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Journalists' perceptions of press freedom in practice: Perspectives from the front-line

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Abstract

In addition to disruptions in journalism in the contemporary era, the current transformations within journalism and society more broadly have significantly disturbed the already complex questions concerning the meaning and scope of press freedom and its function in the twenty-first century. This paper addresses several of the key conference themes by providing empirical, qualitative, and cross-nationally comparative insights into the way journalism ethics are responding to transitions in news ecosystems in a range of cultural contexts. Indeed, questions regarding the impact of variations in journalistic practices for the ethical standards of quality, balance and fairness are of key concern to our AHRC-funded interdisciplinary research project: Defining Freedom of the Press (AH/R00644X/1). This paper presents data from the second stage of this research project, drawing on interviews with 40 journalists and news-workers from five countries: Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland. Utilising a phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1981; Åkerlind, 2012) we examine journalists' perceptions of the contribution of ethics codes of practice in their everyday journalistic practice. We also aim to build an understanding of journalists' shared experiences of what constitutes 'press freedom' in their cultural setting. The analysis will also outline preliminary results from interviews with non-journalist representatives from NGOs whose work intersects with journalism practice and press ethics. Taking a non-media centric approach is an important contribution of our overall research strategy as it is concerned with understanding how news workers and civil society actors understand and practice freedom of the press within a variety of cultural contexts.

References

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Åkerlind, G.S. 2012. Variation and commonality in phenomenographic research methods. *Higher Education Research & Development*. 31(1), pp.115-127.