, media owners seek the winning formula, and it seems to imply among other things the redirection of the newsroom in directions that are not desired by journalists, such as “people-isation” of information, search of sensationalism, a lesser place granted to information that sells less—even if it is essential—and, in parallel, more and more space for the multiple variants of content marketing. This invasion of the press room by thinly disguised advertising is experienced by journalists as a frontal attack on the conditions of the exercise of professional journalism. Whether asking journalists to write sponsored content alongside genuine journalistic articles, inserting such content through the information in ever more creative formats, or seeing newsroom directors choose news items on the basis of the sponsors’ preferences, the boundaries between genres are blurring.²²

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22. See *TRENTE*, the magazine published by FPJQ, published a dossier. (Saulnier, 2015).

Repeated attempts to maintain the profitability of the media and the upheavals that accompany their transformation have led to enormous pressure on the working conditions of journalists: increased workload, use of a higher number of freelancers (whose rates have stagnated for twenty years, if they have not declined), and pressures to change the content so as to promote sales. Since the beginning of the century, all major media have experienced these disturbances. Lockout after lockout follows one another rather than strikes, which clearly indicates that it is the media owners who are applying pressure to accelerate change. The situation is radically different from that which prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s, when unions of journalists multiplied work stoppages to achieve better working conditions and better professional conditions for the exercise of journalism. Today, these unions are completely overwhelmed.

The media are reacting by trying to reinvent a viable business model, with varying success. More precisely, owners and media managers react; they, more than journalists, are trying to reinvent their business model, with mixed success and sometimes catastrophic results for journalists.

Rather than question the future of media, let us question the future of journalism and journalists. The question is no longer whether the media as we know them will disappear or mutate into a new reality – we know the answer. Let us ask ourselves whether the newsroom, this independent, autonomous structure dedicated to producing public interest information described by the Press Council's ethics guide – without which there is no news media – is doomed to disappear, if professional journalism is condemned?

The classic economic model of the media is no longer viable. However, it is far from clear that professional journalism will disappear. By analogy, new technologies and social media trashed the music industry as it existed, bypassing the existing distribution networks, but the music itself still exists. Uber threatens the taxi industry, but the "taxi" function still exists. In the world of retail, countless retailers have closed, but the part of retail that migrated to the Web is doing well. All these functions survive because they are needed; they are carried out otherwise, and they borrow new channels altogether.

Obsessed with the economic impact, we do not pay enough attention to the reaction of the journalists themselves, who are beginning to organize not the response to social media but the evolution of journalism and its adaptation to the new context.

The debate on the status of the journalist and the future of the print media

Given the importance for the well-being of democracy of maintaining a free press worthy of the name, the Quebec government mandated journalist Dominique Payette to explore the future of information in Quebec in the context of technological change. The Payette report, tabled in 2010, notes that the traditional media business model is bankrupt and that, to support quality information, we need to explore new avenues (Payette, 2010). True to the North-American journalistic tradition, it stays well away from any suggestion that government might support the media directly. Rather, it recommends the creation of a status of professional journalists and the establishment of government support for the practice of journalism, where the government would support news media that engage a sufficient number of journalists holding this title. The report also recommends strengthening and providing better funding for the Press Council to raise the general level of journalistic ethics in Quebec.

Dominique Payette (2010) recommends the establishment of a designation of “professional journalist” (p. 78) and provides several arguments in support of this position. The current response to the question “who is a journalist” is so vague that it is impossible for the government to design a support program for them. The same argument is invoked by courts to refuse to recognize the protection of journalistic sources; the Canadian and Quebec Charters of Rights cannot be applied to “a group of writers as heterogeneous and ill-defined” (R. v. National Post, 2010). A status of professional journalist would clearly identify professionals who are dedicated to information of public interest and who respect the rules and ethics specific to journalism. The creation of such a status is not unprecedented. In Europe, laws on the status of the journalist and the issuing of press cards to those who qualify according to the criteria set by a journalist organization are the norm. The Scandinavian countries, all rated better than Canada in the World Press Freedom Index, have been actively supporting their news media for some time, specifically linking such support to the need to maintain their invaluable contribution to democracy (Reporters Without Borders, 2016).²³ As recently as 2015, Sweden was still exploring ways to strengthen the public support afforded to the

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23. According to this index, the top 10 countries out of 180 countries for freedom of the press are, in decreasing order, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, New-Zealand, Costa Rica, Switzerland, Sweden, Ireland, and Jamaica. Canada ranks 18th, Great Britain 38th, the United States 41st and France 45th.

media (Fullerton, 2016). In France, public support for the media cost roughly € 900 million in 2013 (Cour des comptes, 2013). Even in the United States, newspapers have been subsidized by preferential postal rates since the Postal Act of 1792 (Cagé, 2015).

The Payette report is careful to point out that the professional status would be attached to the individual who would receive it, depending on the nature of their professional work, rather than being linked to membership to a corporation or a professional order. This caution is motivated by historical reasons. The very idea that a third party—especially if it is mandated by the State—can define who is or is not a journalist inspires a deeply rooted resistance.²⁴ North American journalists—there is here no distinct reality for Quebec—are so resistant to any form of supervision imposed from outside their profession that they have always largely resisted the idea that anyone who is not a journalist could decide who may, or may not be a journalist. They argue for total open and unrestricted access to the practice of journalism on the sole basis of the relevance of the proposed content for any media wishing to publish or broadcast it. However, as the work of the Payette Commission has shown, historically, when journalists see the possibilities of negotiations on the union side are shrinking, they look more favorably to the possibility of implementing a professional status.

The Payette report was received favorably, both by FPJQ and by the Press Council. At the FPJQ Congress of 2011, a unanimous resolution was passed in favor of a professional status, but the tide quickly turned. The minister responsible undertook a tour and may have shown a little too much enthusiasm, awakening the specter of state control. FPJQ and Press Council could not agree on which body would be responsible for issuing press cards. Discordant voices were heard in the journalistic corps. Some newspaper companies disagreed. In the end, the journalistic community ultimately rejected the idea of a professional status.

In the fall of 2016, the Payette report had fizzled, but a spectacular about-turn was occurring with both media owners and journalists.

A coalition grouping most of Quebec's daily and weekly newspapers owners (178 newspapers in all) took a decisive turn when they requested both provincial and federal governments to financially support their "digital turn" and change laws and regulations to stop the drain of advertising dollars from print to digital media that have been bleeding the print media to death for

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24. The same debate raged at the time of the Hutchins Commission. Some of its members felt that the press should be regulated by the government if it does not assume its responsibilities to the public.

years. The fear of government intervention in the media expressed in the Payette report published in 2010, they argued, was now outdated, and its recommendations that the media stay at arm's length from government to maintain their independence and credibility have been outpaced by the ever-growing menace posed by the FAANG (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, Google). Advertising dollars were being drained at an alarming rate from print to digital media, and 80 % of those dollars end up south of the border. Digital media profit from the content created by print media and do not contribute one single dollar for that content. The coalition asked for a combination of tax credits on salaries and new digital equipment, policies encouraging advertising in print media, and tax exemptions on the sale of printed publications. They were joined by a vast array of intellectuals, unions and business people (*Le Devoir*, 2017).

Journalists joined the fray and suddenly no longer seemed to fear that financial support from governments might lead to interference in the news – at least, these fears were quelled in their public pronouncements. To quote FPJQ president Stéphane Giroux, “there can be no freedom of the press when the press disappears.”²⁵ They joined the media owners in requesting government support, but with a twist, requesting that the financial support be granted to the practice of quality journalism rather than for “high-end gadgets for companies that already have money” (Papineau, 2017).

Response from governments has been slow and weak. In 2017, Quebec announced financial support measures totaling \$36 million over five years. This barely offsets the losses the print media have incurred from this government, as its print advertising budget shrank from \$28 million to \$7 million between 2009 and 2017, even as its internet advertising budget increased from \$4.7 to \$14.8 million (Desjardins, 2017). Furthermore, as of this writing, Quebec has announced its intention to start taxing sales of goods and services via the Internet as of January 1, 2019. How successful these measures will be, and whether they will translate in any kind of reprieve for the print media, remains to be seen.

As for the Government of Canada, at first it purely and simply turned down the request for assistance. Not only did the government refuse to help the print media, it also refused to implement any restraint or additional taxes on the Canadian activities of the GAFA and other digital media. In its 2018 budget, it eventually granted \$50 million over 5 years, labeled as assistance for local media in underserved information markets. It is a drop in the bucket

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25. FPJQ press release dated December 7, 2017.

that provides no significant relief for the print media.²⁶

By May, 2018, the idea that government support was required to allow the traditional media to survive had gained strong support. On the 8th of May, 2018, in a spectacular development, *La Presse*, one of Canada's leading dailies,²⁷ a property of Power Corporation for more than 50 years, announced that the property of the paper was being transferred from Power Corporation to a not-for-profit trust. The idea, plain and simple, is to benefit from government support by raising money from donations that *La Presse* will ask the government to make tax deductible. *La Presse* had good reason to follow that path; in the Federal budget tabled in February, 2018, the federal government indicated it was looking at new models to enable private giving and philanthropic support for non-profit news organizations. Journalist unions and the FPJQ strongly supported the move and urged the Government of Quebec to allow the change to take place.²⁸

The not-for-profit model as applied to the media is not unknown. In the US, *National Public Radio* and the *Public Broadcasting Service* are non-profit organizations, as are *Consumer Report* and *The American Prospect* magazines. A few dailies are also non-profit, such as the *St. Petersburg Times* in Florida and *The Guardian* of London. But this model has always been marginal. The sense of urgency with which all the parties are now supporting this development indicates how far we have come in a few short years, in moving away from a decades-old, perhaps even centuries-old distrust of any form of government intervention in the media, to a new position where it is seen as unavoidable if the traditional media is to survive.

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26. In its March 2019 budget, the Government of Canada announced assistance of \$ 595 million over 5 years for "journalistic organizations in difficulty" which would be paid in the form of payroll tax credits and tax deductions for donations paid to press organizations. A committee made up of representatives of the community has been formed to determine which "journalistic organizations" should benefit from this financial support. As of June 2020, none of this financial assistance had yet been paid.

27. *La Presse* has long been proactive in adjusting to the media crisis. At the end of 2015, *La Presse* launched its electronic platform, *La Presse+* (<http://plus.lapresse.ca/etapes-installation-android>), and stopped publishing its print editions, except for the Saturday edition. The Saturday edition was phased out at the end of 2017. As of May, 2018, the impressions rate of the Internet-based *La Presse +* is superior to the circulation of the paper edition of the best years of *La Presse*. However, this has not solved the financial problem posed by the vanishing advertising market. The same electronic platform was sold to the *Toronto Star* in 2015, but the number of people accessing the new electronic *Star* platform was well below forecasts.

28. In 1963, the Government of Quebec had to pass a private bill to allow the Desmarais family (the family that controls Power Corporation) to buy *La Presse*. It needs to pass another bill to invalidate the existing one.

Social media and democracy

The survival of quality journalism is of interest for all public relations professionals. We are traversing a phase where, behind the erosion of the traditional news media, lies an empty internet space populated by an illusion created by millions of individual voices which together often evoke chaos and confusion more than a solid, well-documented reflection of reality similar to that which can produce a group of well-supervised journalists in a real newsroom. One can find the worst alongside the best on the Internet, where new media are gradually being developed, newsroom included, but if the mainstream media were all to disappear immediately, nothing could fill the vital role that they provide for the benefit of society.

Hopefully, the media will manage to reinvent themselves, because the press room is essential to both public relations professionals and journalists. While the damage from journalistic slips can be very harmful, such events remain few in numbers and can be remedied by an intervention with the news medium concerned. In contrast, a blogger who slips can cause as much damage as a traditional journalist. How do we intervene to correct the damage that is spreading at the speed of light on the Web? Monitoring and rapid response systems can be brought into play, but these do not address the problem of lack of professional journalistic standards for the vast majority of bloggers; the real problem is not technical but professional and ethical in nature. We quickly understand the interest for a public relations professional to deal with well-trained and mentored journalists rather than with bloggers beholden to no one and with no professional obligations.

The survival of journalism should also interest us as citizens concerned about the health of the democratic system that governs our collective lives. Arguing that millions of formerly voiceless people have indeed found a voice, some say that social media and the Internet have brought a golden age of freedom of expression. Others argue that the apparently infinite multiplicity of voices on the Internet obfuscates reality; in fact, social media ownership was consolidated at incredible speeds, recreating the same dangers posed by the concentration of ownership of traditional media, which we discussed in Chapter 1.²⁹ In fact, social media is transforming our society and exerting an influence on our democracy that mostly went under the radar until recently

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29. To explore these very interesting questions would lead us too far from our subject. See in particular *Canada's Digital Divides*, published by Communications Management Inc. (2015), and the website of the Canada Media Concentration Project : <http://www.cmcrp.org/media-and-internet-concentration-in-canada-report-1984-2014/>

but that has become very obvious in 2016.

The small number of players who control the most influential social media are fighting to attract the maximum number of visitors, and, to this end, they have devised algorithms that are closely guarded secrets but that all work along the same principle: give the customer ever more of what they want. These algorithms analyze the online behaviour of each user and provide content that match the user's tastes, their political inclinations, what they already know and what they want to see. By learning to recognize our preferences, the algorithm gives us content that reflects only the news we are interested in, what we already know, delivered by commentators with whom we agree. Ultimately, it cuts us off from the rest. In other words, a person informed only through social media – this is the case of vast numbers of people under 30³⁰ – if they are not aware of this and do not consciously strive to diversify their sources of information and views, will see their worldview shrink, even as they believe they are accessing universal content. The quality of democratic debate can only suffer.

One might think that this situation is not very different from that which we have always known; we all tend to read certain parts of the newspaper and to ignore what does not interest us. But there are important differences. In a real newspaper, even one identified to an ideological or political current, the content is governed by professional rules enforced by the editor: fact checking, multiple sources, clear distinctions between opinion and facts, and balanced perspectives. Even if we read only one daily newspaper, there is a good chance that most of the information will be the same as in other newspapers, that it will have been subjected to at least minimal fact checking, and that we will be able to distinguish between fact and opinion. Even media that are openly aligned with a political tendency base their reputation on the accuracy of facts and rigorous analysis. Although opinions may diverge to infinity, at least there is a common fact base on which all can converge, anchoring the political and social debate in a common reality. Moreover, because they pose as defenders of freedom of expression, the vast majority of traditional media have always maintained a tone of civility respectful of diversity. Racism or hate speech and calls for intolerance are generally banned.

The situation is different in social media. They have almost total freedom in democratic countries and too often indulge in serious abuses. Wild assertions, racism, prejudice, misinformation, and outright lies can be aired

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30. According to the Pew Research Center (Mitchell, Shearer, Gottfried, & Barthel, 2016), only 5% of adults under 30 read newspapers. By contrast, 33% of the 18-24 and 21% of the 25-34 age groups mainly get their news from social media, according to Dunn (2017).

without verification or counterweight. It sometimes becomes difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood. More worryingly, what is false often has the same weight as what is true for millions of people who do not have the means, time, or desire to check. Traditional media may well say that a falsehood promoted by social media is a falsehood, but tens of millions of people are no longer listening to them. Furthermore, on social media the tone of the debate often degenerates. Insults are traded, and intolerance increases. Finally, while traditional media generally give greater importance to recognized experts and proven knowledge, all voices have the same weight on social media, and the flamboyant or demagogue style often outweighs accurate facts and depth of analysis.

This phenomenon is not new. Trash radio and tabloids have always existed. But these media, harmful as they may be, do not cancel the effectiveness of true news media. Social media, on the other hand, do precisely this in two stages. First, as explained above, they generate confusion in the public debate. Second, by undermining both the circulation and the advertising budgets of traditional media, social media generate a significant overall decrease in the number of media and journalists, reducing their ability to perform their duties, undermining the very heart of democratic debate, and opening the door to the worst excesses, as summarized by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas:

When reorganisation and cost-cutting (in the media) jeopardise accustomed journalistic standards, it hits at the very heart of the political public sphere. Because, without the flow of information gained through extensive research, and without the stimulation of arguments based on an expertise that doesn't come cheap, public communication loses its discursive vitality. The public media would then cease to resist populist tendencies, and could no longer fulfil the function it should in the context of a democratic constitutional state. (as cited in Viner, 2016, para. 48)

In other words, the rise of populist discourse and the continual weakening of traditional media threaten the very existence of a rational public debate. The threat is all the more pernicious because traditional media have no choice but to report the populist discourse, and their fact-checking does not seem to have any impact on a large part of their audience. Moreover, some politicians openly bank on the confusion between truth and falsehood maintained by social media.

Again, politicians inventing a reality that suits them and exploiting the resentment of part of the population to build political capital is nothing new.

But discourse based on emotions and prejudices, often unverified and false, is now broadcast by means as powerful as the traditional media from which they have always been excluded or presented critically, with major consequences on society.

The phenomenon is not theoretical. The Brexit vote was no sooner finished than its most ardent promoters admitted they had knowingly used false arguments and that their strategy, faced with the insistence on the truth of the other side (and journalists), had been to bet on emotion. "People in this country have had enough of experts" (Viner, 2016, para. 11), said Michael Gove, a leading British politician. And what about Donald Trump, whose erroneous declarations are reported on daily by all of the serious press? But his supporters no longer listen to the serious press; they communicate between themselves. They talked to each other and had very few connections with Clinton supporters or the mainstream media, concluded the MIT's Electome Project, which monitored and analysed Twitter throughout the presidential election.³¹ While the same was true of Clinton supporters, there were more connections between them and the media, who are heavy Twitter users, which might in part explain how the media got blindsided by the growing support for Trump.

The influence of social media has gone even further. A new cottage industry of fake news sites has emerged to profit from the information bubbles. Quick money can be made from aggregating "clicks" and "likes" and enlisting followers on Facebook. Imaginative people decided to cash in on the gullibility of internet users in the months before the US presidential election by creating fake news sites that carried such stories as "Obama was born in Kenya," "Pope Francis forbids Catholics from voting for Hillary," "Bill Clinton's sex tapes revealed," "Hillary sold weapons to ISIS." Buzz Feed investigative journalists determined that the 20 top-performing false election stories from hoax sites and hyperpartisan blogs generated more shares, reactions, and comments on Facebook than the 20 best-performing election stories from 19 major news websites, such as those of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, and *NBC News* (Silverman, 2016).

The problem goes even deeper. Numerous investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation since the summer of 2016 have unearthed a very strong probability that the Macedonian peddlers of fake news were not the only ones sowing confusion on the Internet; hackers operating under instructions from the Russian government, intent on using the social media to undermine the American electoral process, were also at work. Similar suspicions are raised regarding the Brexit debate, and the media reported several hacking at-

31. The Electome project can be consulted directly at <http://www.electome.org/>

tempts attributed to foreign powers in recent elections in European countries. It seems that democracy is not only being vandalized by reckless politicians; it is also under siege by powers that would prefer to eradicate it.

"You're entitled to your own opinion but not to your own facts." Incredible as it may seem, this bit of wisdom is no longer true. The politicians we are talking about do not hesitate to change the facts, or invent them, for political expediency. There is even a word for it. The Oxford Dictionaries of England and the United States named "post-truth" the word of the year in November 2016. It is defined as an adjective "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016, para. 1). The word is not really new to 2016, but its new implication is, according to the dictionaries, that "truth itself has become irrelevant" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016, para. 7). If Donald Trump "feels" or "believes" that real unemployment rates are at 40% (Jacobson, 2015), crime is increasing (Berman, 2016), and Mexican immigrants are rapists (Neate, 2015), then this matters more than real statistics and scientific studies that say otherwise.

Important social disruption occurs as a result of this loss of landmarks about what is socially acceptable speech in both content and form. Groups hitherto silenced and politically marginal, if not nonexistent, and whose concerns never dominated the political agenda suddenly found a voice, an audience, and political power.

Under the influence of social media, political equilibrium that was stable for decades has been suddenly and rapidly upset. The "Arab Spring" of 2011 would never have occurred without the mobilizing power of social media and its ability to bypass traditional media under the control of the dictatorship. Brexit would have been unthinkable a few years ago, as well as the rise to power of Donald Trump in the United States. The far right, held in check in many European democracies since World War II, is in resurgence. In all these cases, populism has been encouraged by the emergence on social media of content that is outrageous from the standpoint of the usual standards of what can be written or said in the traditional media.

I am not saying that social media are the only source of the phenomenon; dissident or extremist opinions have always existed. But without social media, they could not assert themselves so forcefully nor impose themselves into traditional media and the dominant political discourse.

It is interesting to recall Chomsky's theory that the media constitute a system whose purpose is "to teach individuals values, beliefs and behavioral codes that integrate social structures at large ... [P]ower and money select what

information is to be published, marginalize dissent and allow messages from the government and dominant private interests to reach the public (Chomsky & Herman, 2008, p. 25-26).” If the media can no longer play their role of a filter that only publishes ideas that are acceptable “to power and money,” it logically follows from Chomsky’s theory that ideas unacceptable to the ruling elite will emerge in the public debate.

This is exactly what is happening. Donald Trump is the personification of political incorrectness; Brexit was seen as heresy for 20 years; and the logic of free trade supported by ever more encompassing international treaties, at the heart of economic orthodoxy, is being strongly opposed, as well as the inequalities generated by capitalism, which are not new (although their magnitude is unprecedented in recent history). A large number of dominant ideas that were supported for decades by a fundamental consensus of the major political and economic powers across the political spectrum are now being questioned. The disarray of the elite who can no longer contain the debate is palpable.

Certainly, there is as much good as there is bad in social media. Who would claim that it is unhealthy for all groups and all people to access a tool that allows them literally to speak to the entire planet? All political tendencies can be found online. Eight years before Donald Trump, it was Barack Obama who used social media to channel financial and political support from millions of voters. Millions of refugees migrating from African countries to Europe have used social media to find help, talk to relatives, regroup, and organize. In the US, the excesses of the police forces are now denounced thanks to visual evidence on social media. Social media is inseparable from the Internet, which has allowed whole areas of the world lacking traditional infrastructure to break out of isolation. They are an incredibly rich source of content of all kinds—the world at your fingertips. We will never return this genie to its bottle. Whatever one thinks of social media, we must learn to live with it.

The role of journalism in this world under reconstruction is to help establish a new coherence based on rigorous analysis that distinguishes between proven facts and opinions, and to create forums tempered by an ethic of discussion. As expressed by Katherine Viner of the *Guardian*, “The challenge for journalism today is not simply technological innovation or the creation of new business models. It is to establish what role journalistic organisations still play in a public discourse that has become impossibly fragmented and radically destabilised” (Viner, 2016, para. 57)

Journalism and the media have a far way to go to fill Katherine Viner’s prescription. Savaged by irresponsible politicians and weakened by the rise

of social media, traditional media and journalism are in a sorry state today. Recent polls indicate how far journalism has fallen in public opinion. As measured by the Edelman Trust Barometer (Edelman, 2018), the media are now the least trusted institutions worldwide:

- 50% of the population of the 28 countries covered by the poll are disengaged and consume news produced by major news organizations less than once a week (54% in Canada);
- 66% believe news organizations are more focused on attracting a big audience than reporting (63% in Canada);
- 65% believe the media sacrifice accuracy to be the first to break a story (63% in Canada);
- 59% believe the media care more about supporting an ideology than informing the public (54% in Canada).

Conversely:

- Only 36% believe the media are doing a good job of guarding the quality of information
- Only 45% say they help inform good life decisions
- And only 50% believe they educate people on important issues.

Respondents say that because the media are not performing as they should:

- 50% are not sure what is true and what is not;
- 56% don't know which politicians to trust;
- The fear of fake news being used as a weapon ranges from 55% to 80% in the different countries (65% in Canada).

The silver lining in this bleak portrait is the apparent rebound in the credibility of journalists themselves, as opposed to the media. Worldwide, from 2017 to 2018, the credibility of journalists has increased by 12 points, to reach 39% (in itself, an indication of just how low their credibility has been in recent times). This is by far the most important increase of all categories. The same is true in Canada, where trust in journalism had increased by 10 % to reach 61 %, while trust in social media remains stable at 28 %.

The Proof Inc. 2018 CanTrust Index (Proof, 2018), a poll conducted in Canada in the first two months of 2018, confirms this trend towards increasing

trust in journalism and traditional media and a waning of trust towards social media, even if the numbers are somewhat different:

- Trust in Facebook has declined from 51% to 34% in a single year, while trust in the CBC holds firm at 71%.
- Trust in news media is fairly high but slightly down at 51% in 2018 compared to 54% in 2017.
- The *Shattered Mirror* essay also provides data indicating strong popular support for traditional media (The Public Policy Forum, 2015). Seventy-eight percent of respondents felt that democracy would be seriously threatened or somewhat threatened if there was no news from newspapers, magazines, and television. These same respondents also say that they completely trust or mostly trust the news coming from television (69%), radio (70%), television, newspaper, or magazines' websites (65%) and printed newspapers and magazines (66%), a level that goes down to 15% for news received from the social media (The Public Policy Forum, 2015, p. 41-42).

Reinventing the organisation

Even if the signals are still mixed, there are credible indications that answers to the economical and credibility challenges faced by the traditional media are gradually being formulated, coming from the media and journalists themselves. They are in the process of reinventing the organizational and administrative framework that supports journalistic activity and reaffirming the timeless values of professional journalism practiced ethically and competently.

As for the organizational framework, what we call "business model," the situation is now so uncertain and shifting so quickly it seems impossible to clearly read the future. One thing is certain: there is no going back. To survive, existing media, especially the print media (daily newspapers in particular), must adapt to the reality of information available in real time at no cost. It is unclear whether they are capable of doing so, because their very nature is challenged. The added value of a daily newspaper or a television newscast—to inform us about daily news—has disappeared for younger generations, who learn nothing in the newspaper; they have already read, seen, and heard all the information on a screen they consult a hundred times a day. The statistics confirm that this type of media is falling everywhere.

Adjustment attempts are multiplying; in fact, they are so numerous it would take a whole book just to sum them up adequately, we can do no more here than to sketch a very partial description. An important common feature of all these attempts requires attention: the nature of new platforms make them universally accessible media, allowing everyone to learn in real time about the news of their district and their country as well as from the rest of the world by reading the corresponding reports published in the newspaper of their city as well as live reports from journalists of all countries, published in the media of these countries. The multiplicity of viewpoints available is staggering, which again poses the problem of choice: how can we navigate this electronic jungle?

Many traditional print media offer rich Internet versions. One can find the content of the printed version along with additional reports, access to research materials, links to additional content updates, blogs, and a direct access to a news feed. The La Presse+ case we discussed earlier is a prime example of this approach..

Other new media choose to break with established patterns. The French news website Mediapart, for example, made the bold choice to sell the information to its customers by focusing on exclusives and high quality information while refusing any advertising or grants. Modern computer tools allow the Mediapart team to reinvent the news organization, much as Uber has done for the taxi industry. No more heavy hierarchy, no more advertising or subscription management department; just a big newsroom where journalists govern themselves.

In the United States, Quartz has been publishing since 2012. Defining itself as a “digitally native news outlet” (Quartz, n.d., para. 1), Quartz is aimed primarily at the business community and provides free reports from all continents. Quartz claims to be “a newsroom that is wholly focused on digital storytelling” (Quartz, n.d., para. 5). Application developers work in teams with journalists to define new modes of integration and presentation of information.

Netherlands-based Blendle publicly affirms its intention to transform journalism as iTunes transformed the music industry. Its team of journalists sort through the reports of the most credible media in Europe and America and offer them to subscribers for pennies, with the added bonus of a one-click refund if the article is not up to one’s expectations (The refund rate is 10% in Europe).

The opinion website *Ricochet* provides a virtual offer on two platforms, one in French and one in English. The magazine *Nouveau Projet* offers both printed and digital content. Montreal-born VICE has established itself not

only in Canada but elsewhere, with an increasingly abundant digital offer combining text and video. There are a variety of other experiments in progress, often centered on specific interests or local communities. In the Montreal area alone, for example, *Planète F* deals with family matters, *Rue Masson* is focused on news from Rosemont (a district of Montreal), *Trahir* offers social and cultural essays and analyses, *Mauvaise herbe* deals with culture, and *La semaine rose* and *Françoise Stereo* are feminist publications. After this quick exploration, we can be certain of one thing: we have barely scratched the surface of this sea of new electronic publications. To explore them all would draw us away from our main topic: the evolution of journalism itself.

Note that the ownership of the means of production can be seen as a return to the distant time when small groups of people founded publications that survived primarily on the revenues from the sale of the magazine rather than advertising, guaranteeing their authors maximal freedom of speech. However, the impact of these publications remains very limited, as does their distribution. Few of the new media reach the largest audiences. Behind this apparent multiplicity of voices on the Internet, the bulk of all content still belongs to a very small number of players.

The media, as we have seen, are also turning more and more towards content marketing as a source of revenues. There are numerous variants: dedicated pages or articles, commissioned reporting, native advertising, etc. It is interesting to note here that it is the value of a news medium as a brand that makes it interesting for content marketing; the more the media is credible, the more the marketing content inserted in it will be well-received. To maintain that credibility, the news media must strike a careful balance in the mix of journalistic content and the disguised advertising content that is content marketing. They take precautions. The journalists themselves, often through their unions, require that sections of the publication or website that carry promotion rather than journalism be clearly identified. Attractive and sometimes unavoidable from a revenue perspective, content marketing is therefore a tool to be handled with great care, because inconsiderate use could distort the very nature of the news media, with a great risk of killing the goose that lays golden eggs.

Finally, some news media create their own events and thus generate exclusive content for their own use. Some media organize seminars, conferences and similar events that give them extra income but are also used to generate unique and original content. To give just one example, *Les Affaires*, a Montreal-based business-oriented weekly periodical, organizes conferences on various topics of interest to its readers, ranging from social responsibility

to the Ten Commandments of the modern business executive, while not forgetting the management of human resources, information security, energy, governance, and even the administrative assistant function.

All these experiences have advantages and disadvantages, and none can guarantee long-term survival. It is likely that several others will arise in the months and years ahead. The transformation of the business model of news media that will ensure its survival is barely beginning.

*Reinventing ownership*³²

The ownership of the medium, as we have seen, is of prime importance in the control of information. While each journalist is both a human being with the universally recognized right of free expression and a professional committed to properly informing the public, ultimately it is always the owner of the medium who decides the extent to which resources will be devoted to journalism and what content will be published. French economist Julia Cagé suggests that, to preserve the essential function of a strong press in a democratic society, it is time to invent a new form of ownership.

Julia Cagé first establishes the essential importance of mega news media. The world is vast and complex, and to account properly for it requires a critical mass of journalistic resources in one place. Two newsrooms of a hundred journalists are not equivalent to a newsroom of two hundred journalists, for each must cover the whole of society: politics, education, business, arts and culture, sports, breaking news, the judiciary, etc. Once these essentials are covered, there are scarce resources left to conduct additional journalistic research and investigation. Size matters. Very large media must not only survive but also enjoy a minimum level of prosperity in a context where the autonomy of the journalistic function will be preserved. However, none of the forms of ownership that currently exist can lead to this outcome.

Historically, the media were held by one or a small group of owners, often families. Even today, a newspaper in financial difficulty is often bought by what Julia Cagé calls “a billionaire longing for influence” (p. 12). The exclusive property of a large and influential daily, or other medium of information, inevitably raises doubts about its editorial independence. Moreover, the billionaire may also decide to sell, perpetuating the financing problem.

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32. This section is directly inspired by the (2015) book published by French economist Julia Cagé. All quotes are taken from this book and translated by us.

Media that belong to foundations can also be found in several countries. One of the most important is the German-based Bertelsmann Foundation, one of the largest media groups in the world. This avenue gives the media some stability, but also places it under the absolute control of the foundation, which often amounts to the absolute control by a single family, as has been the case for the Bertelsmann Foundation for generations. Moreover, notes Julia Cagé, most not-for-profit media today remain very small, with a reduced number of journalists and modest budgets. She cites examples such ProPublica, established in 2008 and supported by Herbert and Marion Sandler; the Tampa Bay Times, owned by the Poynter Institute, a journalism school; and the Texas Tribune, launched in 2009 by several foundations. These are all niche media, unable to replace the mainstream media because of insufficient capital.

A small number of media were owned by societies of journalists, a dead-end according to Julia Cagé: “Experience teaches us that media exclusively held by their employees are doomed to failure...the idea of self-management is a journalism utopia, at least if we stick to the rigid ‘one employee, one vote’ canon” (p. 12).

Finally, throughout the twentieth century, many media have constituted themselves as corporations to meet capital requirements, which brings us back to the current cul-de-sac: “[The context of increasing competition] has driven these media to cut costs, especially by significantly reducing the size of their newsroom... [I]t has led the media to shift more and more from information to infotainment, or outright entertainment, much less expensive to produce and often much richer in advertising revenue, leaving a growing number of individuals with no access to the real information” (Cagé, 2015, p. 17). Even when journalists and other employees become shareholders, the model plays against them because, with each new capital call, the proportion of votes they control is diluted to the point of irrelevance.

“We have to realize that the political and general news media provide a public good, as well as universities [and] all industries that feed the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century. They should, as such, benefit from special treatment from the state” (p. 80), argues Cagé. She notes that, worldwide, the media benefit from some form or another of public support, either through preferential postal rates or a tailored taxation regime. These resources could be harnessed more effectively in a new legal framework that would allow large media to continue to exist.

Julia Cagé proposes creating a new form of property, the not-for-profit media company.³³ This entity would be legally constituted according to the

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33. La société de media à but non lucrative.

model of the major US university foundations and attract donations in exchange for tax breaks granted by the state. The real novelty of the model proposed by Cagé is its governance structure. The media company would not be managed by a small group of trustees, as in a conventional foundation, but by the contributors of the funds, such as in a publically-traded company, but with a fundamental difference. In the classic model, voting rights are distributed in proportion to the percentage of capital held by each shareholder or shareholder group. In the not-for-profit media company, voting rights would be distributed asymmetrically, so as to allow all shareholders to exert real influence.

Beyond a certain ownership threshold, say 10% for the purposes of our example, any additional capital contribution from a single shareholder or group of shareholders would entitle them to a decreased percentage of voting rights. The unallocated portion of voting rights would be distributed to minority shareholders. In this model, a group of journalists, writers, or readers might hold part of the media company and exercise real power, without fear of that power being diluted to the point of insignificance by external shareholders.

I have given Julia Cagé's ideas considerable space because they bring us to one inescapable conclusion: the answer to the technological changes that completely transform the modern world will require a profound transformation of the media industry of the same nature and scope as those that are shaking up the taxi, retail, entertainment, cultural industries, and the rest of society. Exactly as the corporation emerged and established itself in response to the need to gather the necessary capital to launch the industrial era, new forms of organization and ownership, adapted to the new conditions, must now be created.

There are signs that such radically new models might be appearing. While most of the examples we listed above are vaguely reminiscent of traditional media or news agencies, Civil, "a decentralized marketplace for sustainable journalism" (Civil, n.d., para. 1) that is going online in April 2018, claims to introduce a new blockchain-based model for journalism that is a radical departure from the traditional publicity-based media model. We will probably see many such new approaches in the near future, and time will tell which ones are better adapted to our changing times.³⁴

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34. As of June 5, 2020, Civil announced it was putting an end to this experiment, having not succeeded in financially sustaining themselves. The race for a new model is far from over!

Back to the future for journalism?

As for the evolution of journalism, the signals are clearly encouraging. Journalists seem to be converging towards the need for more professionalism, more rigor, and greater ethics. It is journalism itself, in its most traditional and purest state, which will affirm its value and find its place in the twenty-first century. It is the journalists themselves who say so.³⁵

Thus, François Bonnet (2015) of *Mediapart* says, “We must insist and insist again on this point: digital modernity demands the best of our professional tradition, that which basically defines our job, which is our ability to produce information” (p. 114). Bonnet stresses the importance of what he describes as “the social mission of journalists: establish the facts rather than comment on them” (p. 114). He continues by quoting Robert Park of the Chicago school of sociology: “It is information rather than comments that forms opinion... [A] journalist in command of the facts is a more effective reformer than a columnist who simply bellows from his pulpit, eloquent as he may be” (p. 114). Journalist and teacher Robert Maltais (2015) adds,

To ensure its sustainability, journalism in the twenty-first century must be able to renew itself by building on solid values: in-depth information processing and analysis, the search for the truth, disseminating thorough accurate facts and novel human testimony. In short, a highly credible and ethical content – added value. p. 177

These journalists bring us back to the essence of what journalism should be. They dissipate some stubborn illusions. Jean-Claude Picard (2015) writes:

The magic of technology has been able to convince many that mastery of the tool ensures that of the content. But nothing is more false. Journalistic practice is much more than just the ability to communicate or to arrange higgledy-piggledy sound, images and text, much more than the ability to write a blogpost or ‘tweet’ without spelling or syntax mistakes ...[Journalism] is basically to collect, prioritize and make information available in order to enhance the democratic potential of citizens by increasing the understanding of the society in which they live and hence, helping them to better exercise their rights. (p. 184)

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35. For the entire section that follows, we are indebted to the remarkable work of journalists Robert Maltais and Pierre Cayouette, who published a collection of texts from 19 journalists on the current state and the future of journalism: *Les journalistes*, published by Québec Amérique in 2015.

Similarly, François Bonnet (2015) brings citizen journalism in its proper perspective:

All journalists! Some have proclaimed, yielding too quickly to the mirages of the technology revolution induced by the Internet. Yes, publishing tools are now within reach of all. Yes, a blog can be read instantly worldwide. Yes, everyone can speak at any time. It is an immense conquest, an unprecedented expansion of our freedoms. But this in no way negates the trade of the journalist, patiently built on expertise, culture and strict professional rules. Testimony by itself is not information. A rumor relayed remains a rumor. An unsourced photo without a caption to contextualize it is only an unusable image. A 'tweet' can be a lead, but nothing more. (p. 115).

Bonnet (2015) says the citizen's role is that of whistleblower, but it is the journalists who will then do the real work by collecting the facts, checking them, seeing if they match, and subjecting them to analysis. He cites Julian Assange, who has made public hundreds of thousands of pages of confidential documents via Wikileaks, and Edward Snowden, who did the same by revealing the extent of the spying practices by the NSA. In both cases, teams of journalists relayed the whistle blowers; it was them "who have worked this raw material, intersected thousands of pieces of information contained in them and given them meaning" (Bonnet, 2015, p. 116).

Maltais, Picard, Bonnet, and many other journalists of great experience therefore argue for journalistic rigor and ethics that must be stronger than ever, both as differentiation factors and as added value.

Several journalists also specifically emphasize the importance of ethics. "Fully assumed ethical practice is what will distinguish journalism from other communicative practices and allow it to survive in spite of contrary winds and multiple pressures - primarily commercial - which are at work today," writes Dominique Payette (2015, p. 197), for whom democratic societies have concluded a tacit agreement with private media companies that their primary function is to contribute to social debate and to interest the population in these debates by the practice of a responsible professional journalism.

Thomas Kent (2015) adds: "It is increasingly ethics that will determine who truly will be part of our profession" (p. 217). The importance of ethics is based on a simple fact: for a journalist - as for a public relations professional - credibility is everything. Each journalist builds their own credibility day by day, and people seeking information quickly learn to spot the familiar signa-

tures, those on which we can count for an accurate worldview and description of events.³⁶

Journalists also identify the main challenges they face to maintain the professionalism and integrity of their practice. The main one is probably the ever-increasing pace of the publication of information. The possibility offered by social media to instantly disseminate information seems to have become an obligation. The race for the “scoop” between journalists has always existed, but it has reached an unhealthy level of intensity, made possible and encouraged by the “indomitable beast” of social media, in the words of journalist Maryse Tessier (2015):

This beast must be nurtured ... [I]t has an insatiable appetite. After eating the viral, videos, photos, animations, shocking text, it requires more. We must satisfy to the demands and changes on Facebook. It's a bit surreal, but, on the other hand, we would be fools, as a medium, to ignore the power of the media ... I therefore follow the masses. I go where the reader is. (p. 267)

Not only must we give more and more, but still, while seeking to maintain a journalistic standard, we must also satisfy the urges of the reader for the unusual, the trivia, the morbid.

Would the media therefore have no choice but to follow the dictatorship of speed and to always give people more of what they expect? Journalist Thomas Gerbet (2015) tackles this problem and suggests another approach:

Who imposes this speed? Are newsrooms flooded with emails from citizens who demand more? Rather, I believe we impose on ourselves these unwritten rules and they take root as competition (or sense of competition) intensifies. What if, to the contrary the way to the future would be cooperation between news media? (p. 245)

Gerbet (2015) highlights several recent examples of cooperation that benefit news organizations, journalists, and the population, such as the agreement signed by seven major European newspapers to share information and resources to jointly conduct large investigations. He could also cite examples much closer to us, such as the continued cooperation of journalists from several Quebec media that led, after two years of research and revelations, to the

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36. Of course, different journalists will develop their own worldviews, which will lead to differences in interpretation; a single event or object can result in different “truths,” as we have discussed previously.

creation of the Commission on the Awarding of Public Contracts in the Construction Industry (Charbonneau commission).

Journalist Gabrielle Brassard-Lecours (2015) goes in the same direction, citing her own pooling experience of means and projects under the collective *Ublo Media*. Gerbet and Brassard-Lecours, it must be emphasized, belong to the younger generation of journalists. Are we perhaps witnessing the emergence of a new, more collaborative philosophy in the world of journalism?

On a much larger scale, on the initiative of the prestigious *The Guardian* and *El Pais*, along with the Global Network of editors, forty media of the world have created a platform for exchanging content on environmental issues six months before the Global Summit on the environment held in Paris in November 2015. This life-size experiment indicates the ability of the media and journalists to work together to cover wide-ranging issues, with all the participating publications emerging stronger for it.

Ultimately, according to the journalists themselves, journalism will not only survive but prosper again by remaining true to what it should be: a tool of true information. Yves Boisvert (2015) summarized it well: "We must stay focused on the fundamentals of the trade" (p. 72).

However, the nature of the institutional framework in which this revived practice can flourish is still far from clear; we are still at the experimental stage.

Conclusion

Journalists reflect current events, while public relations work to shape them. Our conceptions of truth and the common good often differ, which is inevitable. We must take note and learn to manage these tensions constructively.

Journalists and public relations practitioners do not have to be friends or accomplices any more than they should see themselves as adversaries or enemies. They occupy different functions in the "information ecology," whose balance is essential to the health of democracy. These functions sometimes complement each other and sometimes oppose one another. In all cases, both must maintain a professional attitude. By definition and by profession, a journalist doubts everything, wants to know everything, and is forever wary of ready-made explanations. This is normal, for the contrary would be disturbing. The independence of journalists that sometimes enrages us is excellent, as much from the point of view of general democracy as from that of the client or the company that employs us, because our message, when they accept it,

gains credibility. It is our responsibility to exercise due rigour in the development and delivery of our content to convince them.

On their part, the journalist must always consider the facts and make an honest effort to understand and articulate the different views that are available to them, even if they personally disagree with some of them. Even more, for the sake of truth-seeking, honest journalists must at all times be ready to question their certainties when facts contradict them. In this sense, the journalist must be perpetually open-minded. On this point, the professional obligations of journalists are the same as those of public relations professionals, creating a common ground where it should be possible to talk. It is incumbent on the public relations professional to “produce their evidence” convincingly, to never lose patience, to never stop explaining, to maintain an open attitude while seeking to understand the reasons behind the journalist’ doubt, and to explain tirelessly the correctness of their views.

The future of journalism is uncertain. An essential function in maintaining a strong democracy, this profession is undermined by a technological evolution that has pulverized the business model that supported it financially. The economic consequences of this development on the media and journalists are clear, but its long-term effects on both journalism and democracy remain unpredictable. No new business model has yet proven itself. Journalists themselves mainly rely on their professionalism to distinguish themselves from “citizen-communicators” that feed the Web with news, opinions, and comments, which are sometimes poorly documented, as the user does not always know how to distinguish wheat from the chaff.

Public relations professionals have an interest in maintaining a free, strong, plural, and abundant press. It may seem more challenging to deal with a professional journalist than with a blogger. This is sometimes true in the short term but not in the long term, because the information published under the signature of a recognized journalist will have a much greater credibility. Journalists also have benefit from dealing with professional public relations practitioners who are aware of their respective roles and responsibilities, who will supply them with accurate and complete information, inform them of the necessary elements of context, and give access to sources that may enable them to deepen their understanding. The benefits of effective relationships between public relations professionals and journalists become evident in the long term. There are no shortcuts: both must take the time to build a relationship of respect and trust.

Beyond the professional aspects that were the subject of this text, as citizens, we have an interest in following the evolution of journalism. The atrophy

of journalism created by the media crisis is bad news for us all. The growing weakness and declining quality of major public debates weakens our society.

The impoverishment of the public debate inevitably leads to the decline of the quality of decisions. Public relations did not create this crisis, but it can help maintain quality journalism by treating journalists with the seriousness and professionalism they deserve.

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