

Journalism: As Seen in the Eyes of Current Journalism and Digital Media Students

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Abstract. *The world of journalism is complex, multifaceted, and intricate. No consensus exists on the definition of journalism or its characteristics, skill set, and career choices. Differing perceptions stem from journalism's shifts to new forms, practices, and ways of thought. The digital revolution has drastically transformed the understanding and definition of journalism. Journalists, journalism educators, and even social critics have all offered varying notions on the field. However, the students, a key element, are often neglected in this equation. This paper explores how students view journalism. The current generation is arguably highly equipped with digital media through regular practice, consumption, and exposure to digitization. Journalists-to-be are considered to be the future shareholders and may be the directors of the profession. The study focused on how journalism and digital media students specifically classified journalism characteristics, the educational background they found necessary for journalists, as well as their work aspirations. As journalism is evolving and, in particular, digital journalism is a key factor in the study, the student sample was limited to those registered in the Journalism and Digital Media department at Al Maaref University. Al Maaref University has been categorized as one of the first universities in Lebanon to include the term “digital media” in their journalism degree in hopes of reflecting the fast-changing industry. This study used a quantitative approach based on a survey questionnaire administered online to all*

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students enrolled in the above-mentioned department. Findings showed that the majority of students considered the top characteristics of a journalist to include traditional journalism skills before any digital journalism skills. Students also expressed areas of study at times consistent with those skills and other times consistent with their career choices. Moreover, a majority of current journalism students aspire to work in front of the camera.

Keywords: *Journalism, digital media, characteristics, students, work aspirations, Al Maaref University, Lebanon*

Introduction

Positioning journalism, its roles, and responsibilities have long resulted in intense differences due to its ever-evolving essence and shifts to new forms, practices, and ways of thought. Journalism is viewed as a profession, an industry, a phenomenon, and a culture all at once (Zelizer, 2005). Defining journalism has long been a debatable task among journalists and academics. Deuze and Witschge (2017) argued that “journalism is transitioning from a more or less coherent industry to a highly varied and diverse range of practices” (p. 166). Differences in identifying journalism include how it should be practiced, the educational competencies it requires, the technology deemed necessary to carry out the job, and the career choices it offers.

Journalism is no new concept to mankind. It is a universal phenomenon that has long offered advanced ways to communicate and connect that no other species on earth experiences. The earliest forms of expression and information exchange were considered critical survival tools to navigate the environment. Nowadays, humans have modernized their communication, “developing more intricate ways to express, from cave paintings to the written word and illuminated manuscripts to Twitter, the telephone, and FaceTime” (Maryville University, n.d., para.1). The idea of popular media and journalism evolved in the 19th century, before undergoing at least four revolutions. Beginning with print, the earliest forms of independent newspapers with reporters emerged in the

19th century (Maryville University, n.d.). Then came the development of radio, followed by the highly powerful television. In the 21st century, the Internet entered the journalism scene before generations were introduced to the fourth revolution known as mobile technology. Both revolutions profoundly changed the notion of journalism and its operation, forcing institutions and their participants to rethink and fine-tune their tasks and features.

Many forces have entered the journalism landscape offering their independent notion of the subject. Those include media organizations, industries, markets, and educational institutions. For example, non-profit organizations (NGOs) are offering neutral and broad-spectrum definitions of journalism, saying it is the act of “gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and information. It is also the product of these activities” (American Press Institute, n.d., para.1). Journalists are expressing their views, presenting themselves in all shapes and forms such as professional broadcasters, reporters, writers, bloggers, podcasters, photographers, scientists, analysts, and social media personnel. Internationally, the journalism market is modernizing itself continuously. Within the last decade, terms such as multimedia, digital media, social media journalism, e-journalism, mobile media, and convergence have become emerging trends. This has caused major shifts in newsrooms and information hubs as they update their work ethics to keep up with technological advancements, especially in a time of aggressive competition and dire economic situations. There is now a growing demand for digitally competent journalists (Bor, 2014). Finally, universities have also focused on innovation, research, and multi-platform journalism. Most universities today are updating their programs and offering some insight into multimedia, social media, and online journalism. But what remains missing, at times, are the future journalists’ viewpoints, i.e., the students currently in training with hopes of entering the world of journalism. They are the journalists-to-be and the future shareholders and directors of the field. Their notion of what constitutes journalism is

crucial for the understanding of how the modern generation perceives the field and where it is heading.

This current research aims to characterize journalism as seen through the eyes of aspiring journalists. A case study will be conducted with students registered in the Journalism and Digital Media (JDM) department in the Faculty of Mass Communication and Fine Arts (MCFA) at Al Maaref University in Beirut, Lebanon. The journalism department at Al Maaref University is one of the newest in Lebanon as it has been in production for seven years and is still undergoing regular updates to reflect industry changes. In addition, the journalism department is part of one of the top three media faculties across the country. The research will utilize Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory and the Normalization Process Theory as theoretical frameworks to understand how current journalism students in Lebanon, especially those enrolled in new curricula with an emphasis on digital media, define journalism. An online questionnaire is administered to gather information regarding the students' notion of journalism, the characteristics they perceive to be necessary for a successful journalist, and their aspirations. This research will provide educators with details on the realities of students' views and goals when entering their programs to dictate both the similarities and differences in perceptions between them. It will also offer inspiration on how to effectively lead and participate in future journalism revolutions. The remaining research paper is divided into four sections. The first addresses the literature review with insight into current knowledge regarding the definitions of journalism and digital journalism to give clear context on the representation and denotation of each term. The second section discusses the theoretical foundations consisting of the Field Theory and Normalization Process Theory. Section three covers the methodology detailing the procedures, tools, and techniques used to collect relevant data. Finally, the results produced will be discussed and finalized with a conclusion, final recommendations, limitations, and future research.

Literature Review

Journalism

Since journalism is accompanied by different and at times contradictory terms, functions, characteristics, titles, and routines, one well-rounded definition of journalism is impossible. Nevertheless, journalism can be confronted on and with multiple levels and meanings. For this study, journalism will be observed in three different ways: Journalism as a service, journalism as a profession, and journalism as a practice, as introduced by Barbie Zelizer, a former journalist and academic. Such diverse interpretations of journalism will reflect how both journalists and scholars view the specialty. It will also display the purpose of the study of focusing on journalism characteristics, areas of study, and work aspirations among current students.

Many journalists tend to constitute journalism as a service. This means working for the interest of the public and thinking of the needs of healthy citizenship (Zelizer, 2005). In this sense, journalists require skills to provide the public with accurate information to enhance the lives of the public through their understanding of current events (Harrison, 2019). Journalists have the responsibility to investigate and reflect on the diversity of their cultures and surroundings (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2017). This means not isolating themselves and their work from the lives of poor and working-class individuals (Zelizer, 2005). In short, journalism as a service includes connecting with the public on an ethical and truthful level and creating a common language with citizens (UNESCO, 2022). It also means the assessment of news relevance and judgment among audiences.

Scholars tend to view journalism as a profession (Davis, 2010). This includes “a set of professional activities by which one qualifies to be called a journalist” (Zelizer, 2005, p. 72). The idea of journalism as a profession includes viewing the topic of journalism as a body of knowledge. A role that is defined by a certain set of competencies and methods is viewed as appropriate within the professional community and by

society (Donsbach, 2013). Journalism, as a profession, means producing high-quality work. This includes knowledge of current events, an understanding of various topics that journalists may cover, proficient skills in writing, interviewing, fact-checking, and a promise to fulfill values and roles (Ibid). Through such a viewpoint, scholars believe journalists can gain independence and accountability.

According to the American Press Institute (2019, para 1), journalism can also be considered a set of practices. That puts a focus on the applied and hands-on part of journalism. It revolves around the procedures, methods, and exercises executed to gather and present information (Zelizer, 2005). This can include developing computer literacy, maintaining objectivity, and focusing on governmental issues (Walters, 2011). Applying independence, verification, and loyalty are also considered best practices for journalists (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001).

Digital Journalism

The above breakdown of journalism echoes its traditional form. Although the digital revolution has transformed the way journalism is described and comprehended. Journalism cannot be discussed without taking into consideration the modern digital environment currently facing the world (Alves, 2009, p. 5). Digital journalism is dedicated to sending information to audiences in a digital form. The medium in which the content is posted on the Internet can vary in form between text, audio, or video (Singer, 2011). Information produced for a digital environment includes journalists utilizing tools different from pen and paper. Emails, laptops, tablets, mobile phones, voice recorders, blogs, self-publishing tools, and digital video recorders are essentials for a digital journalism kit (Mari, 2019, as cited in Ferrucci and Perreault, 2020). In other words, what differs between traditional journalism and digital journalism are not the values and procedures of the job but rather the tools or technologies used.

Digital journalism has evolved the roles and responsibilities of journalists. According to Guaglione (2022), the BBC, the national broadcaster of the United Kingdom, announced in February 2022 its plans to double its digital journalism team in the US and Canada. In 2013, when recruiting, Steve Herrmann, editor of the BBC News website shared a list of skills needed in the newsroom. That included traditional skills of curiosity and resourcefulness, writing, speed and accuracy, visual storytelling (such as still photos, video, graphics, and audio), social media use for news gathering and dissemination, and an appreciation for data (Marshall, 2013).

Digital journalism is translated across the international landscape differently; in the United States, almost every major newspaper offered an online edition to its subscribers by the early 2000s (Colon, 2000). In Lebanon, the media scene is large with approximately 10 privately owned daily newspapers, 1500 weekly and monthly periodicals, nine television stations, and 40 radio stations (Media Ownership Monitor Lebanon, 2018), most of which offer online equivalents. Bashir et al. (2022) contend that the digital landscape in Lebanon shows a growth of “78.2% of Internet users (a percentage of an estimated population of 6.8 million) and 64.3% of active users of social media platforms” (p. 9), and that “85.4% agreed that they rely on social media platforms as one of the tools for searching and obtaining information” (p. 20). Still, newsrooms in the country have continued to struggle with digitization (Hodali, 2019). The lack of the Lebanese industry’s development may result from several factors including sectarianism in the media, lack of funds, and limited media freedom (ibid). Moreover, the evolution of digital media is rather slow due to the country’s lack of infrastructure and limited international bandwidth.

Educational institutions in Lebanon are following suit with industry changes in technologies. A few universities in Lebanon, including the Lebanese American University (LAU), Al Maaref University (MU), University of Sciences And Arts in Lebanon (USAL), Lebanese University (LU), and others have now added courses that revolve around mul-

timedia, social media, and digital media as core content. For example, LAU now offers BA and MA programs titled Multimedia Journalism. MU and USAL offer degrees in digital media while LU has recently developed a Master's in Arts program in Digital Journalism. Others have revamped their curricula design to include such terms in their degree names. Journalism schools play a vital role in providing insight into new practices and trends in the field (Grueskin, 2018). Those are also expected to constantly update their curricula and integrate new digitized skills based on industry renovations.

Theoretical foundations

Field Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's Field Theory discusses social spaces, also known as fields, in a society where agents interact within their organizations. Each field, whether economic, political, cultural, artistic, sports, or religious, involves rules and principles on how action and cooperation should occur (Benson, 2006). A field has important participants that work in harmony to benefit and improve their specialization and individual intellect (Sánchez Dromundo, 2007). This research will apply Bourdieu's theory by considering the journalism profession as a field.

Bourdieu argues that fields are occupied by *incumbents*, who are shareholders who aim to maintain the identity of the field. Some *insurgents* have wished to change the field with their newly increased responsibility (Vos, 2019, as cited in Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020). Perreault & Stanfield (2019, as cited in Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020) have considered mobile journalists and Vos, Craft & Ashley (2012, as cited in Perreault & Ferrucci, 2020) added bloggers to be insurgents offering a change in the field of journalism. For this study, aspiring journalists or students are viewed as insurgents. With their degrees, internship experience, and society volunteering, students become active representatives of journalists who offer fresh insight into the notion of journalism and the skills needed.

A concept in the field theory known as *habitus* examines the set of feelings, behaviors, and practices shaped into an individual as a result of the specific environment surrounding them (Benson and Neveu, 2005). Students become operational members of the journalism field upon their enrolment in educational institutions. Through their training, students form a set of values and principles regarding the journalism field. The *habitus* of a student may differ from one to another depending on the level of education they receive, the curriculum they have consumed, and their interactions in school and with the market. This study will refer to students' *habitus* formed based on the department they belong to. Students in Journalism and digital media are considered essential elements. They offer a fresh perspective on journalism by combining traditional and new media. Their work aspirations and goals may also differ.

Doxa is an important concept in field theory. It tackles the basic beliefs and values engrained in a field's participants (Benson and Neveu, 2005). Such rules are often untold but rather learned through time. These are sets of norms such as ethical standards and newsworthiness in journalism. For this study, the *doxa* may include the guidelines of students regarding journalism that may not be explicitly discussed in the classroom. Instead, these are students' viewpoints established based on their experience and prior knowledge entering the field.

Normalization Process Theory

The normalization process theory focuses on actions that individuals or groups perform during complex interventions that turn into everyday practice (Murray et al., 2010). This means that when specific interventions become embedded into routine practices, they disappear or, in other words, become normalized (Ibid). Normalized practices are neither eternal nor are they always preferred. Normalization can evolve with time. In regards to journalism, typewriting for newspapers used to be a normal action. Nowadays, digitizing content is the new norm. This falls under the new norm stressed by Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

tary-General and Head of UN DESA, “These include digital economy, digital finance, digital government, digital health, and digital education” (UN, 2020, para 3). Normalization theory is concerned with what work or activities actors execute to enable normalization or routinization. The theory originated to explain how technologies were embedded in healthcare work. However, it has also been applied in other fields. Journalism scholars Gregory Perreault and Patrick Ferrucci used this theory to examine how digital journalists define their field and the practices they found essential (Perreault and Ferrucci, 2020).

According to Gillespie *et al.* (2018), there are four main components to the normalization process theory. Exhibit 1 explains briefly these components.

Exhibit 1: Normalization process components

First, is *coherence*. This means the sense-making work people do when they implement a set of practices.

Second, is *cognitive participation* which revolves around the engagement of people within a certain field. This is the work people are involved in to sustain a community of practice.

Third, *Collective action* which means the participants (at work) in a field undergo that enables an intervention, i.e., it is the effort people complete to enact a set of practices.

Fourth, is *reflexive monitoring* which involves the formal and informal appraisal of the benefits and costs of the ‘intervention’. It is a work carried out to evaluate and recognize how new sets of practices affect individuals and those around them.

Source: Gillespie *et al.*, 2018; Murray *et al.*, 2010.

The components of the given theory will help assess the characteristics students will offer in their observation of journalism. The basis on which students define journalism and how it relates to the practices they believe are necessary for executing such work is important. Students are a central factor in the field of journalism. They offer fresh insight into the subject and will act as leaders when they enter the field.

Not only are they future journalists, but they are also current actors in the field. Some pursue jobs in journalism before formally graduating, and others engage in journalistic work through extra-curricular activities, internships, and volunteering. This signifies that students are an integral part of the equation when discussing work practices and journalism evolution.

As a result of the literature review above, the following research questions are posed:

- RQ1:** What characteristics do journalism and digital media students find necessary for working in journalism?
- RQ2:** What educational background should journalists come from according to journalism and digital media students?
- RQ3:** What are the current work aspirations of journalism and digital media students?

Methodology

For this research, the researcher crafted an online survey that was distributed to all journalism and digital media students at Al Maaref University for data collection. Among the 105 students registered in the spring 2021-2022 semester, a total of 46 responses were recorded. This resulted in a 44% response rate. However, it is necessary to establish the reliability of the final sample size of 46 students by following a similar approach used by Younis *et al.* (2022) and Hashem *et al.* (2022) in applying the published resources by Hardwick Research (2022). In the case of a population size of about 100, a confidence level of 95% [$\alpha=5\%$], and seeking acceptable reliability of about 10%, the sample size would be 50. Hence, the sample size of 46 would be about $\pm 9.7\%$ at the 95% confidence level which means that in 92.3 out of 100 repetitions of the survey, results will not vary more than $\pm 9.7\%$, acceptable reliability for exploratory research.

Survey design

The survey was prepared in Arabic and English and sent to students via email and WhatsApp with the university's administration's approval. All participation was anonymous. The survey offered a neutral and general definition of journalism, stating it is "someone who collects, writes, and distributes information to the public. A journalist can work for a newspaper, radio, TV, or the web. Editors, reporters, presenters, and news anchors are all considered journalists."

The survey constituted four sections: (1) Demographics, including gender, age, educational background, and certainty in wanting to work in the field of journalism, (2) journalistic characteristics, (3) choice of journalism-related subjects to be studied by students, and (4) students' work aspirations. Questions were distributed as follows:

To answer RQ1 on the characteristics journalism and digital media students found necessary, questions asked included how students would describe the level of importance of 22 different journalistic characteristics. This meant answering whether each was very important, somewhat important, or not important. The characteristics given varied between traditional journalism and digital media skills. This included proficiencies in reading and writing, critical thinking, communication, investigation, truth-seeking, computer, multimedia, storytelling, speed, and accuracy. Specific traits such as charisma, attractiveness, charming personalities, and determination were also listed.

To answer RQ2 on the educational background journalism and digital media students felt were important, students were asked what they believe journalists should study before officially entering the market. They were given 13 subjects related to journalism to order based on priority.

To answer RQ3 dealing with journalism and digital media students' work aspirations, they were asked to describe what areas of journalism they needed to enter the job market after graduation. Participants were given a list of 15 journalism fields and were asked to order them based on priority.

Data analysis

Hejase and Hejase (2013) define descriptive statistics as “dealing with describing a collection of data by condensing the amounts of data into simple representative numerical quantities or plots that can provide a better understanding of the collected data” (p. 272). Therefore, this research used frequencies and percentages to describe the variables under study using tables for clarity.

Grounded theory

The researcher used grounded theory to justify theoretical conclusions through data and analysis (Bryman, 2016). A constant comparative analysis occurred to compare how a student’s work aspirations may have affected their notion and characteristics of journalism. In addition, this analysis was important to decipher how students registered in journalism with an emphasis on digital media viewed journalism. Responses were analyzed statistically as well as thematically. This meant extracting core themes found in the students’ responses regarding how they conceived journalism and their goals for the future. That helped classify the overall agreements students had regarding journalism and any differences.

Results and Findings

Demographics

Results show that about 83% (39 out of 47) were females and 17% (9 out of 47) were males. As for their age, 38.3 % of the students belonged to the category 17-19 years old (n=18), 36.2% belonged to the age category 20-22 years old (n=17), 12.7% (6 out of 47) were 23 to 25 years old, and 4.2% (2 out of 47) for each of the remaining age categories 26-28 years old and above 30 years old. In terms of their high school educational background, 85.1% (40 out of 47) of the students earned their Lebanese Baccalaureate certificate, 8.4% (4 out of 47) stu-

dents reported receiving a Vocational Baccalaureate, and an equal 2.1% (1 student) received a French Baccalaureate and an International Baccalaureate.

Journalism Characteristics

The data collected for RQ1 indicate that journalism and digital media students expressed their views on the characteristics of journalism around three themes: traditional journalism skills, digital media-related skills, and physical/personality characteristics. Those themes are closely related to substantial competencies experts believe are needed for journalism students. According to Fred Silverman (2022), the Chair of the Broadcast Journalism School at the New York Film Academy, multimedia journalists are first and foremost in need of developing essential journalism skills. This includes learning to read and write as well as verify the information. Other educational institutions such as Seamedu, a top media school in the Middle East, describe the knowledge of journalism, communication, and news gathering as essential journalism qualities (Seamedu, 2019). Storytelling, creating compelling visuals, and effectively using social media are also considered key abilities in modern journalists looking to work in the digital field (Silverman, 2022). Universities are stressing the importance of including digital literacy skills to teach students how to use computers, websites, smartphones, and other broadcasting mediums to craft their news (Seamedu, 2019). Finally, physical characteristics are also deemed necessary. The New York Film Academy discusses the need for students to master confidence and showcase charisma to have proper on-air performances (Silverman, 2022). These important competencies are shown clearly in the responses of students at Al Maaref University.

Traditional Skills

There was an overwhelming expression of the extreme importance of traditional skills of journalism. Journalism and digital journalism stu-

dents tended to believe these conventional skills were more important than those related to digital media. As shown in Table 1, all 100% of respondents agreed that communication skills were a priority for journalists, all leveling the skill as very important. Other majorities found in the data included the characteristics of being a truth seeker (97.8%), having confidence (97.8%), and being accurate (95.6%) – all of which were deemed very important. Reading and writing skills (93.4%), knowledge of current events (93.4%), and good news judgment (91.3%) were also among the top characteristics that students viewed as very important.

Digital Media Skills

Students believed that digital media skills were secondary to traditional ones. However, the majority agreed on the importance of such skills. Multimedia skills (86.9%), investigation (73.9%), computer (67.3%), and storytelling (54%) were viewed as very important by most students. Not a single student believed that the skills in multimedia, investigation, and computer were not important. Curiosity (69.5%), creativity (69.5%), and speed (56.5%) – all of which are important elements when producing media for the digital world were also considered very important by the majority.

Physical Characteristics & Personality

Although not considered a top priority, journalism and digital media students believed that certain physical characteristics and one's personality are necessary for entering the field. Having charisma (52.1%) and a charming personality (45.6%) were considered very important for most students. Being attractive was seen as somewhat important by 47.9% of respondents.

Table 1: Level of Importance on Journalism Characteristics

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Communication Skills	46 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Truth-Seeker	45 (97.8%)	1 (0.02%)	0 (0%)
Confidence	45 (97.8%)	1 (0.02%)	0 (0%)
Accuracy	44 (95.6%)	2 (0.04%)	0 (0%)
Reading & Writing Skills	43 (93.4%)	3 (0.06%)	0 (0%)
Knowledge of Current Events	43 (93.4%)	3 (0.06%)	0 (0%)
News Judgement	42 (91.3%)	4 (0.08%)	0 (0%)
Multimedia Skills	40 (86.9%)	6 (13.0%)	0 (0%)
Determination	39 (84.7%)	7 (15.2%)	0 (0%)
Critical Thinking	38 (82.6%)	8 (17.3%)	0 (0%)
Close Relationship with Sources	35 (76.0%)	11 (23.9%)	0 (0%)
Investigation Skills	34 (73.9%)	12 (26.0%)	0 (0%)
Curiosity	32 (69.5%)	14 (30.4%)	0 (0%)
Creativity	32 (69.5%)	14 (30.4%)	0 (0%)
Computer Skills	31 (67.3%)	15 (32.6%)	0 (0%)
Speed	26 (56.5%)	18 (39.1%)	2 (0.04%)
Storytelling Skills	25 (54.3%)	18 (39.1%)	3 (0.06%)
Charisma	24 (52.1%)	19 (41.3%)	3 (0.06%)
Lack of Prejudice	22 (47.8%)	16 (34.7%)	6 (13.0%)
Charming Personality	21 (45.6%)	21 (45.6%)	4 (0.08%)
Nosey	13 (28.2%)	23 (50.0%)	10 (21.7%)
Attractive	10 (21.7%)	22 (47.9%)	14 (30.4%)

Educational Background

Following observation of the data collection for RQ2, journalism, and digital media students offered surprising insights on the areas they believed journalists should study to enter the field. During the survey, students were asked to rank order 13 areas in that journalists should be trained. All the areas mentioned in the survey are known to the respondents and are part of the curriculum offered in the Journalism and Digital Media Department at Al Maaref University. Students were given the option of ordering certain areas more than once. For example, students were allowed to rank more than one option as a first choice without limitation to reflect the reality of the importance of each area. Table 2 was created to show how many responses were received for each area of study based on students' first, second, and third choices only. The responses were then calculated based on the number of choices and the ranking frequency to form a score centered on weight. Finally, the choices were rank ordered by their overall rank.

Table 2 shows that the top five subjects ranked by students included ethics and law, communication, reporting and writing, announcing, and research, respectively. Unexpectedly, the area of social media was ranked number 9 out of a total of 13 subjects. Multimedia and web design, a characteristic that students deemed very important earlier in the survey, ranked lower at 12. These declining results do not necessarily mean students do not view multimedia or design as important studies but it is inferred that traditional journalism courses remain the most important. Other research works agree, for example, Fahmy (2008) showed that online journalists ranked editing, reporting, writing, research, and interviewing as the most important despite the rise of digital media. Although journalists believed photo, video production, and web coding were increasing in importance; traditional journalism topics remain among the top-ranked in significance (ibid).

Table 2: What Areas Journalists Should Study

Area of Study	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Weight Score	Ranking
Ethics and Law	19	7	7	72	1
Communication	15	12	2	71	2
Reporting & Writing	14	2	3	49	3
Announcing (Anchor, Presenter, Reporter)	11	6	4	49	4
Research	10	6	4	46	5
Investigation	7	5	9	40	6
Photo/Video Editing	8	3	6	36	7
Public Speaking	8	3	5	35	8
Social Media	9	2	3	34	9
Photography/Videography	7	3	4	31	10
Public Relations	4	5	4	26	11
Multimedia & Web Design	6	3	1	25	12
Radio & TV	3	6	1	22	13

Work Aspirations

Following observation of the data collection for RQ3, a high number of journalism and digital media students expressed their goals in pursuing careers in journalism in front of the camera. Results show that 43.5% of the respondents (20 out of 47) replied yes to wanting to work in front of the camera, 17.4% (8 out of 47) said no, and 39.1% (18 out of 47) answered maybe. Similar patterns were then found when students were asked about specific positions that they hoped to obtain in the journalism industry.

Table 3 outlines the same scoring and ranking strategy as Table 2. Students were offered a list of 15 different journalism fields and asked to order them based on the priority of what arenas they aspired to enter when becoming professional journalists. Again, students ranked more than one option as a first choice. The top three choices were extracted, scored, and rank-ordered for this study. Remarkably, a majority of students chose jobs that were camera oriented. Becoming a TV news anchor ranked number 1 among participants. TV presenters and TV reporters each ranked at 4 and 6, respectively. Becoming a print journalist ranked at number 2 as well as a social media journalist which ranked

Table 3: Work Aspirations Journalism Students Have

Work Aspirations	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Score	Ranking
TV News Anchor	14	5	3	55	1
Print Journalist	10	7	3	47	2
Social Media Journalist	11	5	2	45	3
TV Presenter	7	9	6	45	4
Photographer/Videographer	9	4	2	37	5
TV Reporter	4	8	4	32	6
Multimedia Journalist	8	2	4	24	7
Political Analyst	5	3	3	24	8
News Editor	2	3	9	21	9
Radio Reporter	2	3	5	17	10
Producer	3	2	3	16	11
Public Relations	4	1	1	15	12
Advertising	2	3	2	14	13
Radio News Anchor	1	2	5	12	14
Radio Presenter	3	0	3	6	15

at number 3. Becoming a news editor, working in public relations (PR) and Advertising, and entering the world of radio were ordered among the last choices for journalism and digital media students. Instead, becoming a multimedia journalist and political analyst held higher popularity, ranking before them all at number 7 and 8, respectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

The field of journalism is constantly evolving with new terms, conditions, and routines emerging regularly. The notion of what constitutes a journalist in terms of skills, characteristics, education, and work positions has historically uncovered profound differences between scholars, societal critics, and journalists (Gardeström, 2016; Willig, 2016). This research study took place to add the perception of students to this ongoing discussion. It examined the attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations of current journalism and digital media students at Al Maaref University. The research sought to explore how students in one of the more recent journalism programs in Lebanon defined journalism and how they prioritize the education they receive. Then a complete comparison took place regarding their career goals.

For the first research question 'RQ1', students were asked about what characteristics they believed were necessary for working in journalism. A promising trend was observed; many of the journalism and digital media students believed that traditional journalism skills held a higher importance for journalists than new digital journalism skills. This included the belief that journalists should obtain the characteristics of having high-quality communication skills, becoming truth-seekers, having confidence, working accurately, developing good reading and writing skills, and having knowledge of current events. The traditional characteristics declared 'very important' among students precisely follow suit with theories of journalism as a service, journalism as a profession, and journalism as a practice (Zelizer, 2005). Moreover, they prove scholars' notion that before becoming a specialized journalist, one must first become a good traditional journalist (Bull, 2010).

This student mindset is also encouraging as a result of the realities of the Lebanese media landscape. “Over 78% of Lebanon’s local media outlets are politically affiliated” (Media Ownership Monitor Lebanon, 2018, para 1). This, at times, puts objectivity, accuracy, truthfulness, and clear communication at risk. The fact that students are noticing such characteristics as vital gives hope they may be able to make a change when entering the work field. Alongside traditional journalism skills, students did not neglect the importance of new digital media skills. They expressed the importance of gaining skills, especially in multimedia, investigation, computer, and storytelling. All of these are closely suited to the skills deemed necessary for a digital media journalist at the BBC (Marshall, 2013).

Research question two (RQ2) asked journalism and digital media students to prioritize what educational background journalists should acquire based on a list of subjects. Results show that there were similarities and differences between the characteristics student perceived as essential in a journalist and the areas of study journalists should be educated in. Ethics and law were ranked the number one priority. Communication, reporting, and writing were among the second and third priorities for journalism training, echoing the skills students mentioned earlier for a traditional journalist. Interestingly, multimedia and web design ranked low in subject importance, even though these students are enrolled in a program with an emphasis on digital media. Moreover, it was inconsistent with the high levels of importance they offered to multimedia as a journalism characteristic. These inconsistencies demonstrate that despite students’ desire to enter the digital media field, they still consider conventional and long-established areas of journalism to be a priority. Students are aware of the technological advancements affecting the journalism sector and are mindful that new characteristics are needed. Yet when asked to prioritize areas they should study, essential journalism topics remain the most significant. This echoes the curriculum offered in the Faculty of Mass Communication and Fine Arts at Al Maaref University. Before enrolling in their major courses,

journalism and digital media students are to undertake core courses in reporting, ethics, law, and communication giving a reflection that such courses remain fundamental. The results also reiterate previous studies indicating that even online journalists believe such areas take precedence over new digital media subjects (Fahmy, 2008). Students are not necessarily ignoring new areas that have a high potential for their future, but instead are showcasing devotion towards basic and central journalism.

The third research question (RQ3) aimed to observe how students prioritized their work aspirations. Observations made showed a majority of journalism and digital media students entered the field with hopes of one day pursuing a career in front of the camera. Working in TV was among the top-ranked career choices. Print and social media journalism were also highly ranked. After a comparative analysis, a relationship was found between the areas of study that students ranked as highly necessary for their education and their work aspirations. For example, since a majority of students recorded wanting to work in TV, a majority also found announcing to be one of the more important subjects they should take during their university years. This is interesting because it contradicts the major students are enrolled in. In other words, students are hoping to enter work fields using the general courses required of them to take as media students, not major courses related to journalism and digital media. The students' desire to work in front of the camera can be the result of audience perception. In a study on six different countries, theorists Nic Newman and Craig Roberston found that people pay the most attention to television news anchors rather than journalists from digital or print outlets (Newman and Robertson, 2022). This power of TV that overpasses social media has helped make journalists who work on popular media networks celebrities (Ibid). The yearning to be well-known personalities in society and gather prominence and respect from audience members could be the result of this trend to enter careers in TV. Moreover, the type of campaigning the university uses to recruit students could affect student opinion on job opportunities. Fol-

lowing a thorough review of Al Maaref University's website, it became evident that there is a heavy promotion of the idea of TV productions and videos when it came to identifying the Faculty of Mass Communication and Fine Arts. Pages on the website specifically detailing the undergraduate programs, what students will learn, and what areas of study are offered were all accompanied by photos of students working with or in front of cameras or visiting TV news stations. Moreover, a promotional video introducing the five innovative faculties at Al Maaref University presented the Faculty of Mass Communication and Fine Arts in a TV studio with lighting and professional cameras (Al Maaref University, 2019, 0:15). Another promotional video discussing the quality of education at Al Maaref University included scenes strictly of students engaging in practices relating to presenters and news anchors (Al Maaref University, 2020, 1:55). Such work aims to identify the faculty and therefore may affect student perception on popular career options despite their majors. There is no emphasis in these campaigns regarding careers in digital media or social media. Moreover, the high number of students who expressed their desire to work in print relates to the importance of learning reporting and writing. Another relationship is in the world of multimedia. A lower number of students had an interest in practicing a job in the world of multimedia, similar to the low ranking of that subject as an area of study. Another surprising trend was the inconsistency in student perception regarding social media. It ranked low in priority as an area of study, yet third as a career choice. As mentioned earlier, this means students believe core journalism practices such as communication, reading, writing, and ethics remain essential even if they have the desire to enter workplaces in need of qualities relating to social media. This may be because students are not introduced to working with social media until they begin their major courses. Instead, students are deeply instilled in the courses they prioritized for the first half of their educational experience. Students are still aware that social media is a necessity in the market hoping to enter that specific field. Although many students still have priority to enter TV-oriented jobs social media is secondary to their aspirations.

The above analysis all transpired using the theoretical frameworks of the study. Students offered their independent understanding of journalism. Embracing the skills of traditional journalism adds hope they will be able to better the oftentimes politicized journalism field in Lebanon that risks some of the traditional journalism characteristics. As mentioned earlier, the politics in Lebanese media has deeply affected its objectivity, accuracy, and truthfulness. Since students view these variables as critical for their work as journalists, this gives the expectation that they will implement these once they enter the market. The concept of *habitus* (Benson and Neveu, 2006) was considered when choosing the sample of journalism and digital media students and comparing their work aspirations with the areas of study they prioritized. In addition, *Doxa* was used to view students' perceptions of practices not explicitly given in the classroom. For example, students are not given direct courses on how to become truth-seekers or gain confidence, yet still consider these to be important characteristics of a journalist. Instead, such topics are usually included in in-class exercises and discussions, especially when first familiarizing students with field journalism. The *normalization process theory* transpired through the analysis of the normalized characteristics and perceptions of study areas and work goals. *Coherence* or sense-making in work practices is a key element in the theory (Gillespie et al., 2018). Students showed this harmony in their overall majority agreement on the skills and characteristics of a journalist. *Cognitive participation* or people engagement (Gillespie et al., 2018) is another component. This was shown through the translation of traditional skills vitalized and the areas of study prioritized.

Following these observations, a contribution can be made. It is clear that journalism and digital media students have a great understanding and notions of traditional journalism but need extensive awareness, knowledge, and guidance in their perception of digital journalism. As journalism and digital media students, they should at least give priority to social media and multimedia courses over announcing and presenting. However, since their goal is to work in front of the camera, their

priorities do not fit with the specificity of the major. Journalism is currently undergoing a radical change, and those in the field as well as those wanting to enter the field must adjust to all its forms. Journalists today no longer choose between print, radio, TV, and the web; they must do it all (Bull, 2010). Journalism and digital media students must recognize that whether they want to pursue work in front of the camera or print, they still need a wide range of knowledge from the new form of journalism and vice versa. Those hoping to work as multimedia or social media journalists need deeply engrained traditional journalism skills first. A skilled journalist today is someone who can use all the modern tools available in print, online, audio, video, photo, and social media (Bull, 2010). One's work aspirations should not be related to the priority of study areas journalists to be should be obtaining.

Recommendations

Universities need to follow suit with Al Maaref University's identification and prioritization of essential journalism skills despite emerging technologies and platforms that become available in the future. Educational institutions should still introduce students to new evolutions of journalism to obtain digital literacy, however, without lessening the presence of traditional skills, especially as core material. Moreover, Al Maaref University, as well as others, should further describe to students how to properly implement the skills of accuracy, truth, reading, writing, communication, and ethics in local media to increase the quality of work in a rather political media landscape. This paper also recommends that students learn about the diverse job opportunities awaiting them following graduation from the journalism and digital media programs. With heavy campaigning on TV presentations and production to identify the media faculty at Al Maaref University there is a strong journalism students' desire for journalism students to work in front of the camera. Instead, through their campaigning, class discussions, and field visits, the university should stress further that such a program qualifies

students to work in several different arenas. Strong emphasis should be put on the importance of these diverse career options so students become aware that TV is not the only sophisticated option.

Limitations

Gathering responses from students was a hard task at times. Despite sending various emails, WhatsApp messages, and even communicating privately with all students enrolled in journalism and digital media program at Al Maaref University, their willingness to participate in the survey was rather challenging. Upon reflection, this is not surprising. A majority of undergraduate students usually do not like to participate in research because they say they do not have time, are not interested, and would rather spend their time with more applied work (Stout, 2018).

Future research

This study offered insights into the concept of journalism as seen through the eyes of journalism and digital media students at Al Maaref University specifically. Future research should continue discussing this notion of modern journalism according to students enrolled in other universities across the country. This way a further examination could occur regarding relationships between student perception, geography, academic level, and even political orientation. Future research could also include the perception of fresh graduates who have entered the field and obtained primary experience. This means a continued investigation of how entry-level digital media journalists view journalism following their admission to the market and then comparing it to students currently enrolled.

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