

Eliisa Vainikka, Elina Noppari, Ari Heinonen and Jukka Huhtamäki
Social Media Savvies and Critical Netizens: On Being a Journalist in Social Media
Tampere Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Communication (COMET),
University of Tampere
2013

ABSTRACT

This report is based on the research project *The Online Presence and Credibility of Journalists in Social Media*. The project opens up new perspectives into professional journalists' presence online and especially in social media. The project surveys current circumstances and highlights best practices that might help make journalists' online presence more productive and meaningful.

In the study, Finnish social media experts and Finnish and British journalists who actively use the internet and social media were interviewed. The findings indicate that journalists would benefit from a more dialogic approach to their work when interacting online with the public. The foundation for an effective online presence could lie in service orientation: journalists should constantly strive to offer interesting content to their online followers. In this sense, journalists could learn from other experts with an avid and active following in social media, whatever their field.

Making the most of the internet's interactive nature requires time: journalists should be allowed to use their working time for creating and updating their social media profiles. It is high time to acknowledge that communicating and being online is and should be a crucial part of every journalist's typical workday – not something extra they do in addition to 'real work'.

The study also examined what netizens think of journalists' online presence. The results of this survey, conducted at online forums, demonstrate that from the perspective of active non-journalist internet users, professional journalists' social media practices are still taking shape and that journalists don't always consider the effects their online actions have on their active audience. On the one hand, online actives criticize journalists of acting like spectators: they aren't aware of the online culture, don't know where to search for information, aren't able to evaluate the credibility of sources and can't separate trolls from serious commentators. On the other hand, most respondents would be willing to interact and collaborate with journalists. When it comes to searching information, the willingness to collaborate proved to be so significant that it would be foolish of journalists to waste such a promising journalistic resource.

The research project also develops a research method that combines computational and content analysis methods. A Facebook analysis with a smallish data-set indicates that media tend to form separate spheres of audiences around them in social media, and that the connections between these spheres exist but are weak. Newsrooms also differ in how actively they seek to engage their followers and create interaction.