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FLEMISH JOURNALISM STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF AND PREPAREDNESS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL JOB PROFILES IN THEIR FUTURE CAREERS

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ABSTRACT

Digitalization and failing traditional revenue streams have led to some news companies blurring the lines between commercial, technological and editorial departments to survive the digital transformation, innovate and remain financially sustainable. Future journalists will enter news companies that stimulate this cross-functional approach to tackle challenges and fuel innovation, but we know less about how journalism students expect to navigate the blurring lines between technology, business and journalism. Moreover, entrepreneurial journalism has focused on studying innovation, individualization and capitalization to understand journalists' part in creating the future of journalism. Still, it is less clear how future journalists perceive these aspects. We surveyed 150 Flemish journalism students (bachelor's and master's level) to understand how they perceive this cross-functional trend and the different aspects of entrepreneurial journalism. Flemish journalism students believe journalists should innovate to help journalism survive, and a large portion of journalism students also anticipates becoming journalism innovators or entrepreneurs. However, innovation is still largely perceived as technological and multimedia and not as entrepreneurial. We did see a convergence of commercial and editorial skills to respond to the changing news context (native advertising, the audience turn) and journalism students gave some importance to business skills. We also noted pull and push dynamics towards freelancing. Finally, Flemish journalism students seem to have a realistic understanding of job opportunities. In response to job scarcity, some prepare to become a freelancer, while others look at career opportunities in other industries.

Keywords: Journalism innovation ▪ journalism education ▪ entrepreneurial journalism ▪ boundary work ▪ interpretive repertoires

1.   INTRODUCTION

The digitalization and the struggling, traditional business model of news has impacted newsrooms immensely and has led to organizational transformations and changing practices ever since the turn of the millennium, putting high pressure on journalists to reconstruct their professional practice (Cottle & Ashton, 1999; Witschge & Nygren, 2009). Over time, media owners have increased their influence on how newsrooms operate (Strömbäck & Karlsson, 2011). For one, decision-makers in news media believe that barriers between editorial, commercial and technological departments are slowing down innovation and progress (Boyles, 2016; Vos & Singer, 2016). Already in 2014, the leaked NYT innovation report stated that the first step towards successful change "should be a push to abandon our current metaphors of choice: 'the wall' and 'church and state' - which project an enduring need for division" (p. 61). Removing the barriers has led to new journalistic profiles, renegotiations of the line between commercial and editorial departments (Ferrer-Conill et al., 2020) and the development of job profiles that bridge these traditionally separate departments in news media, dubbed as 'bridge roles' by practitioners and in industry publications (Cherubini, 2017; Ciobanu, 2018). These bridging job profiles and the changing boundaries that come with them entail several challenges. They aren't always accepted by newsrooms or scholars, especially regarding entrepreneurial journalism, the convergence of entrepreneurship and journalism. (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Meyen & Riesmeyer, 2012).

Nevertheless, the next generations of journalists might be asked to rethink these boundaries as they will enter an industry that is different from the one that existed in the previous century. Even if traditional role perceptions remain, it does not remove the increasing pressure on news media to change these boundaries. Several news companies are stimulating a cross-functional approach to tackle challenges, while lines between technological, editorial and commercial departments are redrawn further (Cornia et al., 2018). These changes largely determine the professional future and work environment of young journalists. However, little research looks at their perspective on these trends.

In this study, we look at journalism students' views on three aspects of entrepreneurial journalism: capitalization (being involved in turning assets into capital), innovation (building innovative solutions to current challenges of news media) and individualization (freelancing and self-employment).

Via a survey among 150 Flemish journalism students, we wanted to understand how they perceive this cross-functional merger in journalism practice. Future journalism innovators are expected to have cross-medial skills and an entrepreneurial mindset to take advantage of opportunities the internet and technology might offer (Briggs, 2012). However, research looking into the needed skills of journalism students to enter this work environment is scarce, so we expanded our survey to have them evaluate the skills and tasks of journalists that are connected to traditionally separated departments (commercial, technological and editorial) and to

indicate their proficiency in performing these tasks. We also asked them about their expectations of their future careers, which can shed light on the supply of change agents within the Flemish news industry and the divergence of journalism graduates towards other industries.

The continuing financial struggles in news media mean that a growing number of journalists will start as freelancers. In Flanders, one in four journalists were working as freelancers in 2018, two years earlier, one in five were active as a freelancer (De Cock & de Smaele, 2016; Van Leuven et al., 2019). Freelancing can be a voluntary or forced decision, for instance, due to lay-offs, unappealing job profiles or limited job opportunities (De Cock & de Smaele, 2016; Zion et al., 2016). Many young journalists also start as freelancers before landing a fulltime job. Freelancing demands entrepreneurial skills to, e.g. pitch stories, promote work and negotiate contracts. In this study, we want to understand the pull and push towards freelancing among journalism students and how prepared they feel to develop their freelancing activities.

Some studies looked at the impact digitalization and financial struggles have on the journalism profession and how to implement these cross-functional skills in the curriculum of journalism education (Mensing, 2010). Journalism educators have been looking for ways to implement cross-functional skills in their educational programs to prepare students. They take different approaches: focus on multimedia training (audiovisual and social media), technological skills (coding and data) or entrepreneurial skills. In general, innovative journalism seems to be interpreted as technological rather than entrepreneurial, as a survey by Singer and Broersma (2020) among journalism students from 'two leading journalism programs' in the UK and the Netherlands showed, suggesting future innovators might be mainly focused on technological advances. However, without a functioning business model, journalism struggles. So, innovative journalism might have to enclose the business model as well. These insights are often strongly embedded in their locality, so research from other countries helps to expand our understanding of future journalists view on innovation and entrepreneurship.

In the following section, we will outline how digitalization, financial struggles and media executives are pushing to change boundaries between commercial, editorial and technological job profiles at news media and how this impacts newsrooms. Furthermore, we will expand on three aspects of entrepreneurial journalism: capitalization, innovation and individualization and how journalism educators try to implement cross-functional and entrepreneurial skills in journalism training.

2.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.   Bridges between editorial, commercial and technological departments in news media

One of the main challenges for news media in the 21st century has been to recalibrate

the balance between their commercial and democratic activities while advertising revenue decreases and the audience's willingness to pay for news remains low (Chyi & Ng, 2020). Since the turn of the millennia, news media have been struggling with their business model, and some argue that the future of journalism depends on innovative enterprises that focus on new technology and the profitable production of editorial content (Depuydt, 2017; Harlow, 2018). Therefore, many of the necessary changes have focused on developing innovative solutions to remain in business or generate growth. For instance, at the New York Times, innovation isn't perceived as just digital progress but also the strengthening of their advertising business (Leonhardt et al., 2017).

Journalists have been encouraged to be a part of the solution by implementing entrepreneurial thinking in the newsroom, but it also puts high pressure on journalists to reconstruct their daily job (Cottle & Ashton, 1999; Witschge & Nygren, 2009). In several studies and industry publications, experts have voiced the need to lift the silos between technological, commercial and editorial departments in news media to cultivate innovative changes (Baron et al., 2017; Boyles, 2016; Ellick et al., 2014). For instance, the lower revenue from advertising in the digital space has increased the pressure from media executives on newsrooms to create an advertiser- and subscriber-friendly environment by blending commercial and editorial tasks (Artemas et al., 2018; Cornia et al., 2018; De Smet & Vanormelingen, 2011; Hanusch et al., 2020). Some researchers and news media even suggest that changing the boundaries between commercial and editorial activities is necessary for journalism's survival (Cohen, 2015; Picard, 2015; Vos & Singer, 2016). However, these changes aren't always accepted (Boyles, 2016), nor without challenges for journalism's democratic role and independence (Carlson, 2015; Carroll, 2019).

Nonetheless, journalism innovation has resulted in less clearly defined boundaries between technology, commerce and journalism. Within journalism studies, many scholars have been studying this boundary work (Lewis, 2015). Boundary work is a standard process all professions engage in to delineate their profession from adjacent professions and to "marginalize nonprofessionals encroaching on their turf" (Lewis, 2012, p. 837). This concept helps to understand "how distinctions such as professional/amateur, producer/user, and journalist/non-journalist are forged, maintained, and continuously reconfigured amid changing circumstances" (Lewis, 2012, p. 842). These blurring boundaries have led to different reactions from journalists: some develop coping mechanisms, instigate collaborations (Drew & Thomas, 2018), redefine their position within this hybridity or reject the interaction with other stakeholders altogether (Luyckx & Paulussen, 2022).

In this context, entrepreneurial journalists are often defined by crossing boundaries, merging journalistic ideals or creating new job profiles (Lewis, 2015; Ruotsalainen & Villi, 2018). Meyen and Riesmeyer (2012) showed how different journalistic profiles tailored to commercial goals have already emerged: "service providers" want to connect with the audience, "traders" look at the audience as customers,

and "promoters" try to include advertisers' needs. Grubenmann and Meckel (2017) argued that some journalists take a "service-oriented" approach in an attempt to improve journalism online. In industry publications, these job types have been called bridge profiles: as they bridge the traditional gaps between the commercial, editorial and technological departments at news media (Cherubini, 2017; Ciobanu, 2018; Searles, 2018). Several of these new bridge profiles cross these boundaries purposefully to accelerate innovation (Kosterich, 2021; Royal & Kiesow, 2021):

- Commerce and editorial: social media editors, native advertising creators, entrepreneurs, e.g.
- Technology and editorial: data journalists, computational journalism, newsroom developers, e.g.
- Technology and commerce: data analysts, growth hackers, AI developers, e.g.
- Commerce, technology and editorial: product developers, e.g.

For instance, social media editors and audience engagement have become standard to newsroom practices to increase traffic, promote editorial content and attract people to the news medium's platforms fulfilling democratic and commercial goals simultaneously (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Lischka, 2018). A study of US journalistic job postings from 2010 to 2015 showed how social media skills have become equally important besides traditional skills such as writing and reporting (Wenger et al., 2018). With the implementation of online advertising that matches the form and function of editorial content, advertisers have been moving from the side-line (banner ads) to a more embedded position (Wojdynski, 2016). Thus, advertising demands a much closer interaction with the advertiser, resulting in the development of content studios within news media, often enlisting current or former journalists (Palau-Sampio, 2021).

However, many journalists remain skeptical regarding commercial and strategic activities, as the growing influence of the audience and advertisers could threaten their autonomy, one of the five journalistic core values (Deuze, 2005). Increasing corporate or commercial pressure across western newsrooms has made journalists feel less autonomous in their profession (Hanitzsch, 2011). Moreover, tensions between the audience, advertisers and newsrooms seem to temper the enthusiasm among journalists to change their daily activities (Duffy et al., 2018; Johnson & Dade, 2019; Luyckx & Paulussen, 2022; van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014). In a study by Grubenmann and Meckel (2017), digitalization was considered a threat by some journalists. When studying the interpretative repertoires of journalism students, traditional views of journalistic roles remained dominant (Singer & Broersma, 2020). These recent studies seem to continue resonating with a long-established division between those journalists exploring the opportunities of the internet and those who remain hesitant to change their journalistic performance (O'Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008). This tension between market orientation and professional autonomy lies at the core of entrepreneurial journalism and academics and media professionals do

not yet have a clear answer on how to approach the hybridity, change culture and complexity of a journalist's job.

In any case, future journalists will enter these newsrooms that might be resistant, cooperative or forced to redefine boundaries. Because of the recent technological and commercial aspects of journalism practice, the job of journalists has also become much more complex (Barnes & de Villiers Scheepers, 2018). Therefore, we need to expand our current insights by understanding how journalism students view this merging of skills in a journalist's practice, originally allocated to other departments in news media. Their perception regarding the boundaries of what is included in a journalist's job can have an impact on how journalism practice will evolve, and it is important to understand their view to increase our understanding of future newsrooms.

RQ1: How do journalism students perceive the job of a journalist regarding commercial, editorial and technological skills or tasks?

In 2005, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defined skills as part of competencies: "the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual's knowledge of [a] language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating" (OECD 2005, 4). Building on that definition, we define skills for this study as what journalism students need to be able to do in order to perform journalistic tasks competently in a newsroom.

Many studies have looked into what media professionals believe to be important skills to have as a journalist and compared these results with the curricula of journalism schools (Ferrucci, 2017; Larrondo Ureta & Peña Fernández, 2017; Vasilendiuc & Sutu, 2021; Wenger et al., 2018). Other studies pointed out how over time and space, the desired skills for journalists change (Fahmy, 2008; Örnebring & Mellado, 2016). However, many of these studies focus on more traditional or digital editorial skills such as reporting, networking and writing. Scholars studying entrepreneurial journalism have been expanding research into skills further by including technological, commercial and entrepreneurial skills. The entrepreneurial journalist tends to combine skills from technological, editorial and commercial profiles, but is still quite contested among journalists as this type of journalist could be viewed as going against the protected division between church and state (Vos & Singer, 2016). However, in the following paragraph, we will outline how the concept of entrepreneurial journalism goes beyond this specific type of journalist and how it actually encloses many aspects of the current professional reality of young journalists, making it crucial to understand how journalism students view these aspects.

2.2. Entrepreneurial journalism

Innovation is strongly connected to entrepreneurialism. According to Drok (2013) entrepreneurship and self-employment have been two of the six major innovative changes in journalism. Entrepreneurialism is a multifaceted concept studied intensely in management studies, but only recently has it been of interest to journalism studies (Martiarena, 2013; Parker, 2011; Singer, 2018). It has become an important part of certain journalists' jobs that bridges the gap between commerce, technology and journalism and has been studied as entrepreneurial journalism (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016; Porlezza & Splendore, 2016). Despite the fact that entrepreneurial journalism isn't easily defined and most attempts focus on different aspects or fail to be all-encompassing (Ruotsalainen & Villi, 2018), the majority of academic work puts three main elements at its core: capitalization, innovation and individualization.

Capitalization is defined as the process of converging assets into capital. In general, entrepreneurs are considered as people who take the risk of developing and growing a new venture independently of existing corporations (Luchsinger & Bagby, 1987). Within journalism, one key element is the fact that individuals are being called upon to bridge the existing separation between journalism and commerce to reinstate journalism's relevance and revive the faltering business model (Cohen, 2015). For instance, we see that individual journalists use newer, online formats such as podcasting or newsletters to develop an audience through platforms like Substack or Patreon that can support them financially in their journalistic careers and can help grow the team behind the brand. Other journalists go out on their own to build sustainable journalism startups and new business models for news like Buzzfeed (USA), De Correspondent (NL), Republik (CH) or Krautreporter (D). For instance, Siapera and Papadopoulou (2016) argued that some of these journalism startups have found innovative ways to reconcile business and democratic goals by operating for social benefit and take advantage of the cooperative and collaborative nature of the digital space.

A lot of scholarly attention has gone towards another group of entrepreneurial journalists that remains employed within newsrooms and is capable of capitalizing on their journalistic content in an innovative way to turn a profit (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016). In contrast to entrepreneurs, these intrapreneurs develop new opportunities in an existing organization to create economic value by taking advantage of a changing landscape (Parker, 2011). They distinguish themselves from entrepreneurs because they operate within existing corporations to push them in a new direction (Singer, 2018). Entrepreneurs are self-employed and independent innovators, while intrapreneurs are focused on results, ambition and competition in the workplace (Luchsinger & Bagby, 1987).

Entrepreneurial journalists are seen as change agents that push for **innovation** and creative solutions to current challenges of journalism, both inside and outside of legacy media, depending on who is defining the group (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016). As argued by Slappendel (1996), innovation is being produced by "the interaction

of structural influences and the actions of individuals". So innovation in organizations builds on individual agents within the necessary structures in place. In accordance, Steensen (2009) argued that newsroom culture, management and innovative individuals are important determinants for innovation processes in journalism. These determinants can be accelerators or barriers to innovation (Spyridou et al., 2013). Several researchers have argued that newsrooms have been slow to innovate (Boczkowski, 2005; Ryfe, 2013). It meant that innovation has often been reactive rather than proactive and a process of mimicry (Paulussen, 2016). Moreover, innovation in journalism is often mainly considered in connection with technology (Singer & Broersma, 2020), even though it is much broader than technology alone and encompasses business innovation as well, like developing a production process, tapping into a new market segment or finding new revenue sources (García-Avilés et al., 2019). In many cases, technology has been the solution, but the driving force is often the need for the news business to survive or to create new journalism enterprises (Mierzejewska, 2011). For instance, being innovative technologically can attract investors, generate new revenue or make production processes more efficient or effective (Leurdijk, 2015; Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016). However, journalists seem to accept technological changes to their job much more than changes to their relationship with the audience or their professional culture (Ekdale et al., 2015). Therefore, we expect to see a strong connection between technology and innovation in journalism students' mindsets and a lesser connection between innovation and audience engagement or business modelling.

Individualization is described as employing yourself and the self-determination of journalists to discover new opportunities and niches and develop successful ventures (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016; Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Mathisen, 2017). Fulltime jobs in newsrooms have become more scarce (Bridges, 2017), but newsrooms are still expected to put out increasing quantities of quality content, so freelance journalists have become an integral part of the daily workings of newsrooms (Achtenhagen, 2017). In 2018, one in four Flemish journalists were working as a freelancer, up from one in five in 2016 (De Cock & de Smaele, 2016; Van Leuven et al., 2019), while other neighbouring countries have even higher percentages. In the Netherlands, half of all journalists are active as a freelancer (De Cock & de Smaele, 2016). Job scarcity and the expected work experience in job vacancies meant that more starting journalists were being pulled or pushed into freelancing before they could land fulltime employment. Other, more experienced journalists are being forced to start as a freelancer because newsrooms have shrunk due to budget cuts and digitalization (Holton, 2016; Mathisen, 2017). This distinction between being pushed and pulled is important, as a qualitative study by De Cock and de Smaele (2016) showed how free choice determined job satisfaction among freelance journalists.

Working as a freelancer can be precarious, and one could argue that it is shifting a large group of professionals away from secure employment towards the insecure gig economy. News media from several countries have been consolidating in only

a handful of media conglomerates, which impacted the negotiation power of free-lancers in regards to their rates, leading to legal action by Dutch freelancers against the Belgian media company DPG Media (Kivits, 2019). Generally, freelancers earn less than their employed peers with the same skills and experience, and financial insecurity pushes many laid-off journalists towards other better-paying industries (Bridges, 2017; Zion et al., 2016). De Cock and de Smaele (2016) also showed how entrepreneurial skills seemed pivotal to freelancers' mindset change from a 'slave to' to a 'master of' their careers. Moreover, some scholars argue that freelancers can offer insights into how newsrooms can implement entrepreneurial thinking ethically, as freelancers have to deal with the tensions between commerce and the normative principles of journalism on an individual level. Moreover, many journalists start out as freelancers but become fulltime employed journalists in newsrooms after a couple of years, bringing along their entrepreneurial thinking (Holton, 2016; Mathisen, 2019).

With freelancing being one of the employment options for journalists, journalism students need to be adequately prepared to be able to develop their freelancing activities. As freelancers, journalists must be able to promote themselves, negotiate contracts and manage their business. However, there is a growing concern about this job prospect among journalism students because they often do not know how to start as a freelancer (Wake, 2016) nor how to generate revenue from journalistic content (Oller Alonso et al., 2019). Therefore, we need to understand if journalism students are pulled or pushed into this type of employment and if they feel prepared to become freelancers. Moreover, Standaert (2018) interviewed early-career journalists, which showed that they were not aware of how their career goals did not correspond with freelancing expectations and job scarcity. In this study, Standaert (2018) argued that a disillusion arose further along in their careers when young journalists realized a fulltime job in a newsroom might be hard to achieve, and many ended up leaving journalism altogether. This could increase the divergence of journalistically trained people towards other industries.

The process of innovation is supported by individuals working with and within supportive organizational structures. Some journalism students will become innovators, entrepreneurs and change agents, and others might become freelancers or create bridges between newsrooms and technological or commercial partners. Therefore, it is important to understand how they perceive innovation, entrepreneurship and individualization in journalism, as this will influence the process of innovation within news media. Their perception could give insights into how journalism innovation and bridge profiles might evolve in the next decade. It is yet unclear how future journalists understand entrepreneurial journalism, with little research looking into their point of view, leading to the second research question.

RQ2: How do Flemish journalism students perceive individualization, innovation and capitalization in journalism?

2.3.   Bridge profiles and entrepreneurship in journalism education

The professional routines that were successful in the past century are no longer adapted to the current journalistic processes (Deuze, 2008). Future journalists will enter news companies that stimulate a cross-functional approach to tackle challenges while lines between technological, editorial and commercial departments are redrawn further (Cornia et al., 2018; Westlund et al., 2021). Much research has been dedicated to studying the impact of these changing boundaries (Ferrer-Conill et al., 2020; Hanusch et al., 2020; Luyckx & Paulussen, 2022).

In journalism education, the implementation of entrepreneurial skills has been especially strenuous, as it exposes one of the biggest challenges of news media today: how to rebalance the financial and democratic well-being of news media. The clear separation of commercial and editorial departments used to safeguard this balance in the past century, but today it can no longer guarantee the survival of journalism, and many researchers have pointed out its deficiencies (Coddington, 2015; Lewis et al., 2008). However, there isn't really a proposed framework that works instead of it. As argued by Baines and Kennedy (2010) and Barnes and de Villiers Scheepers (2018), the need for entrepreneurial journalists in the industry does not mean that the whole curriculum should be addressing this need, but journalism students should be able to think critically about cross-functional developments at news media and how different skills from other job profiles can be used and adopted.

In the earliest part of the past decade, several journalism programs have adapted their program to these changes (Ferrier, 2013; Hunter & Nel, 2011). To adhere to industry demands, some journalism programs dedicated more time to entrepreneurship, as they argue that these are necessary to build the future of journalism and should help future journalists to create their own jobs and develop a change in the digital landscape (Massey & Elmore, 2013; Schaich & Klein, 2013). However, it is still a fairly new development to implement entrepreneurial skills in journalism programs (Ferrier, 2013; Lepistö & Ronkko, 2013). In 2011, three in ten of the American journalism programs surveyed by Becker et al. (2012) were teaching entrepreneurial and managerial skills. An early study by Schaich and Klein (2013) showed how journalism educators still held traditional views about entrepreneurship in journalism (Vasilendiuc & Sutu, 2021). Over the past ten years, more and more journalism programs have been looking at ways to implement entrepreneurialism. Nowadays, specialization in entrepreneurial journalism can be found in the UK, Canada, France, Denmark, Colombia, Mexico and the Netherlands (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). Some argue that entrepreneurship should be 'more a mindset than a skillset' as voiced by Mark Harrison, Head of Digital Production at the BBC (Baines & Kennedy, 2010, p. 101; Quinn, 2010). Vos and Singer (2016, p. 150) argued that entrepreneurial journalism is described both in terms of "an 'entrepreneurial spirit' as[...] a specific practice or set of practices". Others focus more on an orientation towards change or the "discovery and exploitation of opportunities"

(Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016; Schultz & Jones, 2017, p. 12). According to Barnes and de Villiers Scheepers (2018) such an entrepreneurial mindset can be taught best via problem-solving techniques.

Singer and Broersma (2020) used the concept of interpretative repertoires to understand how journalism students from the UK and the Netherlands perceived change and innovation in the news industry. The researchers proposed to study graduates from these two journalism programs because they were considered to be at the forefront of journalistic innovation, which resulted in students having a modernistic view of journalism practice and a self-perception of themselves as future innovators. Casero-Ripollés et al. (2016) noted that most journalism students link the entrepreneur with freelancing and entrepreneurship with innovation and creativity, rather than economic and financial issues or audience engagement. They also noted a high willingness to venture into entrepreneurship initially, however, the more advanced the program, the less willing journalism students were to be entrepreneurial.

Not all journalism programs are the same, so different results might appear when surveying other students. Moreover, Belgium has taken a protectionist stance in regards to their media industry, which according to some has led to slowed down innovation, despite its necessity. So, it might be interesting to see how this impacts journalism programs and journalism students' perception of entrepreneurial journalism. Therefore, this study aims to increase our understanding of the entrepreneurial mindset across six different journalism programs within one local media market. This study helps to get a full picture of Flemish journalism students' perception of innovation in journalism, and by reusing some of Singer and Broersma (2020) survey questions, we could connect past and current results.

A study by Chen et al. (1998), supported by insights from Wakkee et al. (2010) on developing entrepreneurial employees, showed that when people believe that they are capable of entrepreneurial behaviour, this will be reflected in their actual level of entrepreneurial behaviour. To develop entrepreneurial minds, people should be able to recognize what they are capable or not capable of, increasing their self-efficacy. Moreover, future journalists need entrepreneurial skills in their careers as many new journalists struggle to find jobs or have been disappointed by the ones that remain (Massey & Elmore, 2013; Singer, 2016). Rather than looking at how entrepreneurial skills and mindset are being translated to the curriculum, we wanted to understand how journalism students evaluate their own skills in the three domains: technology, commerce and journalism, leading to the final research question.

RQ3: How do Flemish journalism students evaluate their acquired skillset in different domains (commercial, editorial, technological) in light of their future careers?

3.   METHOD

3.1.   Survey design

To understand how journalism students perceive the future of journalism and their future as journalists, we surveyed 150 Dutch-speaking, Flemish journalism students (both bachelor and master level) at the beginning of 2020. The survey was developed in Qualtrics, and the data was processed in SPSS. The first set of nine statements (5-point Likert scale) were taken from the survey by Singer and Broersma (2020) and translated for this study to Dutch to understand how journalism students perceive the current landscape, entrepreneurship and innovation. We also asked them in an open question to give three different words that describe what innovation in journalism means, followed up by a multiple choice question on different types of journalism innovation (artificial intelligence, business, clickbait, native advertising, process optimization, etc.). This set of six questions was meant to get a general view of how they perceive innovation and entrepreneurship in journalism. The answers to the open question were then coded and categorized according to semantic closeness and similarity. The open question allowed analyzing interpretive repertoires. Repertoires can be seen as building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes, and other phenomena (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). This method thus allows understanding how people use language to build stories about the social world by using cultural frames.

   The next eight questions helped understand how journalism students evaluate certain skills and tasks for journalists that are connected to different parts of news media (commercial, technological and editorial). They were also asked to evaluate their own proficiency and to what level their educational program offered training in these skills. We finally asked eight questions about student's future careers with a focus on freelancing and different career options (innovator, entrepreneur, fulltime employed and so on).

3.2.   Context

The Flemish news industry counts three large private media groups (DPG Media, Mediahuis and Roularta), a large public broadcaster (VRT) and eight smaller news media represented by Media.21. The public broadcaster VRT and two private media groups (DPG Media and Mediahuis) represent more than 80 per cent of the online news media market in Flanders (Cools et al., 2018). In 2020, the Vlaamse Vereniging van Journalisten counted 2.537 professional Flemish journalists (VVJ, 2020). This number has been decreasing in the past years. In 2018, 25.3% of Flemish journalists worked as independent journalists or freelancers, and 72.7% were employed at a media organization (Van Leuven et al., 2019).

3.3.   Sample

Flanders is the Dutch-speaking northern part of Belgium with about 6.65 million inhabitants. In 2019-2020, 942 students were enrolled in a Flemish journalism bachelor's program, and 190 students were enrolled in a Flemish journalism master's program (AHOVOKS, 2020). In Belgium, we have three Flemish universities offering a journalism master's program and six Flemish colleges offering a journalism bachelor's program.

We surveyed 150 students during the second term of the school year 2019-2020. Students were enrolled in six Belgian universities and colleges that offered a journalism program. Three Flemish universities offer journalism master degrees, so we included them all in the survey: Vrije Universiteit Brussel, KU Leuven and Universiteit Gent. We also selected the three largest journalism bachelor's degrees offered at Flemish colleges, representing 75 per cent of Flemish students enrolled in a journalism bachelor's program in 2019-2020 (AHOVOKS, 2020): Arteveldehogeschool Gent, Thomas More Mechelen and Artesis Plantijn Antwerpen.

We only sampled students that were more advanced in their journalism training in the school year 2019-2020, so we excluded first-year bachelor students and focused on master's students and second-year bachelor's students. We did not set out to survey third-year bachelor's students, because they have traineeships during the second term, which made it difficult to survey them via a paper survey. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to change our approach in the middle of the data collection from offline to online data retrieval. However, as we had already collected data via the paper survey for the second-year bachelor's students, we continued with this selection for the online data collection.

Table 1 Surveyed percentage of total journalism students per institution

Paper survey in March 2020		Online survey in April 2020			
Artesis Plantijn Antwerpen	Thomas More Mechelen	Vrije Universiteit Brussel	KU Leuven	Artevelde-hogeschool Gent	Universiteit Gent
72%	83%	50%	50%	28%	30%

Online surveys have the disadvantage that longer surveys have a more challenging time to achieve completion, and respondents lose interest (Wright, 2005). Due to the pandemic, many more online surveys were sent out, so people's willingness to participate decreased as well. We surveyed 57% of all master's and second-year bachelor's students in the selected programs. 114 respondents were from a bachelor's program, 36 respondents were from a master's program. The sample was more male (67%) compared to the complete population (40% men, 60% women) based on data from AHOVOKS. Respondents' age ranged between 21 and 24 years old (M=22.8). The survey took, on average, about 15 minutes to complete.

4.   RESULTS

4.1   Flemish journalism students on innovation and entrepreneurship

We asked the students to evaluate ten general statements, nine derived from Singer and Broersma (2020) and the statement 'There exists a clear separation between advertising and journalism', on a five-point Likert scale (see Figure 1). Almost all students (strongly) agree that journalism is a lot more different than ten years ago (99%), and journalism has to constantly change to remain relevant as our society changes (93%). About eight out of ten agree that journalists should innovate to survive (83%).

71% of the students (strongly) agree that journalists need to be up to date on new revenue models. Half of all students believe that 'journalism in the future will be dependent mainly on external funding via e.g. crowdfunding or donations'. This result is much lower than in Singer and Broersma (2020), where 69% of the British students and 75% of the Dutch students agreed. This could suggest that journalism students in Belgium still believe in the sustainability of the dual revenue model of subscriptions and advertising that exists in many news media. Even though half of the surveyed group believe that there exists a clear separation between advertising and news content, one in four students does not support this statement.

Half of the students agreed (strongly) with the statements that referred to the traditional journalistic role perception like keeping power accountable (53%), and three in five agreed that journalism should contribute to positive change (65%). These results are more in line with the Dutch students' evaluation (resp. 60% and 70%) than the British students' evaluation (resp. 89% and 88%) of these statements from the 2016 survey by Singer and Broersma (2020).
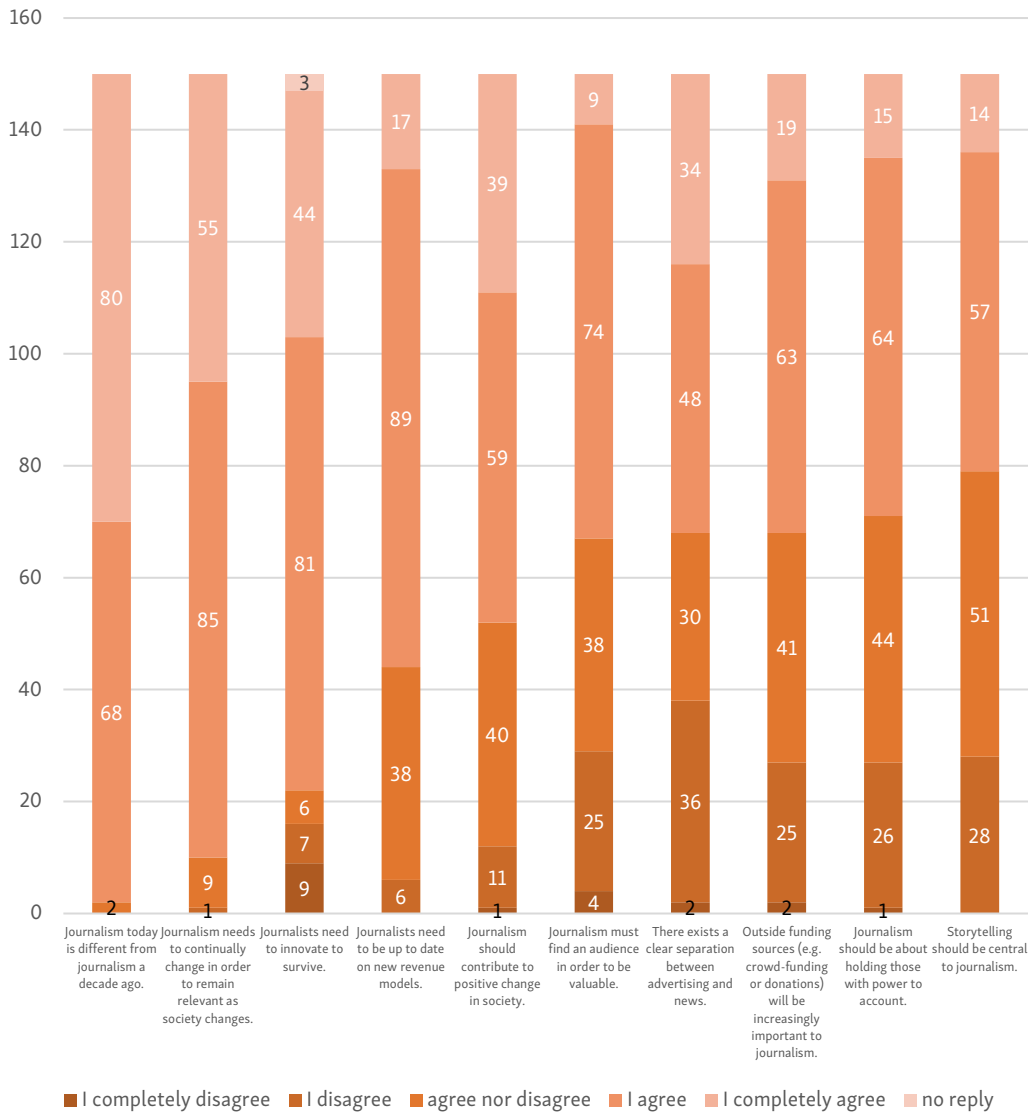
Figure 1 Students' evaluation of ten statements on innovation and entrepreneurship in journalism (N=150).

Regarding innovation, we also asked the respondents to give three keywords to describe 'an innovative journalist'. We collected those keywords that were mentioned more than five times in Table 2. Our findings show that the interpretative repertoires of Flemish journalism students are dominated by associations with creativity (68 times), cross-media skills (32 times), and technology (32 times). These keywords can be clustered into five different skills and/or mindsets: technology-related, journalistic, audience-related, entrepreneurial and change. Technology is the cluster most

strongly connected with innovation, and the cluster audience is least connected with innovation.

Table 2 Discursive clusters from analysis of answers to open question 'what is an innovative journalist?'

Different words to describe 'innovative journalist'	Total # mentions	Clusters
Cross-media skills	32	Technology/platforms
Technological change	17	
Curiosity	16	
Technology	15	
Digital	12	
Progressive	11	
Originality	11	
Newness	9	
Social media	8	
Up-to-date	8	
Subtotal	**139**	
Creativity	68	Journalism
Storytelling	6	
Being critical	5	
Subtotal	**79**	
Open-minded	18	Change
Change	14	
Flexible	8	
Adaptive	6	
Out-of-the-box thinking	5	
Subtotal	**51**	
To dare	10	Entrepreneurship
Insight	8	
To do something	5	
Subtotal	**23**	
Knowledge of the audience	9	Audience
Targeted audience	6	
Subtotal	**15**	

4.2. Flemish journalism students on a journalist's job and profile

The majority still consider traditional tasks of journalists as important, like adhering to ethical principles, delivering information quickly to an audience and having reporting, writing and editing skills (see Figure 2). We see that journalism students

also emphasize the importance of knowing their audience and knowing how to use digital technology. Knowledge about business insights such as competitors and basic business principles is seen as important as well, but actually being involved with matters that relate to generating revenue is seen as one of the least important tasks of journalists, besides attracting the largest audience with their news content. Half of them find the skill to create stories to generate as many clicks as possible unimportant.
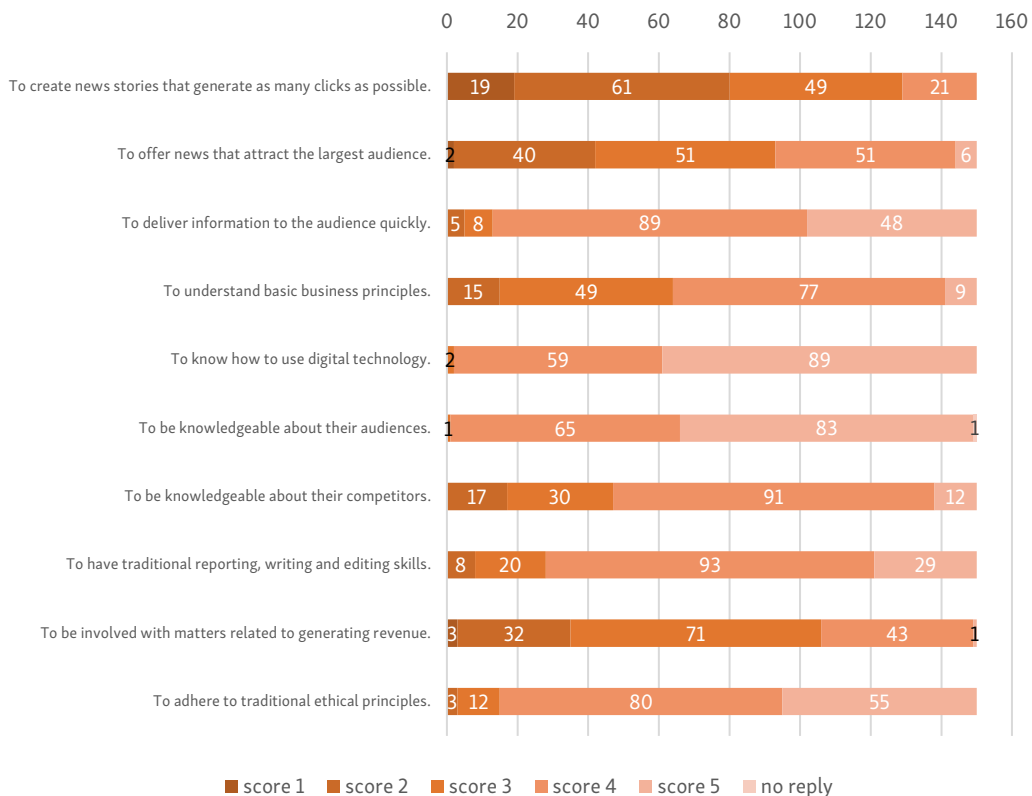

Figure 2 Perceived importance of different skills (1= not at all important, 5= very important).

In Figure 3, we see an overview of the perceived importance per skillset. Journalism students find it less important to be able to code computer programs than other skills. Only 23% gave it a score of seven or higher, and almost one in three said it to be not important at all. Marketing skills and business skills are found important by a bit less than half (marketing) or half of the students (business), with many scoring it around the middle. Multimedia, writing and journalistic skills are scored as the three most important skills to have as a journalist, with social media and technical skills not too far behind, resp. 89% and 75%. Besides marketing and programming skills, students generally do not find any of the other skills completely unimportant.
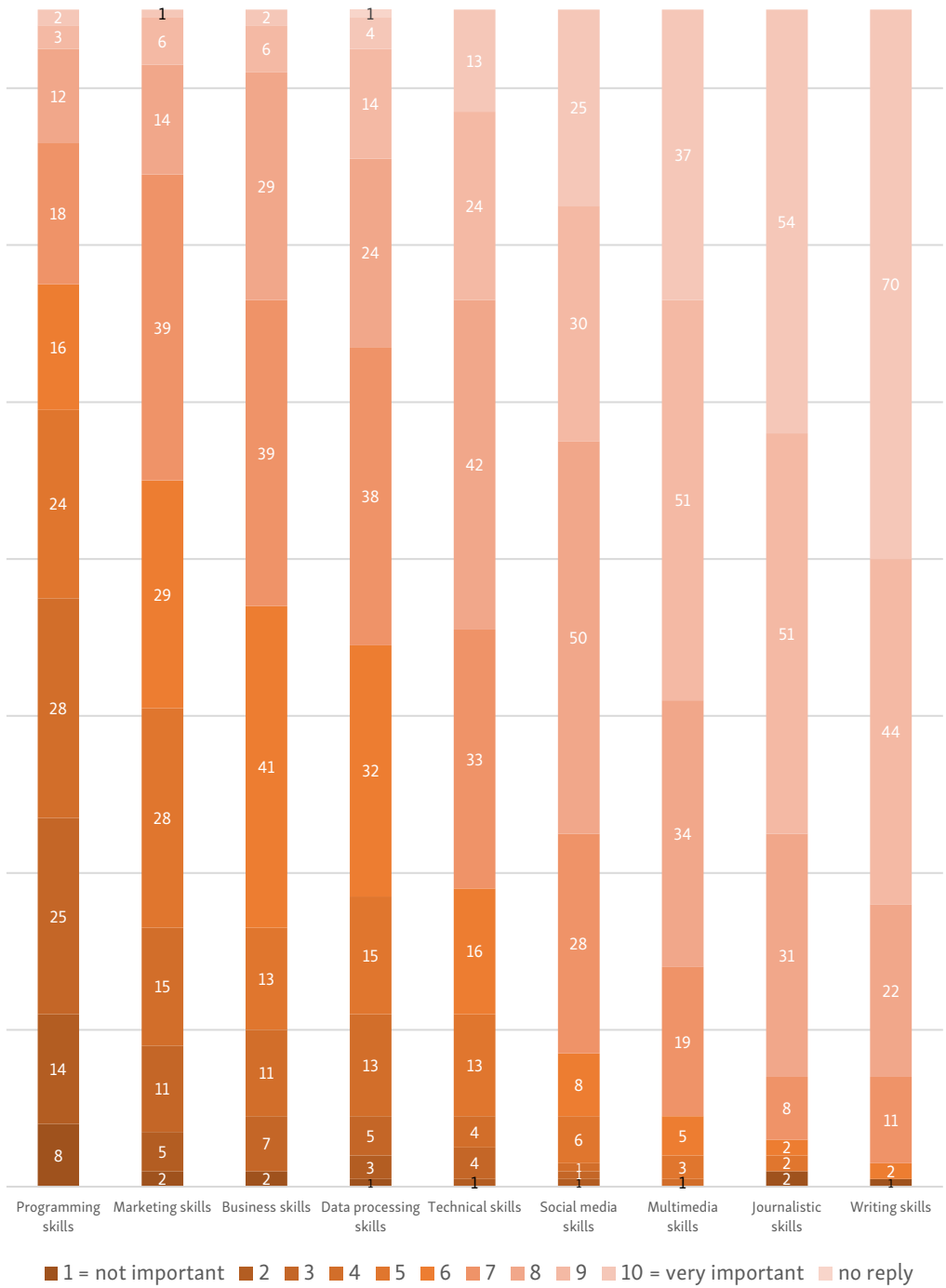
Figure 3 Perceived importance of different skills (N=150)

In Table 3, we see that business, programming and marketing skills are evaluated as the least present in their educational program. Writing, journalistic and multimedia skills are considered to be a large part of their educational program. Social media skills and data processing skills are somewhere around the middle.

Table 3 Presence of skills in an educational program (1-4, 1 = not at all present, 4 = strongly present).

Skillset	Mean score
Writing skills	3.7
Journalistic skills	3.5
Multimedia skills	3.5
Social media skills	3.0
Data processing skills	2.8
Business skills	1.9
Programming skills	1.8
Marketing skills	1.6

When students evaluated their own skills, we noticed two domains they felt competent in: technology and journalism (ethics and production). However, they felt less competent to attract a large audience or to deliver news quickly (see Figure 4). They evaluate their entrepreneurial skills (generating revenue, business know-how and understanding competitors) as the least developed skillset.
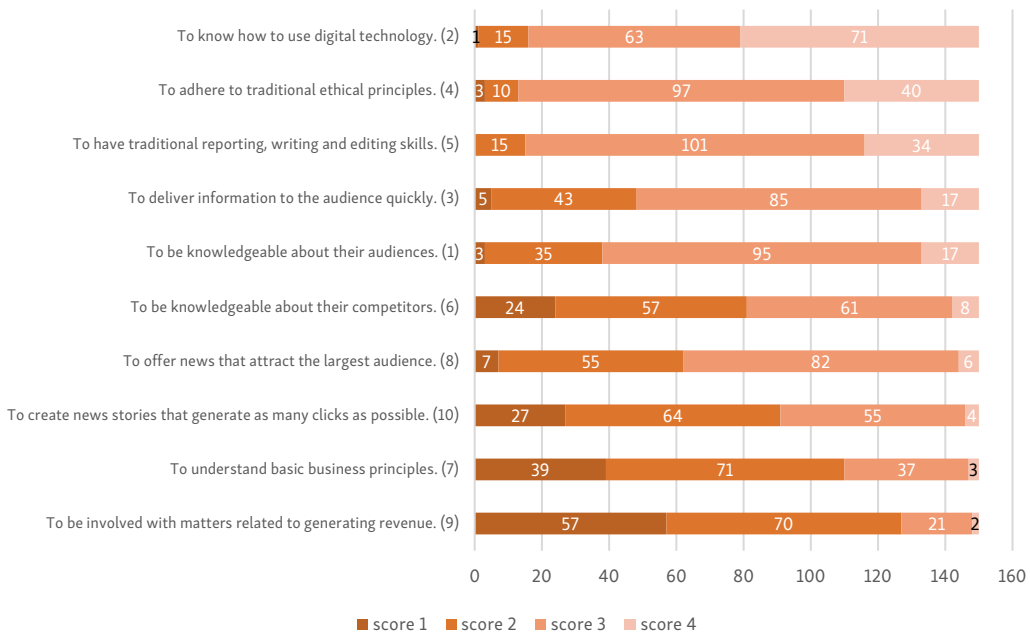

Figure 4 Perceived personal capability of different skills (1= I can't do it at all, 4= I'm very good at it).

 We asked the students to evaluate their entrepreneurial skills and how entrepreneurial they want to be on a scale from zero to ten. We noted a significant difference between the level of entrepreneurial skills they assign themselves (M=6.46) and the level they want to be at (M=8.50).

Social media can be used for several different aims: obtaining feedback, monitoring an audience, self-promotion, window for your articles, measuring the impact on an audience, gathering information or following politicians and others in power. However, these different tasks originally stem from different areas: (self-)promotion could be seen as a commercial task, using it as a source or to stay up to date to politicians are journalistic uses and monitoring or obtaining feedback from the audience signal the audience turn in journalism (Costera Meijer, 2020). We wanted to see which tasks journalism students deem important. We asked them to select up to three uses (see Table 4). Most students value social media as a tool to connect and understand the audience: measuring the impact of stories on the audience and obtaining feedback from the audience were two of the top three prioritized uses. Using social media as an information source is the second most prioritized use. Regarding promotion, self-promotion is far less prioritized than promoting articles.

Table 4 Journalism students' prioritization of social media uses (respondents were asked to select between 1 and 3 items).

Question: "Social media are important …"	Total # (%)
… to measure the impact of stories on the audience.	90 (22%)
… as an information source.	87 (21%)
… to obtain feedback from the audience.	69 (17%)
… to promote articles.	67 (16%)
… to follow politicians.	33 (8%)
… to promote yourself.	33 (8%)
… to monitor the audience.	29 (7%)
Total	**408 (100%)**

4.3.   Flemish journalism students on their future careers in journalism

The survey also showed that 38% of the students are willing to **freelance**, 30% aren't, and 32% might be willing to freelance. We also asked them how likely they deem it to be that they will have to work as a freelancer. We ordered the data for the perceived likelihood of working as a freelancer according to the willingness to freelance. Students who wanted to freelance deem it likely (score 6-10) that they will indeed work as a freelancer (84%). However, those who do not want to freelance are more or less split in half. 44% deem it likely to be working as a freelancer, even though they do not wish to work as a freelancer. Their mean score for likelihood to freelance (M=5.02) isn't as low as one might expect but still lower than for those who were willingly

(M=6.95) or perhaps willingly to freelance (M=6.35). It shows that future journalists experience both the pulling and pushing regarding freelancing in journalism, but also that many journalism students take this prospective future job into account.

Those who said to become an entrepreneur have the highest score of believing they will also be active as a freelancer (M=6.33) after those who said they wanted to be a freelancer (M=7.77), as visible in Table 5. Those who saw themselves as innovators deem it less likely that they will have to work as a freelancer (M=5.75). Students who anticipated to remain employed at a news company all their lives also deem it unlikely (M=5.83). Almost one in five students believes not to be active in journalism in their future careers.

Table 5 Job perspectives for future careers. Respondents had to select one option of the above to answer: "how do you see yourself as a future journalist?".

Job perspectives for future careers (N=146)	# students selecting this option	% of students choosing this statement	Mean score of this subgroup on the likelihood of freelance
I anticipate being a journalism innovator during my career.	28	19%	5.64
I anticipate being a journalism entrepreneur during my career.	21	14%	6.33
I anticipate being employed fulltime in a newsroom for my whole career.	17	12%	5.82
I anticipate that most of my journalistic work will be as a freelancer.	26	18%	7.77
I would prefer working for a print or broadcast news organization rather than a digital-only one.	24	16%	6.00
I expect not to be active in journalism.	27	19%	5.89
Journalism will be my secondary occupation.	3	2%	4.00

5.   DISCUSSION

5.1.   Innovation perceived as mainly technology and multimedia

Journalism students are very much aware of the importance of innovation and technology to help journalism survive the challenges of digitalization. More than four out of five also recognize the need for journalists to innovate. Consistent with

survey results from other countries, Flemish journalism students perceive innovation mainly as taking advantage of technology and multimedia and less as finding entrepreneurial opportunities. This finding is consistent with the willingness of professional journalists to adapt to technological changes (Ekdale et al., 2015). However, as demand for audience-engaging skills increases (Wenger et al., 2018), the low connection between innovation and audience engagement might leave journalism students unprepared for entry-level jobs in newsrooms.

About one in five also anticipated becoming a journalism innovator. The interpretative repertoires regarding an innovative journalist further confirmed a strong focus on multimedia and technology and much less on entrepreneurship. Although Flemish journalism students recognized the importance of technology, they did not evaluate coding or programming as relevant skills for a journalist. Thus, it is possible that journalism students see technology more as something to use and take advantage of rather than actually building technology themselves. Therefore, it might be interesting to dedicate future research to newsroom developers. What type of profile and background do news developers have? Why do they choose to work in journalism? How can newsrooms support effective interactions between them and journalists? Further insights into news developers could increase our understanding of the cross-functional work culture at news media and how innovation in journalism unfolds.

5.2.   Capitalization as knowledge and mindset, not practice

From the results of this study, we argue that Flemish journalism students believe a certain degree of knowledge about revenue models of journalism is necessary but that journalists are not the ones in news media who should also put this knowledge into practice. This insight connects to the challenge of implementing entrepreneurial training in journalism education: whether it's a skillset, a mindset or both. When we look at how they evaluated their educational program, business and marketing skills were among those skillsets that were the least present in their training. The need to be entrepreneurial could be connected to the likelihood of working as freelancers or entrepreneurs in their future careers, as several expected to become freelancers or entrepreneurs. In line with Vos and Singer (2016), a large portion of journalism students found that developing an entrepreneurial mindset was important. However, journalism students felt far less entrepreneurial than they wanted to be.

5.3.   Individualization as pull and push

When looking at the responses regarding Flemish journalism students' willingness to freelance and how they estimate the likelihood of actually being active as a freelancer, the survey results seem to indicate that there exists both a push and pull towards freelancing. Feeling pushed into freelancing might lead to lower job

satisfaction because these journalists do not feel in charge of their careers (De Cock & de Smaele, 2016). Freelancing comes with freedom but also uncertainty. Those students who do not expect to be active in journalism also seem unwilling to work as freelancers. Journalism students who are not willing to work as freelancers can be motivated more to work in other industries, as shown by Zion et al. (2016), who stated that job insecurity leads to many journalists venturing into other adjacent industries. Further studies into how to support young journalists with adequate training to be successful as a freelancer are needed, as it seems to become an increasingly important task for journalism education to offer it. Further studies into the relationship between freelancers, newsrooms and news media could also help understand what skills are needed to be successful as a freelancer.

5.4. Blurring lines and journalists as a jack-of-all-trades

In general, we see that the different departments (technology, commerce and editorial) have been growing closer in the mindset of future journalists. Skills that were traditionally allocated to non-journalistic departments have increased importance for journalism students.

A bit more than half of the students agreed that a clear separation between advertising and news existed, but almost one in five disagreed. Several studies have shown the blurring lines between commercial and editorial content. This trend could contribute to a growing belief among several journalism students that there exists no clear separation between advertising and journalism. Embedded advertising formats like native advertising or podcast hosts voicing advertisements have been increasingly used by news media to increase their advertising revenue (Wojdynski, 2016). Together with a growing influence of commercial departments and management on news media to accommodate advertisers' needs, this is instigating a reconfiguration of how to balance commercial and democratic goals in news media (Cornia et al., 2018). Further qualitative research might be interesting to understand how journalism students believe this blurring line is changing and what possible solutions they envision to tackle this challenge.

In evaluating skills, we see that journalism students complement multimedia and social media skills with journalistic and writing skills. They also noted that these skills were most prominent in their training. In general, journalism students consider business and marketing skills less important. However, we would argue that a certain level of marketing and business skills has transferred to a journalist's job profile. Journalism students reported that they would use social media mainly for audience insights, as an information source and to promote articles. These different tasks surpass traditional lines between marketing and journalism, as understanding the needs of an audience and promoting stories are more recent tasks of newsrooms and connect to the editorial and business goals of the news company. In contrast, journalism students scored programming skills with very low importance

for journalists. This coincided with a low presence of training towards these skills in their educational program evaluation.

In this study, we see a convergence of commercial and editorial skills to respond to the changing news context (native advertising, the audience turn), and journalism students do not fully discard business skills. Journalism students believe journalists should innovate to help journalism survive, and a large portion of journalism students does also anticipate becoming journalism innovators or entrepreneurs. However, innovation is still largely perceived as technological and multimedia and not as entrepreneurial. We noted the pull and push dynamics towards freelancing, but also that Flemish journalism students seem to have a realistic understanding of job opportunities. In response to job scarcity, some expect to become freelancers, while others keep an open mind to finding jobs in other industries.

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