

Extended abstract:

Time for media scholars to step up to the global challenges

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When thinking of media scholars as outsiders or insiders, it is important to ask for what and for whom. Is the discussion about media scholars in relationship to academia, to the media industry or in society in general? All these areas need to be addressed. One thing is sure. Time is ticking for everyone living on this planet called Earth.

The absence of media in Agenda 2030

Right now, the world is engaging in finding strategies to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), often called Agenda 2030. The global community of the United Nations agreed in 2015 on 17 goals and 169 sub-goals to reach economic, ecologic and social sustainability by 2030. Agenda 2030 is an important landmark that is hoped to involve all countries and sectors of society.

However, the role of media and journalism is not really part of the equation. In fact, the word ‘media’ is not mentioned at all in the resolution, nor is ‘freedom of expression’ or ‘freedom of the press’. At the same time, the resolution reaffirms the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the portal text:

We emphasize the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status. (United Nations, 2015:6)

This can be interpreted as implying that freedom of expression and freedom of the media are there, although not spelled out. It can also be found indirectly in Goal 16, concerning the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and to ‘provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’ (United Nations, 2015:25). A sub-goal (16.10) is also about ensuring public access and fundamental freedoms. These are the few pathways where media researchers could engage in Agenda 2030 and stand up for the importance of bringing the role of the media into SDG conversations and actions.

University engagements in global challenges – the case of an ageing population

It is no longer possible to solve large global challenges within one academic discipline. There is a need for solid in-depth knowledge building from media and communication studies, but multidisciplinary environments that cross national and academic borders are also necessary. The University of Gothenburg has, in recent years, been a frontrunner on this topic by investing 300 million SEK in six multidisciplinary research centres on global challenges. The premise for the university to engage in this way is the notion that strong multidisciplinary research efforts are needed to meet today's global societal challenges.

JMG, the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, is engaged in two of these research centres: 1) ageing and health (agecap.gu.se) and 2) antibiotic resistance (care.gu.se). Ageing and antibiotics are two research areas that hopefully will benefit from engagement of media scholars.

When it comes to ageing, there is a democratic deficit in the media regarding who has a voice in the public debate. More people are growing older all over the world: in Sweden, 25 per cent of the population is 60 years of age or older. But these persons are rarely seen or heard in the media. The fact that people are living longer and healthier lives is often framed in the media as an economic problem, if it is discussed at all.

Here it is also important to ask how the democratic deficit in the media affects the research agenda: who and what topics do media scholars not perceive as interesting due to lack of media reporting? The portrayal of older persons and ageing needs to be investigated further by media scholars, as well as how older people use and perceive the new digital environment. Here, the *Nordicom Review's* special issue on being old in the age of mediatization is an important contribution (*Nordicom Review*, 2017).

Taking data to the next level – gender and media research on the move

Another area where there are huge global challenges is gender and media. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW; 1979/80) is the most ratified UN convention and is still the most important global commitment in order to eradicate gender stereotypes. The UN Beijing Platform for Action from 1995 is also important since Women and Media is one of the 12 areas where state parties have agreed to take action.

At the same time, media is an area where there are almost no consistent comparable sex-disaggregated data at all. Only 15 per cent of all UN member states collect sex disaggregated data on media, compared with 81 per cent when it comes to education and training (Seager, 2015). Work needs to be done.

With so many missing statistics, it is not surprising that media scholars have engaged in collaborations with activists to collect data. Thanks to the Global Media Monitoring Project on gender (GMMP), we now know of the persistent lack of women in the news: only 24 per cent of news subjects are women. We also know that there is a glass ceiling in the media industries, especially when it comes to top-level management and board rooms, thanks to a study from 2011 by the International Women's Media Foundation.

Recent years have seen more willingness to support research on gender and media financially. At JMG, a project financed by the Swedish Research Council will create an

open database, called GEM, combining several large sets of data collected on gender and media around the world. This means that media scholars will be able to take the collected data to the next level and start investigating patterns of gender inequality in the media – for example, to investigate further the relationships between gender equality and freedom of expression (Comparing gender and media equality across the Globe, 2016-2020, PI Monika Djerf Pierre).

Another example of financial support in this area is AGEMI, a project that aims to advance gender equality in the media by sharing good practices, developing meaningful training activities and fostering relationships between media and journalism students and media practitioners, thus bridging the transition from education to employment. AGEMI is funded by European Commission/DG Justice and is an innovation project consisting of a consortium of three universities, Newcastle, Padova and Gothenburg, which are collaborating with EFJ and Copeam to create a resource bank of good practices and online education modules (project leader: Karen Ross, Newcastle University). One challenge of the project is to communicate existing research so that it becomes useful for practitioners.

Steps to take – open the knowledge

Last but not least: all media scholars (and all other researchers) need to make sure that their research results are communicated in open access environments. They should ensure that data and reports are published with open access and stored in digital repositories that last over time. Right now, so much research is unavailable outside the universities, with Nordicom being an exception, offering open access to all its publications. The Nordic countries are wealthy enough to share their knowledge. Scholars should not settle for less than full open access to their work.

References

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Websites

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