

Media's Role In a Democratic Society

A Systematic Review of Normative Role

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As the landscape of the journalism profession changes over time with the advent of new technologies, government structures, societal values, political motives, and economic trends, the roles of journalism and how scholars analyze them too have shifted and therefore propose new possibilities to answer the question, “what is and what should be the media’s role in a democratic society?”

Introduction



Foundations

Normative role in a democratic society is an evolving facet of the journalism profession that is rooted in the democratic and philosophic traditions of Western culture.

Background

- **Corporatist tradition**
 - Common good orientation, inclusion of participatory debate, and deliberation rooted in truthfulness and rationality
- **Libertarian tradition**
 - Obtaining knowledge for individual gain and diverse debate
- **Social responsibility**
 - News media has a duty to the public (that “duty” varies)
- **Citizen participation**
 - The public has input

Important Literature

- Four Theories of the Press (Siebert et al., 1956)
- Normative Theories of the Media (Christians et al., 2009)
- David Weaver journalism studies (2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019)

FOUR ROLES

Monitorial

In broad terms, journalists who serve in this role inform the public and heed warnings about current events.

In practice: The monitorial is the everyday task traced back to the start of journalism. It’s a newspaper breaking the news, reporting on political affairs, disseminating public events calendars, and generally keeping the public informed.

Radical

The radical role insists “on the absolute equality and freedom of all members of a democratic society in a completely uncompromising way.”

In practice: The radical role of journalism is utilized as a tool of progressivism and advocacy for marginalized groups. Historically, radical or underground presses have published under the causes of religion, race, class, gender, sexuality, and various social movements including anti-war and students rights.



Facilitative

This role facilitates a space for public discourse to uphold democratic traditions and civic republicanism.

In practice: The facilitative role manifests as guest commentator spots on the news, letters to the editor, comment sections on stories and social media, call-outs in articles, guest columns, and town hall discussions.



Collaborative

This role deals with the needs and expectations of the government, but also the expectations of the press itself.

In practice: The collaborative role is usually applied during times of public health crises or other times when the press and the state need to work together.

There is tension in practice, however, due to the fact that collaborating with the government can call the press’s autonomy into question.

Conclusion

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These roles are almost never mutually exclusive, and journalists serve multiple motives through their work.

Increasingly, capitalism is becoming a player in the journalism and political communication arenas.

Implications and Limitations

- It’s challenging to define the era in which we currently live
- Advancement of technology (Internet and social media) limits prior research
- Digital journalists are defining a new role: the “mobilizing marketer”
- Social media has already revolutionized communication channels and the media



Presentation Credits

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