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The Digital Challenge: A Reconfigured Public Sphere

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Media in the 20th Century Public Sphere



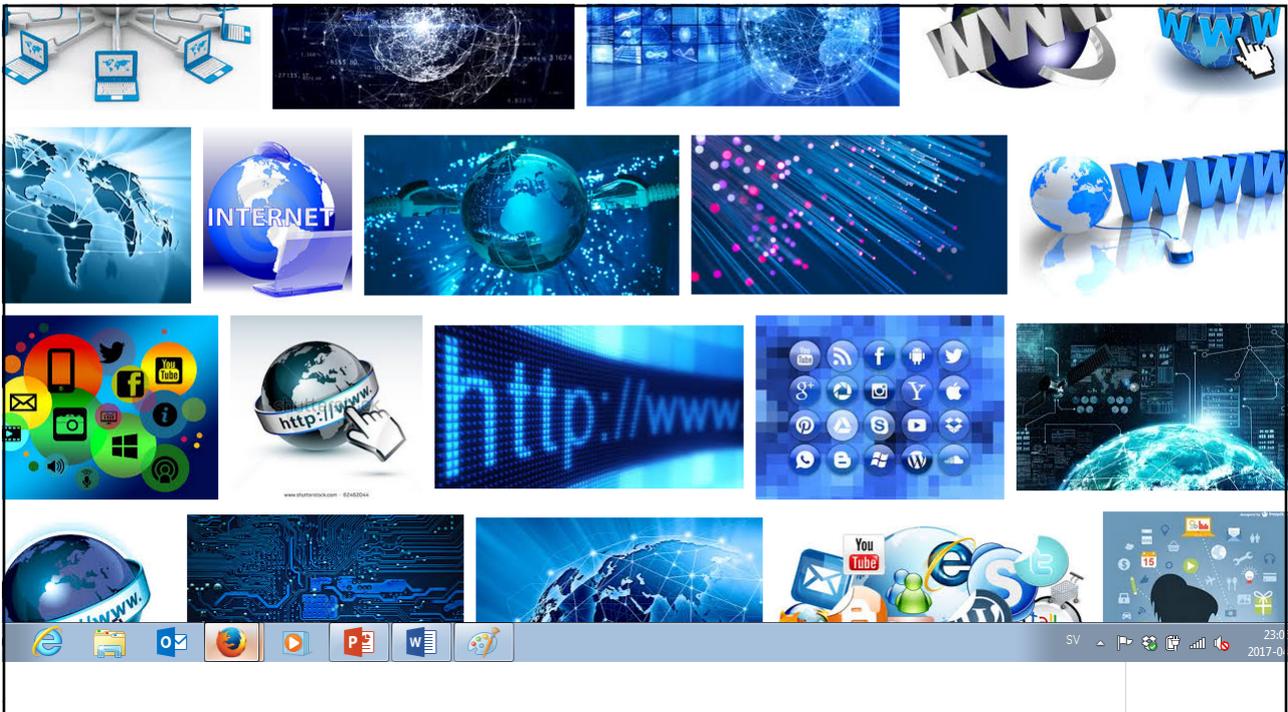




Media in the 20th Century Public Sphere

- Based on the idea of offering information to the citizenry (rather than communication and/or participation)
- “Broadcasting” – from the few to the many
- Producing for the public sphere as a professional job, not for anyone
- Local, regional, national
- Public service ethos: What does the citizenry need to know?

Media in the 21st Century Public Sphere



Media in the 21st Century Public Sphere

- Digitalized, converged and interactive
- Melted into one, global infrastructure
- Communicating and participating users
- Producers and prod-users (professionals AND amateurs)
- Multitude of channels



Media in the 21st Century Public Sphere

Some implications:

Established business models are put under pressure (advertising and subscribing)

New position for public service media

Changing roles and identities for media professionals. For instance, dealing with users who participate...



Professionals and Participating Users

Hierarchy of work tasks. Percent. Proportion of respondents that find the work task being "stimulating" or "very stimulating".

	%	N
News stories	94	588
News articles/reports	86	589
Investigative jobs	77	586
Portraits	77	591
Web-editing	24	582
Telephone beat (eg. the police)	15	590
Edit readers comments	10	585
Rewrite published news	6	590
Edit press releases	3	584

Olsson, T. & Viscovi, D. (2013)



Professionals and Participating Users

Opinions about reader comments. Percent. Proportion of respondents that believe the feature occurs "often" or "quite often".

	%	N
Characterized by linguistic errors	96	589
Questionable ethics	76	588
Express extreme views	76	588
Are part of political campaigns	70	585
Enrich public debate	44	587
Correct errors (in journalism)	29	587
Have an objective tone	23	588
Add new facts	21	588
Give new ideas	15	585

Olsson, T. & Viscovi, D. (2013)



Professionals and Participating Users

I mean, we don't let amateurs into the hospitals, despite the fact that it's ever so fun with medical treatment. I mean, this is a professional job and it takes education and competence and understanding to make it work. It would be an underestimation of ourselves if we allowed for too much user generated content. [...] (Newspaper, chief editor)

Reporter: Yes, they are uneducated. It's obvious, actually. Now... I'm not saying all, but there is a group who consist of grumblers who write a lot and have very extreme opinions. And that's a large group...

You can have an important discussion within these forums, and then the idiots enter it and everybody else leave [...], but we shouldn't be a playground for maniacs, you don't gain anything from that as a brand. (Newspaper editor)



Concluding Remarks

- The digital challenge is not only a techno-economic challenge. It is also a challenge for existing public sphere-*professions*.
- The reconfigured public sphere challenges what it means to be a producer of professional media (e.g. journalist, editor) and what their professional practices ought to include.
- Is there a need for a renewed public service ethos for the digitalized public sphere?



