



Article

Exploring the Normative Foundation of Journalism Education: Nordic Journalism Educators' Conceptions of Future Journalism and Professional Qualifications

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Abstract: This article deals with Nordic journalism educators' conceptions of journalism by placing the concept of normativity at the center. The values, norms and ideas concerning journalism and journalistic practice have previously been studied by journalists and journalism students around the world and in the Nordics, while the Nordic journalism educators' conceptions have remained more or less without attention. Nevertheless, journalism educators play a crucial role in defining what journalism is and what it is not, and thus largely affect future practitioners' ideas of journalism. Using a questionnaire that has been employed in previous studies, journalism educators within the academic journalism training in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden ($n = 115$) were surveyed in terms of their conceptions. It was found that the journalism educators, of which 35 per cent had a doctoral degree, still largely subscribe to the ideas of the welfare state. In addition, the ideas of slow, investigative, constructive and solutions-based journalism have gained high popularity among the Nordic educators, which, we argue, dovetails well with the pedagogical aims of journalism education.

Keywords: journalism educators; journalism education; journalistic values; professional identities; normativity; the Nordic countries



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1. Introduction

This article focuses on journalism educators' normative conceptions and future anticipations of journalism. Journalism educators play a crucial role in defining and mediating the central ideas of journalism, professionalism and professional practice to aspiring journalists. Journalism educators are to a large degree in the position of affecting students' ideas of what journalism is and what it should be, or what it is not and what it should not be. In his or her pedagogical activities, the individual educator is, of course, bound by curricula and teachers' communities, as well as institutional strategies and academic norms. Even the industry and professional communities largely affect journalism students, for example, through internships and pedagogical collaboration on journalism courses. However, it is the journalism educator who typically delivers the overall ideas and summarizes the accumulated experiences into a framework that the students adopt. Journalism educators have thus always had the potential of being influential normative actors and changemakers.

While journalists and news organizations, journalistic cultures, professional practices and journalism students have been intensively and systematically studied during recent years, journalism educators have not received much attention. The study of journalism education as an educational and academic practice has become a distinct strain of research within journalism studies (see e.g., [Deuze 2006](#); [Joseph 2019](#); [Solkin 2020](#)). Journalism education refers to the study programs that have an objective to educate future professionals; in this study, we focus on academic institutions within higher education. The degree

programs within journalism education have permanent structures that need to be officially accepted or accredited within the structures of higher education, following formal curricula, in contrast to journalism training that is a short-term, project-based education connected to the work life of employed journalists. The Nordic countries, with democratic societies with traditions of welfare states, are forerunners in journalism education. Journalism education was started as early as 1925 in Finland, which was also the first Nordic country to establish a professorship in newspaper studies in 1947.

In this article, we focus on journalism educators in the Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The Nordic countries have been found to have many similarities with each other. They have a strong journalistic professionalism, state intervention, welfare-state ideology and a high newspaper circulation and readership and have adopted the same type of media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004) and journalism culture (Ahva et al. 2017; Hanitzsch et al. 2019) supported by relatively similar systems of journalism education (Hovden et al. 2016). There are studies that have focused on the educational infrastructures in the Nordic countries, such as the study programs within the national educational systems in comparison (e.g., Hovden et al. 2016; Terzis 2009; Nowak 2019), journalism curricula (Jaakkola 2019) and course literature (Jaakkola and Uotila 2020). In this article, instead of focusing on the structures or pedagogical contents, we concentrate on the relationship that journalism educators have to their object of teaching and study, journalism. This area of inquiry is of particular interest because it resonates with the recent studies of journalistic culture and work, as well as students' conceptions of journalism.

We will begin by taking a look at the recent academic research on journalistic cultures and journalism educators in the Nordic countries, bringing these two areas together. Thereafter, we will describe our study design before going further to the results of a survey (see Supplementary Materials) conducted in the Nordic countries.

2. Previous Research

During recent years, the field of journalism studies has been organized to study the ideas of professionalism and professional cultures. Journalists' professional identities and the values in journalism cultures have been richly studied, above all because of transnational comparative research projects. Building upon the previous efforts to inquire into the professional practitioners' identities across the globe (Weaver 1998; Weaver and Willnat 2012; Willnat et al. 2013), the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) conducted a number of cross-country comparisons of the central dimensions of journalistic cultures across the world (Hanitzsch et al. 2019), including the Nordic countries. The Journalistic Role Performance project (JRP) studied journalists' role conceptions, performances and enactments (Mellado et al. 2017), providing a more global context for regional examinations. These projects dissected the anatomy of the journalistic professionalism and pointed out differences in different parts of the world; thus, also marking a place for the Nordic journalism culture (Hovden and Väliaverronen 2021; Ahva et al. 2017) and providing frameworks for inquiring into stakeholders' views on journalism.

Complementing the studies of journalists and journalistic cultures, journalism students have also been surveyed. The project Journalism Students across the Globe: Professionalization, Identity and Challenges in a Changing Environment (JSG) conducted simultaneous surveys of journalism students from 2011 to 2015, exploring their interests and experiences (see e.g., Hanusch and Mellado 2014; Hanusch et al. 2015a, 2015b). Together with national initiatives, the study has led to increased information on Nordic journalism students, including their preferred future areas of work, interest in different journalistic beats, practical work and internship experience, study motivations and assessment of future threats to journalism (Hovden and Esperås 2014; Mäenpää and Ahva 2017; Stigbrand and Nygren 2013). The Hovdabrekka project collected Nordic educators and researchers to survey journalism students in Denmark (incl. Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, which resulted in an anthology (Hovden et al. 2016). In addition, the impact of journalism education on students' socialization into industry professionals has been studied in differ-

ent parts of the world (Jackson et al. 2020; Vasilendiuc and Sutu 2021; Williams et al. 2018; Hanusch et al. 2015a, 2015b; Hanusch 2013; Rimestad and Gravengaard 2016).

In this context, the studies of journalism educators have not been recently studied in the Nordics. Sloan (1990) was among the first to dedicate attention to journalism educators as individuals with influence in the journalistic field, arguing that journalism educators are “creators” who have played a critical role in the making of the “media mind”, thus having their own intellectual history and academic tradition. Drok (2019) surveyed European journalism educators, including four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, $n = 136$, 11% of the sample) and used partly the same questions used in the questionnaire of this study. Compared to the sample of the present study, the respondents from the Northern region, which also included Estonia, were slightly older in age, the average age being 50, and showed a higher percentage of PhD degrees (43% vs. 35% in this study). Drok’s report provides a detailed analysis of how gender, age, educational background and geographical location influence the views on different continents.

Drok’s (2014) previous study indicated a high level of consensus between journalism educators and students on the journalistic qualifications that journalists-to-be should possess to maintain the standards of quality journalism. Journalism educators have also been surveyed with an aim of forecasting the 21st century competencies; Poynter’s report identified 37 core skills by surveying professionals, educators and students about their views on future competences (Finberg and Klinger 2014). In this report, both professionals and educators considered accuracy and curiosity to be the two most important qualifications of a future journalist. In many cases, national educational programs have been compared to each other as macro-level systems (Stigbrand and Nygren 2013) or journalism educators have been studied instrumentally or with regard to a specific topic (see e.g., Mutsvairo and Bebawi 2019) rather than as a specific group of respondents or an object of study in their own right.

In their crucial role, academic journalism educators work as brokers between the prevailing reality where journalism is produced (industry) and education (university), translating the essentials of journalism into the sphere of learning. As journalism degree programs are part of higher education, they also need to take the academic skills and knowledge requirements into account in this mediating or bridging task. Indeed, many journalism educators at the universities are *hackademics*, professionals working as part of academia with a background in the journalism industry (Harcup 2011). Practical experience, especially in courses where students are expected to learn journalistic production skills in environments where the work in authentic newsrooms is simulated (see e.g., Jaakkola 2017b), is appreciated and often a precondition for understanding journalistic practice. It can be assumed that many journalism educators, at least at the more practical level, feel a strong affinity with the practitioners, and balancing between the “theoretical” and “practical” dimensions has, therefore, been one of the most frequent questions addressed when scrutinizing journalism education (see e.g., Jaakkola 2019).

As teachers are more seldom to be found in expert registers or set up public profiles, unlike researchers, it is interesting to map the field of journalism education in the Nordic region, asking who journalism educators are, and how they think of journalism and its future development. In this study, we focus on the journalism educators’ relationship to journalism. It is a critical relationship, as journalism educators’ demarcations and understandings of the very definition of journalism are passed on to the future generation of professionals—even if journalism educators are not completely alone in this mission, as students also acquire a significant part of their knowledge through internships and socialization into work communities.

3. Normativity of Journalism Education

Our basic assumption that we explore in this article is the statement that journalism educators are conducting their work based on a normative basis. Norms refer to the sets of social rules, standards and expectations that both generate and regulate the professional

interaction and communication (Williams 1994, p. 206). Normativity has been observed as important for journalism, as journalism has been defined as a professional ideology that leans upon a distinct set of values, norms and pertinent principles (Deuze 2005).

Journalism educators mediate the normativity of journalism by teaching students what journalism is, how it differs from other forms of communication and what it should not be. This way, journalism educators reflect the normativity from the “field”, put forward by working practitioners and the industry (see also Deuze 2006). However, the conception of journalism and its normativity is not monolithic and tension-free, but different subfields of journalism may put stress on different aspects of journalistic normativity, and there may be internal tensions between journalistic groups and journalists and other workers of the field, ranging from the leaders of journalistic organizations to marketers and strategists of journalism. Journalism educators thus need to construct an accumulated conception of the normativity while perceiving the field’s preferences and changes to them. Journalism educators are, in other words, in the position of defining the normative basis of journalism, or how it is mediated to future journalists. Journalism educators are situated in a double role: they are mediating prevailing normativity, but also adjusting and renewing it. As we have argued before, because of this intermediary gatekeeping position, it is important to explore the views of journalism educators in relation to what they feel is important and preferable when it comes to the normativity of journalism.

We suggest that the normative basis of journalism education can be broken down into three interconnected fundamental categories, which are the following:

1. The ideological category of normativity: attitudes, norms, values, ideals, functions—what should journalists do, according to the journalism educators?
2. The performance category of normativity: competences, work roles, work differentiation—how should journalists do it, according to the journalism educators?
3. The viability category of normativity: anticipations about the future normative and performance factors to create sustainability—how should journalists do it in order to ensure a sustainable future for journalism, according to the journalism educators?

The ideological category sets the foundation for the professional journalistic ideology underlining the functions of journalism. Journalists should “provide people the information they need to be free and self-governing”, and the function of journalism is based on the fulfillment of this expectation (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014). The ideals of the journalist’s role are more or less aligned to these functions. The values that constitute the basis for the ethical rules that are important in conducting the work are established into norms that newcomers to the field are socialized into. Altogether, this normative framework makes journalism into the ideological entity manifest in journalism cultures and distinguishes it from other forms of communication such as content marketing, blogging or non-fiction literature.

The performance category encompasses the desired and pursued competences that every journalist, or a journalist within a specific subfield of journalism, should acquire. It also incorporates a conception of typical work roles and role differentiation in-built in newsrooms’ workflows. A relevant question that can be identified at the performance category of normativity is what new topics, journalistic approaches or genres and work roles should be incorporated into journalism education, which has been a frequent topic of debate especially with regard to new technologies. The performance category addresses sets of characteristics, features, personal traits, or abilities that a journalist should possess or adopt. A common term used in this context is “qualifications” (Nowak 2009), also used in our survey, typically understood as a mixture of abilities, attitudes and commitments. Competences are seen as a specific set of traits or features that the journalist possesses, and hence, to become a journalist a person needs to be embedded in the existing structures of roles, identity models and workflows. To put it differently, journalistic professionalism can be deconstructed by identifying the necessary sets of skills, characteristics, abilities or processes typical of and desirable for journalists and transferring them to newcomers

through socialization. The performance category is strongly informed by an ideal type of a journalist, or a normative figure that an aspirant needs to adopt.

The viability category refers to normativity outlining the future development of journalism based on an idea of journalism's survival. Journalistic practitioners, including journalism educators, agree on the fact that journalism needs to continue existing and ensure its future existence, otherwise it would be counterproductive and self-destructive. Journalism educators are part of the debates concerning journalism's future and attempt to find ways to solve different crises that journalism has been stated to have undergone during the recent decades (Alexander 2015). In the Nordic countries, there have been a number of efforts towards increasing the sustainability of journalism, such as the Sustainable Journalism Partnership network established by the Fojo Media Institute in Sweden, supported by the Nordic Council of Minister's vision of the Nordic region as "the most sustainable and integrated region in the world in 2030" (Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) 2021). The viability category connects to the counter-discourses of journalism crisis.

As said, the three categories of normativity are intermingled, often supporting each other, but they can be helpful analytical categories for dissecting journalistic action and statements concerning journalism to distinguish different levels of normativity. Identifying normativity in journalism educators' thinking and actions implies recognizing their role as actors of influence in the journalism ecology, where journalism education institutions have typically been termed as reproductive of the industry (Mensing 2011; Mensing and Ryfe 2013).

4. Research Questions

The aim of this study was to inquire into Nordic journalism educators' views on journalism and journalistic work, focusing on the normative basis of the ways in which journalism educators think about journalism. Our research questions read as the following: First, *what do Nordic academic journalism educators conceive of journalism in terms of the normative, performance and viability category?* Second, based on their insider and in-depth knowledge in the field, *how do they anticipate the future development of journalism in terms of these three categories?*

As the national subsamples from each Nordic country are relatively limited, we focused on the Nordic area as an entity instead of trying to distinguish national characteristics of educational cultures, which have been explored from different perspectives in previous studies (Hovden et al. 2016). Understanding the differences between pedagogical approaches would need a separate analysis that could go deeper into the development of institutional infrastructures and traditions. Our focus is thus dedicated to the Nordic journalism educators' relationship to the journalistic field that they are connected to through their educational activities.

5. Data and Methodology

The data were collected with an online survey conducted in 2021 as part of a global survey for journalism educators. The Nordic countries Finland, Denmark (incl. Greenland), Iceland, Norway and Sweden were included in addition to 29 other countries. The sub-studies used the same questionnaire as the other countries, available in five languages, but the study was conducted separately; the journalism educators were invited to the study by the authors of this article in the Nordic languages, and the data were analyzed by the authors. The questionnaire used, set up with the survey tool CheckMarket, was in English, but the journalism educators were targeted in their own national languages, providing a national context for the study.

All the major journalism schools within higher education in the Nordic countries were selected ($n = 26$), based on their membership in the Nordic Collaboration Committee of Journalism Education (NordJour 2020) and European Journalism Training Association (European Journalism Training Association (EJTA) 2020)¹. Using the staff directories on the institutional webpages, invitations to employees in journalism study programs ($n = 354$)

were sent on 7 January 2020. The questionnaire was available until 28 February. Reminders were sent at the end of January.

The share of females among the invitees, based on the institutions' staff lists, was 43 per cent in Denmark, 55 per cent in Finland, 25 per cent in Iceland, 42 per cent in Norway and 64 per cent in Sweden. The questionnaire was created in a GDPR-compliant way by asking for the respondents' active consent to participate in the study. In total, we received 115 responses by the deadline, which corresponded to an acceptable response rate of 32 per cent.

There were 31 respondents (27%) from Denmark (incl. Greenland), 30 respondents from Finland (26%), 29 respondents from Sweden (25%), 21 respondents from Norway (18%) and 4 respondents from Iceland (4%). The non-response rate varied from question to question between 0 and 13 per cent ($n = 15$), which was because all respondents who started answering the questions did not complete the questionnaire; in this study, all actual answers were taken into account, which meant the total number of replies varied. Among the respondents, 45 per cent ($n = 52$) were male, 39 per cent ($n = 45$) female and 3 per cent ($n = 3$) were non-binary or preferred not to answer. As for their education, 35 per cent of the respondents ($n = 40$) had a doctoral degree, while 37 per cent ($n = 43$) had a master's and 11 per cent ($n = 13$) a bachelor's degree.

Most respondents were middle aged and thus obviously mid-career educators; 2 respondents (2%) were 20–29 years of their age, 9 respondents (8%) were 30–39, 35 respondents (30%) 40–49 years, 32 respondents (28%) were 50–59 and 22 respondents (19%) were older than 60 years. Indeed, most of the respondents had a couple of years of practical experience from working as a journalist. Among the respondents, 29 per cent ($n = 33$) had 6–15 years of experience and one third were even more experienced, 23 per cent ($n = 26$) had 16–30 years of experience and 4 per cent ($n = 5$) more than 30 years.

The majority of respondents ($n = 84$, 73%) mainly taught journalism, while there were also respondents with a focus on other subjects within the media and communication sciences; 12 respondents (10%) mainly taught research methods, 10 respondents (9%) media and communication theory, 2 respondents (2%) languages and 7 respondents (6%) some other subjects. The majority of the respondents (92, 80%) were employed full time. Among the respondents, 7 respondents (6%) were working 60–80 percent and 16 respondents (14%) less than 60 percent part time.

6. Results

The questions addressed the norms related to journalistic cultures and daily work as perceived by journalism educators who are in the position of mediating these norms to future journalists.

The norms dealt with both ideals and principles, reflected in general statements, and work practices manifest in descriptions of individual choices included in the news work. The questions were about the journalists' position in society, the tasks that professional journalists conducted, professional ethics and ethical principles, future directions for the development of journalism and the future qualifications and competence areas of journalists. Many of the questions were future-oriented, covering a period of the next ten years. The questions were followed by a number of statements that the respondents were asked to assess on a 5-point Likert scale, 1 referring to the lowest and 5 to the highest score. Next, we will go through these questions in a respective manner.

The first question built upon the general conceptions of the professional roles of journalists, anchored in journalistic cultures. The statement was formulated as follows: "A journalist should . . . ", and it was intended to examine the epistemological grounds of the idealized position of journalists in society in terms of neutrality and objectivity. Respondents could choose an answer to the 12 statements shown in Table 1 on a 5-point Likert scale between strong disagreement and strong agreement.

Table 1. Journalists' position according to the respondents ($n = 111$).

Journalists' Position in Society	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
a. Be a detached observer	3.54	0.94
b. Promote social change	3.28	0.87
c. Remain strictly impartial	3.36	0.98
d. Influence public opinion	3.01	0.95
e. Be a neutral disseminator of information	3.28	0.96
f. Set the socio-political agenda	3.19	0.99
g. Mirror reality as it is	3.59	1.14
h. Report about positive developments in society	4.05	0.64
i. Not let personal beliefs and convictions influence reporting	3.94	1.01
j. Be transparent about the working process	4.58	0.61
k. Let facts speak for themselves	3.51	1.08
l. Monitor and scrutinize the reporting of other news media	3.88	0.81

The professional principles of realism, analysis, inclusiveness and detachment have been found to be canonical in journalism cultures around the world ([Hanitzsch et al. 2019](#)). Nordic journalists have been found to embrace the detached watchdog observer role ([Ahva et al. 2017](#)). Danish and Swedish journalists have been found to comply with monitorial ideals with a high adherence, while Finnish journalists differ from Danish and Swedish journalists with their more market-oriented style and Icelandic and Norwegian journalists are characterized by a greater distance from political influences and political roles ([Hovden and Väliaverronen 2021](#)).

In [Drok's \(2019\)](#) journalism educators survey, the Nordic region stood out in relation to other parts of the world in its views on how journalism should report about the positive developments in society (h). Even the statements on the transparency of working process (j) and monitoring and scrutinizing other media (l) were supported more highly in the Nordic region than elsewhere. These dimensions indicate that the Nordic journalism educators express affinity with the recent development of positive news or journalism (see e.g., [Leung and Lee 2015](#)) and solutions journalism (see e.g., [McIntyre 2019](#)), as a counteraction to the overdramatization, sensation-seeking mindset and the crisis and negativity bias in coverage. They also emphasize the accountability of media, in terms of highlighting the importance of work process transparency and the critical investigation of the media, which refers to a strong ethical commitment which is supported by further findings in this study.

The second question dealt with the relative importance of a number of functions that professional journalists should perform. The statement read as follows: "Compared to today, in the next ten years the importance of the following task for professional journalists should become . . . ", and the respondents were asked to choose an answer according to whether they assessed that the need for the competence would be much lower, lower, the same as now or much higher. The results are shown in Table 2.

The answers underline the need for combatting the challenges of a post-truth society: the verification of facts (b), supporting the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of people (d) and the journalist's traditional watchdog role in reacting to societal shortcomings (f, i, o). The need to construct meaning and relevance for citizens (h, l, n) in an increasingly complex and turbulent mediated landscape is experienced as something that has to be strengthened in the coming years. The journalists' role as gatekeepers and meaning-makers of public knowledge to support informed citizenship is thus something that journalism educators will continue to emphasize. In their critical relationship to societal elites and knowledge, an approach that seems to be especially supported by the Nordic educators is the journalists' ability to point people toward possible solutions for societal problems (r). Here, the gradual impact of constructive solutions or slow journalism ([Haagerup 2017](#); [Holmaas 2019](#); [May 2020](#); [Hautakangas et al. 2017](#)), which has gained ground in the Nordic countries during the recent decade, can be seen in the educators' attitudes. These views dovetail with the viability category of normativity, but

they also reflect the distinctly Nordic type of journalism as seen in the ideological and performance categories.

Table 2. The future importance of journalistic functions according to the respondents ($n = 115$).

Journalistic Functions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
a. Get information to the public quickly	3.08	0.71
b. Stay away from stories that cannot be verified	4.04	0.86
c. Monitor and scrutinize the government	3.65	0.69
d. Stand up for the disadvantaged	3.79	0.72
e. Provide entertainment and relaxation	2.47	0.84
f. Expose social abuses	3.73	0.71
g. Make as many stories as possible each day	1.74	0.79
h. Provide analysis and interpretation of current affairs	4.12	0.73
i. Monitor and scrutinize business organizations	4.13	0.73
j. Give ordinary people a chance to express their views	3.35	0.82
k. Concentrate on news that will sell	2.32	0.87
l. Provide information that people need to make political decisions	4.04	0.70
m. Concentrate on bringing the latest news	2.8	0.65
n. Provide in-depth background information	4.19	0.62
o. Monitor and scrutinize civil society organizations	3.72	0.70
p. Motivate people to get socially involved	3.58	0.79
q. Treat the public as consumers rather than citizens	1.86	0.80
r. Point people toward possible solutions for societal problems	3.86	0.72

Nordic journalism educators are also set to contest time pressure (a, g, m) and consumerism (q, e, k). A majority of respondents (79%) thought that journalists should not deliver information to their public any quicker than now (a), and a large majority (88%) also pointed out that the trend to increase the quantity of stories that an individual journalist creates should be opposed (g). According to 91 per cent of respondents, the pace of bringing on the latest news should not increase. With a majority of 89 per cent, journalism educators clearly agreed upon the statement that journalists should not focus on making more saleable content, and 92 per cent asserted that the people should not be primarily treated as consumers or customers. Decreasing the pace of journalistic production may, however, be slightly contradictory, as the journalism educators at the same time emphasized the need to deliver information to the public rapidly, with 21 per cent even saying that journalists should be quicker in the future than today. Opposing the managerial and advertorial approach “of the marketing department”—that is, of *them* rather than ours—is nothing radical with regard to the professionalism that essentially builds upon building journalistic integrity within news organizations by detaching journalists from marketers, but, as seen in recent studies from newsrooms (Waldenström et al. 2019), the negotiations between journalistic and managerial, or “democratic” and “economic” issues, is often more subtle. As journalism educators are following the industry, they are likely to adopt approaches from the field, but at the same time they have sufficient distance to oppose such developments.

In the third question, the focus was directed to the professional ethics in the context of major societal issues. The instruction text said: “Consider an assignment about an important economic topic given to a journalist. We would like to know whether or not you find that certain practices are acceptable”. The answers can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The ethical principles of journalism according to the respondents ($n = 102$).

Ethical Principles	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
a. Reveal confidential sources	1.57	1.06
b. Claim to be somebody else	2.84	1.11
c. Use hidden microphones and cameras	3.35	1.01
d. Pay people for confidential information	1.8	0.94
e. Get employed in an organization to get inside information	3.26	1.06
f. Use confidential government documents without authorization	3.75	0.98
g. Use personal documents without permission	2.67	1.16
h. Exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	2.04	0.95
i. Agree to protect confidentiality but not do so	1.13	0.36
j. Use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors without mention	1.4	0.74
k. Publish a story with unverified content	1.6	0.82
l. Accept money from sources	1.09	0.32
m. Alter photographs substantially	1.22	0.61
n. Alter quotes from sources substantially	1.22	0.50
o. Use copyrighted material without permission	1.87	1.04
p. Reveal the truth, no matter the consequences	2.88	1.16

It is often easy to assert that ethical principles are rules that pinpoint the integrity and fairness of journalistic conduct. In Poynter's report (Finberg and Klinger 2014), educators were more likely to prioritize ethical principles as core skills than the professionals. Some of the typical ethical guidelines were also very obvious: almost all the educators confirmed that journalism needs to be trustworthy, transparent and accountable and should not, for example, agree to protect confidentiality but not do so (i), use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors without mentioning it (j), publish a story with unverified content (k), accept money from sources (l) or alter quotes (n) or photographs (m) substantially. Delivering such fundamentals to future journalists is also part of the core function of journalism educators who in many respects are the guardians and safeguards of the very essence of journalism. In other words, if journalism educators do not succeed in mediating the basic ethical principles to their students, the definition of journalism will be lost, as implied in the ideological category of normativity. As journalism is a professional ideology that subscribes to being ethical and, in this way, worthy of people's trust, newcomers in the field who do not follow the cornerstones of professionalism can easily be dismissed.

Nordic journalism educators seem to be relatively united in that confidential sources should not be revealed (a) and the sourcing work of journalism should operate on trust and commitment instead of money (d). The answers also indicate that covert action, such as the use of the Wallraff method and hidden equipment (b, c, e) is accepted under certain conditions. Over the half of respondents (60%) accepted that a journalist can claim to be someone else when collecting information, and 81 per cent saw no hindrances for using hidden microphones and cameras for journalistic purposes. Even 77 per cent regarded the method of becoming employed in an organization to gain insider information as an acceptable approach. However, at a general level, the opinions were more dispersed, with 54 per cent agreeing that the end justifies the means (p) and 40 per cent disagreeing upon "revealing the truth, no matter the consequences".

When it comes to more grey-zone methods, such as whistleblowing and news leaks, 73 per cent disagreed and 16 per cent remained neutral in the question of using confidential government documents without permission (f). Indeed, Nordic journalists have been involved in the multi-national journalistic work of the recent global leaks of Pandora papers (2021), Paradise papers (2017) and Panama papers (2016), and the activities of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) have been followed at the institutions as international examples of contemporary investigative reporting. In contrast, exerting pressure on unwilling informants to obtain a story (h) is experienced as an insult of individual integrity in a democratic society.

The fourth question connected to the discussions that have been influential in journalism education, as well, namely how and in which ways journalism should be adjusted or re-defined because of the economic, technological and societal changes of the 21st century. The 10 statements, listed in Table 4, concerned the direction in which journalism could evolve, and respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with the statements. The introductory phrase read as follows: “In my view, it would be good if journalism was...”.

Table 4. The future priorities of journalism according to the respondents ($n = 102$).

Priorities of Journalism	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
a. More about social responsibility and less about earning money	4.09	0.80
b. More about ordinary people and less about the ruling elites	3.28	0.94
c. More about long-term issues and less about the events of the day	3.75	0.83
d. More about solutions and less about problems	3.33	0.88
e. More about consensus and less about conflict	2.97	0.87
f. More about what’s next and less about what happened	3.16	0.81
g. More about interacting with audiences and less about one-way sending	3.62	0.90
h. More about getting the whole story and less about trying to be first	4.31	0.77
i. More about successes and less about failures	2.91	0.75
j. More about renewing journalistic content and less about new technology	3.75	0.87

According to the Nordic journalism educators, journalism should take its democratic responsibility seriously by advancing the traditional virtues of journalism, such as social responsibility and justice, by providing relevant and meaningful information. Relevance seems to be a key feature, as advocating an interpretative approach to the social reality is highlighted in multiple ways (b, d, f, h). An explicit majority of the educators (82%) regarded the attention dedicated to ordinary people as more important than focusing on elites (b). This may be interpreted in terms of examining ordinary people’s perspectives and standing up for the disadvantaged (as statement d in Table 2) instead of following the agendas of the centers of power. Advancing solution journalism approaches, which was supported even here by a majority of 85 per cent (d), does not necessarily mean that failures should be hidden. This can be seen in the types of answers that showed that some (18% preferring reporting on failures and 55% remaining neutral in this issue) seemed to regard the addressing of failures as important, contesting the coverage of mere successes (i), but many (80%) tended to think that journalism should be more success- than failure-oriented. This may be read as a call that, again, dovetails with the constructive- and solution journalism approaches, which are also likely to lean more on the future than historical aspects, reflected in the conscious preferences for the question “what’s next” (f) by 37 per cent of the respondents.

The fifth question focused on the educators’ views on the qualifications that young and aspiring journalists should acquire or possess. “Qualifications” were in this context understood as a mixture of abilities, attitudes and commitments. The introduction was: “Compared to today, in the next ten years the importance of the following qualifications for professional journalists should become ...” Table 5 largely confirms the findings from the answers to the previous questions, such as the appreciation of the “welfare-state of mind” of the Nordic journalist with a strong democratic commitment and social responsibility (a, q, r), interpretative approach (b, c, d, g, i, m), strong emphasis on the reliability of information through fact validation (j, l) and the skepticism towards time pressure (e).

Table 5. The future qualifications according to the respondents ($n = 101$).

Journalistic Qualification	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
a. Have a commitment to a democratic society	3.85	0.68
b. Link the local with the national and the global	3.87	0.65
c. Know current events and their context	3.91	0.65
d. Discover newsworthy issues on the basis of in-depth research	4.04	0.65
e. Work under time pressure	2.88	0.85
f. Organize contributions from the public	3.26	0.87
g. Have a wide general knowledge	3.87	0.73
h. Have a more specialized knowledge in a field	3.9	0.76
i. Be able to find multiple perspectives on an issue	3.93	0.69
j. Be able to evaluate sources	4.09	0.66
k. Interact with the public	3.62	0.83
l. Select information on the basis of reliability	3.97	0.67
m. Select information on the basis of relevance	3.87	0.71
n. Use different types of storytelling techniques	3.84	0.77
o. Make journalistic use of technology	3.98	0.77
p. Present content in effective combinations of words, sounds and visuals	3.85	0.80
q. Take responsibility for the choices you made during the process	3.77	0.72
r. Take responsibility for the impact of your product	3.68	0.69
s. Be able to recognize market opportunities	3.16	0.84
t. Be able to develop new products or formats	3.58	0.83
u. Reflect on the future of journalism	3.62	0.84
v. Provide workable solutions for complex practical issues that professional journalism faces	3.7	0.78

Furthermore, journalism educators seemed to contend that developing and diversifying presentation methods in journalism (n, o, p, t, u, v) is of high importance. Future journalists should be able to employ a variety of storytelling techniques (n) using technology (o) in multimodal or transmedia settings (p) and develop new products and formats in an increasing manner (t)—the majority of educators highlighted the increased importance of this. At the same time, educators seemed to have a more ambivalent relationship to social engagement (f, k). The educators seemed to have different opinions regarding whether the importance of organizing contributions to and interacting with the public should increase or remain the same. The diversification of presentation methods is, however, connected to the ideological category of normativity in ensuring a diversity of ways of addressing audiences, and to the normative category of viability, as diverse presentation methods may contribute to keeping audiences interested and attract new audiences in journalism.

From qualifications, the attention was directed to the employability and future labor market of journalism students. Question six examined the educators' forecasts about the future outlook on the roles in which their students are likely to do their job in a changing media landscape. The question was formulated as follows: "To what extent do you agree that your current students will be working in the following positions within the next 10 years?" Table 6 describes the results, which were quite concordant.

Table 6. The future labor market roles according to the respondents ($n = 100$).

Labor Market Role	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
a. Having a contracted job at an established news organization	3.44	0.98
b. Freelancing for established news organizations	3.95	0.76
c. Doing journalism at a start-up/new outlet	3.75	0.77
d. Working at a media production company	3.72	0.66
e. Doing part-time journalism and part-time something else	3.72	0.97
f. Working in a PR or communication job	3.87	0.89
g. Working outside of journalism and communication	3.65	0.79

With regard to the discussions of the decline of the conventional job market, Nordic journalism educators seemed to support the idea of working with established news organizations (a); over the half of the respondents (55%) agreed that future journalists would remain as staff workers. At the same time, increased freelancing was anticipated, as 82 per cent agreed or strongly agreed—as we interpreted the answers—that the contracted jobs would be freelancing positions (b). There was, nevertheless, a strong impression that an increasing number of students would be employed beyond the established news organizations (c, d, e) and their journalism (d, f, g). The overall picture that was painted thus conformed to the recent discussions of journalism that is increasingly produced beyond the established structures (Deuze and Witschge 2020) even in the Nordic countries. However, ideas regarding whether journalists would be sharing their time between journalism and something else or completely leaving journalism for PR or communication appeared to be more dispersed. If the ideological category of normativity journalism is still seen to be leaning upon non-commercial values, the idea of journalists seeking PR and communication can be seen as a resignation from the journalism educators' perspective.

In the last question, the respondents were asked to complement the statement “[i]n the next ten years, for journalism teachers the importance of the following qualifications should become” with their assessment. As seen in Table 7, over the half of the respondents thought that the nine mentioned competence areas would remain the same or grow only a little in their importance.

Table 7. The future importance of competence areas according to the respondents ($n = 100$).

The Future Importance of Competence Areas According to the Respondents	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
a. Practical experience from journalism	3.54	0.72
b. University degree in journalism or related field	3.38	0.68
c. University degree in any field	3.24	0.74
d. Didactic–pedagogical knowledge	3.85	0.69
e. Extensive general knowledge	3.49	0.66
f. Specialized knowledge	3.61	0.63
g. Research skills	3.82	0.78
h. Linguistic skills	3.49	0.70
i. Technical skills for digital media	4.12	0.73

Not surprisingly, as the journalistic professionalism largely leans upon the idea of being a “craft” and, accordingly, journalism education can be localized between theory and practice, journalism educators (97%) thought that practical experience (a) was important now and its importance will even increase in the future. Skills that were expected to increase in their importance were, above all, didactic–pedagogical knowledge (d), technical skills for digital media (i), specialized knowledge (f) and research skills (g). The importance allotted to didactic–pedagogical knowledge may refer to skills that are needed to conceptualize and clarify complex societal processes in conditions where trans-media and multi-platform storytelling dissolve the one-story model, urging journalists to think how to present ideas in different channels in an understandable manner, creating more audience engagement. However, the views regarding whether the university degree one acquires as a result of an academic learning process should be from journalism studies (b) or another field (c) did not notably differ from one another. While a little over a half of the respondents (53%) claimed that the demand for extensive general knowledge (e) will remain the same, 54 per cent were convinced of a strengthened call for specialized knowledge (f). Journalism educators thus seemed to envision the field of journalism as an increasingly heterogeneous and technologically saturated occupational area where more specialization and related tools will be needed. No notable increase in importance was seen for linguistic skills (h).

7. Discussion

The present questionnaire departed from the assumption that journalism educators, being involved in the development in journalism for their educative function in the journalism ecology, are experts of journalism and the expressions of their views regarding the future development of journalistic profession are relevant. The normativity sustained by journalism educators can be organized into the three categories of ideological, performance and viable normativity as shown in Table 8. We can identify three major topics, of which the first one describes the state of art, the second one a recent trend and the third a future change, and which we call the watchdog role, the constructive—or what we call mediary in order to detach it from any specific framework—approach and the diversity of content. They are described in terms of the found traits of normativity in the ideological, performance and viability categories.

Table 8. Journalism educators' views on the key dimensions of journalism in the three categories of normativity.

	Ideological	Performance	Viability
Watchdog role	Democratic commitment, factual information, social responsibility	Monitoring elites, maintaining integrity, validating facts	Interpretative approach as key to creating meaningfulness and a survival strategy
Mediary approach	Relevance, meaningfulness, solution-seeking mindset	Counteracting time pressure, focus on success instead of failure, finding work roles beyond institutional structures	Constructive, solutions-based, etc., approaches to journalism as survival strategies
Diversity of content	Maintaining diversity of content	Development of new formats and techniques of storytelling	Diversity of storytelling as a survival strategy

The watchdog role comes into being in terms of the maintenance of ethical values sustaining democracy, which is the basic Western understanding of journalism. The constructive approach is connected to ideas of slow, investigative, constructive and solutions-based journalism and has largely been endorsed by the Nordic journalism educators. Creating meaning, interpretation and relevance, producing in-depth accounts and providing solutions are highly appreciated qualities of journalism and a high priority is set for them within the education sector. This approach, known, above all, under the umbrella terms of “constructive journalism” (Swedish *konstruktiv journalistik*; see e.g., [Holmberg 2020](#)) “solutions journalism” (Danish/Norwegian *lø[y]sningsjournalistikk*) or “conciliatory journalism” (Finnish *sovittelujournalismi*; see e.g., [Jaakkola 2017a](#)) in the Nordics has recently been advocated as an alternative to the sustainable future by many Nordic professional practitioners and journalism trainers, but has also been strengthened by the establishment of national structures such as the Constructive Institute in Denmark and inter-Nordic networks, as well as national research projects (see e.g., [Ahva and Hautakangas 2018](#)).

It can be argued that the hermeneutic, reflective and critical approach, which we can subsume into the category of *mediary journalism* to include all its national variants, not only fits well into the Nordic legacy of journalism (the watchdog role) and democracy (welfare state), but also neatly dovetails with the objectives of journalism education itself and with the sustainability of journalism. Pedagogically, the ideas of bridging polarized views, negotiating with conflicting sources of information, seeking solutions instead of highlighting conflicts or digging into background instead of merely mirroring current events allow learners and teachers to see the critical role of journalists in society in a clear way, re-arranging the constituents of news making into a didactic approach. As journalism educators tended to express that their aim was not merely to follow the industry but, more importantly, to sustain a critical and developing attitude towards the existing structures and

patterns of the “field”, the investigative, critical ingredients of mediary journalism within journalism studies and journalistic practice are likely to provide journalism educators with tools to provide this essential perspective that, besides, distinguishes academic journalism education, first, from the more vocational training with immediate employability aims and, second, from the industry. In academic journalism education, the discussion on searching for ways to integrate the theoretical ingredients of the curriculum with the more practical substance that the professional learning requires has been prevalent. The mediary journalism approaches offer journalism educators tools for strategies to move their journalism education programs closer to other disciplines within the academy.

When discussing norms, there is always the notable risk of a “good respondent bias”, as the respondents typically answer according to what they feel is expected from them, instead of exposing their actual patterns of behavior. Moreover, it is relatively easy to agree upon general professional principles, while the adjustability and flexibility of these professional principles are more efficiently tested in dilemmatic cases in practice. Responding to questions that contradict the general professional ethos may cause uneasiness and discomfort in respondents, regardless of how they would act in a real situation. As always (see e.g., [Summers and Hammonds 1969](#)), the potential bias needs to be taken into account in this study; however, in the case of journalism educators, who are primarily involved in the formation of this normative discourse at their institutions rather than making the practical decisions in newsrooms, the norms maintained by the educators play a particularly important role. Nevertheless, what the questionnaire did not examine were the pedagogies how the views expressed are applied and put into practice. Therefore, and not least because of the aforementioned good respondent bias, it would be an equally relevant question to examine how journalism educators translate these norms and principles into action in their classroom and newsroom education.

The data collection phase of our study unveiled information on the structures of journalism education by indicating that there are about 350 academic employees working as journalism educators in the Nordic countries, excluding hourly-based guest lecturers who are regularly involved in journalism education. In comparison, there were about 750 registered Nordic media researchers in the Nordic expert database run by the research center Nordicom in July 2022 ([NordMedia Network \(NMN\) 2022](#)). While in Denmark and Norway under a half of the staff were female, in Finland the gender share was more equal and Sweden had the most female-dominated staff structure. However, [Drok's \(2019\)](#) survey, which examined the replies to the same questions used here according to gender categories, indicated that differences in journalism educators' epistemological and ontological positionings in general were very small in terms of gender.

The constructive approach can be said to link to the Nordic legacy of a welfare state with social responsibility and criticality as pivotal virtues of journalism, in contrast to the entrepreneurial and innovation-driven approaches that have been much more prevalent, for example, in the American discussions on journalism education (see e.g., [Mensing and Ryfe 2013](#)). However, to conclude, even in the Nordic countries the discourse revolving around contemporary and future journalism education has largely been characterized by efforts to discover solutions through journalism education for journalism to survive in an age of uncertainty and crisis (see also [Ring Olsen 2020](#)). It can be suggested that even here, the mediary approaches to journalism that are seen in the survey results have turned out to be the most “Nordic-minded” way to go.

8. Conclusions

This article examined the values, norms and normative practices of journalism perceived by academic journalism educators in the Nordic countries. While the survey results confirmed many of the previous study results on the Nordic countries, they indicated that Nordic journalism educators highly subscribe to ideas of sustainability of journalism, seen in the support of constructive journalism and its derivatives, or kinship areas such as solutions, positive, slow and investigative news-making approaches.

More studies are needed to capture the qualitative dimension of how the normativity—especially that of the mediary approaches—is enacted in instructional designs, both in theoretical tasks and in work simulation in the training newsrooms. Especially when it comes to the digital domain, journalism educators do not necessarily have a shared framework, as the most experienced educators might not have worked in the digitalized newsrooms and online outlets themselves and practices tend to be organization-specific, varying from one newsroom to another. Journalism education institutions also seem to differ a lot with respect to the models they employ, varying in their practical orientation to teach online journalism (see e.g., Jaakkola 2017b). In addition, a future task for journalism researchers interested in the study of journalism education would be to investigate in more detail how journalism educators verbalize mediatory journalism approaches and conceive of their pedagogical implications.

Supplementary Materials: The results of a survey conducted in the Nordic countries can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/journalmedia3030031/s1>.

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Note

- ¹ The journalism schools included the Danish School of Journalism (DMJX), University of Southern Denmark, Roskilde University, University of Greenland (Denmark); Tampere University, University of Helsinki, University of Jyväskylä, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Turku University of Applied Sciences, Oulu University of Applied Sciences (Finland); University of Akureyri, University of Iceland (Iceland); Oslo Metropolitan University (Oslo), Sámi University of Applied Sciences, University of Bergen, University of Stavanger, University of Volda, NLA University, Nord University (Norway); Linnaeus University, Lund University, Mid-Sweden University, Södertörn University, Stockholm University, Umeå University, University of Gothenburg (Sweden).

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