

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM QUESTIONS FOR MIRJAM GOLLMITZER

FIELD TITLE: THE CHANGING NATURE OF JOURNALISM, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

From: R. Hackett, for release at noon, May 12, 2009

Please answer two of the following questions, according to the Guidelines for Comprehensive Exams, which recommend a length of 2500-3000 words per essay. Ensure that your answers do not unduly overlap with each other or with the essays you wrote for your other field. If necessary, feel free to “tweak” the questions to cover the topics for which you have prepared.

1. Write an essay that combines the two fields you have prepared, viz. Democracy and Communication, and the Changing Nature of Journalism. Specifically, what do the normative models of democracy you have considered have to say (explicitly or implicitly) about the appropriate role of the audience in public communication? And, what do those normative models imply about the current technological, workplace, professional and political economic challenges to journalism: What do those models identify as the main threats and opportunities in the new and changing environment for journalism?
2. Compare and contrast three major theories of journalism: public sphere theory (Habermas, amended by Fraser and others), field theory (Bourdieu and other proponents), and the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker & Reese). Are these theories normative and/or explanatory? Is there any “object” of analysis that links them, or are they constructed for different purposes (in which case, explain why you have chosen to focus on these three particular theories). How, and to what extent, does each theory help us to understand the relationship between journalism and the rest of society, the determinants of news, the formation of public opinion, and/or the current challenges facing contemporary journalism? What do you see as main blind spots in these theories? Would it be useful (or possible) to combine them into a single integrated model?
3. Consider the main developments that are currently restructuring and arguably redefining journalism – e.g. commercialization, infotainment, digital technologies, restructured labour processes, and the blurring of boundaries between journalists and audiences. Do these changes portend a continuation of traditional journalism, its fundamental transformation, and/or its complete demise? What are the main dangers and opportunities in these developments, from the viewpoint of democratic communication? What is the most hopeful and realistic future scenario for re-organizing journalism in the context of contemporary democracy?
4. Write an essay on the role of the audience in relation to contemporary journalism. How do the three theories of journalism (public sphere, field theory, hierarchy of influences) conceptualize the ‘audience’ (if at all)? In light of the major contemporary challenges to journalism that you have identified in your field statement, what is the current status of ‘the audience’ (however you choose to define that term) in relation to journalism? How and to what extent have new types of audience participation redefined journalism, and what threats and opportunities do they pose for democratic communication? Can such audience participation be conceptualized in one normative and/or explanatory model?