THE ROLE OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN JOURNALISM: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM JOURNALISTS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT *This paper presents the preliminary findings of an ongoing research project focused on the importance of building learning tools and procedures that will help media professionals adjust to a constant changing environment. Adopting a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodology by conducting in depth interviews with journalists from Greece and Cyprus, and by running an online questionnaire, addressed to journalists as well as communication professionals, we try to define the role and the profile of the contemporary journalist, and how it has changed under the pressure and the potential, unleashed by new technologies and the global financial crisis. We study the development of lifelong learning programs, their impact and their results with an emphasis on distance learning. Through our research we conclude that there is a need to rethink journalism training and curricula by introducing new skills. In addition, lifelong learning in the form of distance learning seems to be a priority for most journalists in order to adjust to the current media landscape.*

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We are living in an era where, as global communities, we face challenges and crises. "At the moment we are in the midst of global turmoil. Global financial services are collapsing, economies are in a steep downturn and iconic enterprises are disappearing from the map of the business world" (Sahlberg, 2009). On the other hand, the rise of web 2.0 and social networks have changed the way we think, produce, consume and innovate (Leadbeater, 2004). Such turbulent times often produce new ideas as a reaction and often require new skills to be developed and "this is a challenge for formal education in general and lifelong learning in particular" (Sahlberg, 2009).

All the aforementioned have also affected journalism, both as a profession and as a research-learning objective. Nowadays, more and more journalists are losing their jobs (Edmonds, 2013). In addition, digital skills and an understanding of new media are becoming crucial for younger and older journalists (Gillmor, 2010).

Our hypothesis is: the journalistic community needs a strategic rethinking of journalism curricula today, one that is focused on new skills via lifelong learning.

In this context and in order to test the accuracy of this statement we will attempt to describe the trends of the new educational models and perspectives as they have been presented and stated in the literature, as well as the trends in lifelong learning systems and organizational schemes, in general, and in correlation with journalism studies.

Education 2.0 and lifelong learning

"If you think of it, children starting school this year will be retiring in 2065. Nobody has a clue, despite all the expertise that's been on parade for the past four days, what the world will look like in five years' time. And yet we're meant to be educating them for it. So the unpredictability, I think, is extraordinary" highlights Sir Ken Robinson in a talk wondering whether school kills creativity (Robinson, 2006). Flexibility, risk-taking, creativity and innovation, according to Andy Hargreaves, (Sahlberg, 2009) might be the answers to the challenge of rethinking education.

We are living in an era where new media and social platforms bring changes to every aspect of human action. Web 2.0 allows people to interact, share, collaborate, co-create and participate (Shirky, 2008a). The activities most often associated with web 2.0 realize four typically human dispositions: the playful, the expressive, the reflective and the exploratory (Selwyn et al., 2008) allowing peers (Johnson, 2012) to experiment with and exchange knowledge and skills. If we look at both the theoretical frameworks and practices we will understand that the educational process has started moving towards: learning networks, collaborative knowledge, creativity, innovation, self-directed knowledge (Rudd et al., 2006) and a trend to adapt to the continuous changes in those environments in which learning takes place (Sahlbeg, 2009).

Education 2.0 is the current trend, driving from more classical learning theories, such as social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978, in Cochrane et al., 2013) or communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2009 in Cochrane et al., 2013) and moving to more modern theories such as authentic learning (Herrington and Oliver, 2000; Herrington and Herrington, 2007; Herrington et al., 2009, in Cochrane et al., 2013), pedagogy 2.0 (McLaughlin and Lee, 2007; McLaughlin and Lee, 2010, in Cochrane et al., 2013), m-learning (Cochrane, 2010; Cochrane, 2011; Cochrane and Bateman, 2010, in Cochrane et al., 2013) and gamification in education (Huang Hsin-Yuan and Soman, 2013).

Along with the new models, new theories rise, focusing on learner autonomism and connectivism. As stated by several researchers in the field of self-directed learning, learner autonomy is rather important (Kop and Fournier, 2010). Paul Bouchard (2009) and Marcie Boucouvalas (in Kop and Fournier, 2010) both highlighted the learning environment, learning context, and the connections people make during their learning as determining factors in the success of self-directed learning journeys (Kop and Fournier, 2010). On the other hand, the World Wide Web and social platforms create networks and advance peer to peer collaboration and in the learning process, according to connectivism (Downes, 2010) people engage with other people in order to exchange knowledge, rather than the transfer of knowledge from an educator to a learner. In addition, learning does not take place in a single environment and educational routine changes frequently (Kop and Fournier, 2010).

In that context, educators and faculty members experiment and try to change the educational structures that have been the norm for centuries (Downes, 2010; Kop and Fournier, 2010). Distance learning techniques and applications, e-learning, Moocs and mobile learning are the growing trends in an era where knowledge is decentralized and distributed through different channels and where skills and not degrees are our access, not our assets (Hartley, 2013).

In a fast changing world- by 2035 according to UNESCO more people worldwide will be graduating through education than ever before and within the next few years, according to the International Labor Organization more than 50 million people will lose their jobs (Sahlbeg, 2009). Lifelong learning through continuous building of skills and knowledge might be the solution. "According to Giasemi Vavoula and Mike Sharples, at the core of the learning practice is the learner" (Aizaz and Ashish, 2012) and the aim is the training of a workforce capable of adapting to a rapidly changing world. Formal learning, non-formal learning, informal learning, and self-directed learning are the basic components of lifelong learning schemes.

At the same time, technological developments create a new hybrid of formal and informal learning inside and outside typical educational institutions in an attempt to meet both the needs of the new economic landscape and also the needs of 'homo-sapiens',' net savvy' and 'power users', the 'internet generation', 'generation M' (media), 'generation V' (virtual) or 'generation C,' referring to characteristics such as connected, creative and click (Selwyn and Crook, 2008) and also to the digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001), people

that are moving towards technology in order to catch up with the changing ecosystem. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "learners increasingly seek courses that allow them to update their knowledge throughout their working lives. In addition, as learners seek to acquire particular knowledge or skills to satisfy labor market needs, more and more prefer to pick and choose courses from the most suitable providers, rather than studying a traditional clearly defined program at one institution" (Hanover Research, 2011).

Over the past years we have begun witnessing a growth in distance learning and e-learning programs and platforms offered either by universities, by corporations or by creative collaborations of academic institutions within corporate environments. Distance learning has been described as a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both (Aizaz and Ashish, 2012), whether e-learning comprises all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching (Ibid.). The term is still more likely to be used to refer to out-of-classroom and in classroom educational experiences via technology, even as advances continue in regard to devices and curriculum (Ibid.).

According to a study conducted by the Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning Team at the University of Oxford (2010), the vast majority of online distance learning offered by higher education institutions is at the postgraduate level and almost all of the online distance learning courses identified could be described as continuing professional development (Hanover Research, 2011). Also, Sloan Consortium's survey showed that many more U.S. institutions reported seeing an increase in demand for online courses and programs than for face-to-face programs in 2010 (Ibid.), highlighting the trend. Finally, in the Hanover Research on Trends in Global Distance Learning (2011), seven educational institutions were identified as key players in the global higher education distance learning market (Open University, University of Derby, University of Maryland-University College, Drexel University Online, Indonesia Open University, Indira Ghandi National Open University and University of South Africa), from which only three are traditional postsecondary institutions that also offer distance education and the other four are institutions based on open and distance learning.

Another growing trend is MOOCs and M-learning. In the case of massive open online courses (MOOCs)[1], the concept of open access to learning was taken in a different direction (Liyanagunawardena et al., 2013). "A MOOC brings together people interested in learning and an expert or experts who seek to facilitate the learning. Connectivity is usually provided through social networking, and a set of freely accessible online resources provides the content or the study material. Furthermore, they generally have no prerequisites, fees, formal accreditation, or predefined required level of participation" (McCauley et al., 2010, in Balasubramanian et al., 2010). MOOCs seemed to have dominated the educational landscape over the past few years, this is supported by the fact that about 1.7 million students have enrolled in a Coursera and about 370.00 have registered for edX

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[1] MOOC stands for Massive Open Online Course and it is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web.

courses in the fall of 2012. Although some believe that if 2012 was the year of the MOOC (Daly, 2013), 2013 might be described as the year of the anti-MOOC (Watters, 2013).

In the case of M-Learning, the opportunity of learning is independent of time, location and changes in the learning environment (Aizaz and Ashish, 2012). In relation to lifelong learning, m-learning seems to advance it. According "though there exist technologies that aid learning, to a certain extent also lifelong learning, but mobile learning makes it complete. Mobility, for example, makes the difference that technologies such as e-learning could not provide to the learners. With mobility, a learner is able to learn anywhere anytime" (Ibid.). Also, collaborative skills and interaction are being promoted by the use of mobile phones and smartphones (Ibid.). It is rather interesting to observe that in developing countries, mobile phones rank as primary educational tools (Balasubramaniana et al., 2010).

Journalism Education and Training

As traditional media is rapidly evolving under the pressure and the potential unleashed by Social Media and a variety of web applications, there arises immense scope for research, development and innovation in studying the potential mixes of diverse media in a single platform (Gillmor, 2010). The study of these new opportunities for a hybridization of the older media with the new web-based technologies (and communities and ethos) is becoming increasingly necessary. At the same time, the need for professional journalists to cope with the new ecosystem and face the crisis in their profession, results in the need of the development of lifelong learning programs that will offer journalists new skills and capabilities (Knight Foundation, 2007), especially in technology, multimedia and data skills (Finberg, 2012). In addition, lifelong learning in journalistic environments via distance learning seems to have grown in popularity over the years. As highlighted in the research conducted by the Knight Foundation (2007), "Distance learning programs regarding journalism have increased as well as the investment of media organizations and professional journalists in training. One in 10 journalists use online distance learning, compared to only one in 20 five years ago. The increase, which coincides with the development of Poynter's News University and its more than 35,000 registered users, is accompanied by greater interest in online learning on the part of news executives. More than two in 10 said their newsrooms had used this method in the past year and another four in 10 said they would seriously consider using it". The trend appears to be the same among European Journalists as well. According to COPEAM UNESCO research project (2010)[2], promoting the necessity of a long-life learning strategy among both professionals and decision makers inside media organizations is an urgent need.

According to The State of Journalism Education 2013 conducted by Poynter News University, "39% of educators said journalism education is keeping up with industry changes not at all or a little. Newsroom leaders and staffers are even harsher, with 48 percent saying the academy isn't keeping up with changes in the field". "To teach journalism in the digital age you have to teach both journalism and the digital age —

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[2] The project was aimed at assessing the current journalism training priorities and needs in the Southern Mediterranean public broadcasters.

and use modern tools to do it. That's why the schools that are serious about this are getting bigger, not smaller," argues Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation (Poynter News University, 2013). In addition, according to the European Digital Journalism Survey 2009 (Oriella PR Network, 2009), more than 66% of the participants to the survey said that they had to train themselves in producing media content for the new platforms, suggesting a gap between their academic studies and the trainings offered by employers or professional unions and the reality.

At the same time, new platforms and tools (such as Moocs, e-learning platforms, etc.) offer new possibilities not only to those who want to study journalism, but also to individuals who might not be interested in a degree but want to improve their skills (Poynter News University, 2013). In Europe, this is also growing, more and more organizations are announcing online courses.[3] Journalism schools are one part of a "growing news ecosystem" that demands to be fed by new training in journalism, media skills and business not just for students and professionals, but also "entrepreneurs and hyper local, hyper interest journalists – and technologists," Jeff Jarvis says (Poynter News University, 2013). He continues, "journalism training is necessary not only for undergraduates and graduates, but also as continuing education for journalists who may use online education to keep up with the changes in their industry as it convulses around them". (Ibid: 10) Clay Shirky (2008b) said that journalists now need experimentation and not nostalgia. And this is something that can be transferred to journalism education as well. Donica Mensing and David Ryfe argue that the teaching hospital metaphor, proffered by Newton and others, puts too much emphasis on production, turning journalism schools into "production facilities staffed by industry professionals who have left an industry in deep distress" (Poynter News University, 2013). The report on journalism education by Poynter News University suggests that journalist schools should reconnect with communities as participants rather than professionals, "facilitation and moderation, experimenting with small entrepreneurial businesses, collaborating with computer scientists, artists, and urban planners might not produce coverage of many city council meetings (although it could) but it may help journalism programs contribute research and development that will be more valuable to the long-term future of journalism". (Ibid: 17)

In Greece and Cyprus the landscape of lifelong learning programs for journalists could not be described as rich, although the demand for new skills is rising due to the financial crisis, globalization and technological development. In Greece, only the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Faculty of Journalism and Media, offers online training, specialized in computer programing and technologies. There are also some sporadic seminars organized by ESIEA, the professional journalists union. On the other hand, in Cyprus the postgraduate distance learning program Communication and new Journalism of Open Cyprus University offers an updated journalistic curriculum, while also organizing online seminars for journalists and communication professionals.

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[3] The European Journalism Centre is running the online course Doing Journalism with Data: First Steps, Skills and Tools.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY

In this paper our research hypothesis drives from two basic parameters: the global economic crisis and the growing technological developments we face every day. More specific and with a focus on the profession of journalism, we are experiencing a fall in traditional media practices and a strong move towards digital approaches. For example, the Greek newspaper "To Vima" stopped its daily circulation couple of years ago and advanced an online presence. In addition, according to Deloitte's Media Consumer Survey for 2013, although print magazines are still attractive to consumers, circulations continue to decline and PCs are now the favorite way to read news. On the other hand, journalists are losing their jobs more often than in the past, and young journalists face difficulties in acquiring a job in media. According to the Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates held by the University of Georgia (Beckeret et al., 2012), "just 55.5% of 2009 journalism and communication graduates with a bachelor degree were able to find full-time work within a year of leaving school. That is down 4.9 percentage points from the year before and stands in stark contrast with the 70.2% of graduates who found work as recently as 2007" (Nikitin, 2010). Moreover, new media seem to open the landscape for older and aspiring journalists striving for a job. The authors of the same survey identified "an increase in the number of 2009 graduates working with the internet, a central component of modern journalism. Fully 58.2% of the recent bachelor graduates with communication jobs reported being involved with Web writing and editing, a substantial increase from 50.6%, the year before" (Ibid.)

The technological changes not only affect the journalistic profession, but they also have a great impact on the consumers of the media products. Today, the audience seems to be more energetic and in a continuous dialogue with journalists. As Jay Rosen (2006) states: "The people formerly known as the audience wish to inform media people of our existence, and of a shift in power that goes with the platform shift you've all heard about. Think of passengers on your ship who got a boat of their own. The writing readers. The viewers who picked up a camera. The formerly atomized listeners who with modest effort can connect with each other and gain the means to speak – to the world, as it were". Also, they are digitally savvy, owners and users of new devices (PCs, tablets, smartphones) and mostly always on. The Digital Media Junkies generation (McKinsey, 2011) often participate to the process of collecting and distributing information and they are certainly more demanding consumers.As we observed earlier, there is a current need for an "update" to the media studies curricula offered by Universities and a growing demand for training focused on the digital era. Also, there are many that claim that changes in education today, should be more dynamic and peer to peer based. Crises are affecting the field of journalism more than ever, and so professionals should become more flexible in multitasking, sometimes even able to set up and organize their own media brand.

Research Hypothesis and Questions

Taking into consideration all of the above and in the context of our theoretical framework we focused our main research hypothesis on the new skills a journalist should acquire today through academic studies and lifelong education programs and the role of distance learning institutions in the development of such new skills.

In order to approach better the research hypothesis we apply the following research questions:
> What are the skills that a journalist should have today in order to adapt to the new demanding media ecosystem?
> How do they value the skills they acquire through their studies? Are they relevant to the current media landscape?
> Do journalists correlate crisis with the need of a lifelong learning approach? If yes, how?
> Are they willing to invest time and money in order to get better qualifications?
> What is their experience with lifelong learning institutions, both online and off-line?
> How will they describe the ideal journalism curricula of today?

Methodology

In that first part of our research, we adopted a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodology. We conducted 15 in depth interviews, with a semi structured questionnaire, with journalists from Greece and Cyprus. The interviews took place during the last week of February 2014 and the first week of March 2014. We attempted to approach a varying sample of journalists: men and women, working on various media (TV, radio, newspapers, web portals), both "more traditional" and "more digital", as well as more and less experienced, and finally those journalists who have been affected by the economic crisis and the loss of their jobs.

The interview questionnaire consisted of two main parts: the first one was more focused on the contemporary media landscape (economic and credibility crisis, digital era, etc.) and the second on the skills that journalists should develop in order to adapt to this fast changing ecosystem through lifelong learning programs.

The basic questions asked during the interviews were formulated as such:
> Do journalists perceive their profession as experiencing a crisis? To what extend is the crisis related to changes in technology?
> What are the skills that journalists believe they should have today in order to adapt to the new demands of the media ecosystem?
> How do journalists value the skills they acquired during their studies? Are they perceived as relevant to the current media landscape?
> How do they value the existing lifelong educational process provided by employers and journalistic unions?

During the last week of May 2014, we ran an online structured questionnaire, with close ended questions. The questionnaire is still running and so far we have gathered 311

answers by journalists and communication professionals. We also attempted to approach a varying sample of professionals, both men and women, working on various media and posts (editors, reporters, newscasters, etc.) or who have lost their jobs.

The main focus of this particular survey is, again, on the skills that journalists and communication professionals have to develop in the context of the digital era, as well as on lifelong learning programs.

The basic questions asked through the questionnaire were formulated as such:
> Would you be interested in obtaining a postgraduate degree? If yes, would you do that in order to find a job more easily, to be able to create a more permanent relationship with an employer, to upgrade your professional status, to be able to seek a job in a foreign country, to acquire more skills, for academic purposes.
> Would you choose a Greek, Cypriot or a foreign university?
> Would you choose a private or a public university?
> Would you choose a distance learning institution?
> Would you like to acquire a specialized postgraduate degree? If yes, why?
> In which fields of communication and journalism would you like to be specialized?

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSION

As it was almost expected, the majority of participants in the interviews agree that media are facing a crisis, a crisis that is both financial and a crisis of trust. This aligns with the global trend in the media sector, where journalists and media organizations score really low in terms of credibility.[4] Most of the participants agree also that the main reasons for the crisis are the wider political and economic environment that allowed irresponsible behaviors on behalf of media players. They underline the fact that the credibility crisis was there before the financial one. One of them claims, "a very excessive media landscape in Greece, more newspapers and TV and radio stations than the market could afford and could pay off and, therefore, there was also an internal crisis in the media sector. The fact that the economic crisis came along, accelerated the already grave crisis in the media".

The majority of our sample also agrees to the fact that new technological tools have changed the media landscape. They seem to understand the importance of adopting digital skills, but most of them, at the same time, feel cautious towards social media and other platforms. However, most of them try to learn and understand not only the use of those tools, but also the values they bring along (sharing culture, collaboration etc). They believe that, in order to stay active within the media market, they must follow the new trends. "The generation now in its 50s – 60s has been tremendously affected by new technologies. We ought to have adapted very fast in order to cope with new needs as well as those of our working environment. We became redundant very fast", one of them states.

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[4] We refer indicatively to GFK Custom Research Worldwide's survey (2003), where journalists scored in the second place, just right after politicians, in terms for trustworthiness or to Edelman's Trust Barometer (2008) where media are placed to the last positions in terms of trust. According to Media Standard Trusts research (A more accountable press) or Globe Scan's Research (on behalf of BBC, Reuters and Media Center), journalists and media score really low regarding credibility.

An interesting finding is that the "traditional" journalists strongly argue that their new colleagues although they are really tech savvy, they lack classical journalistic techniques. On the other hand, the younger generation of journalists, claim that traditional journalists fear new technologies. The aforementioned provokes a rather challenging thought that has been stated in academic papers and researches, but hasn't been stated so clearly by media professionals themselves: new and old media need each other (Lasica, 2003).

Technical skills, critical capacity, production of more credible and quality media content via filtering and content management and also flexibility to the constant changes are the skills that the sample stressed out as the most important for the contemporary journalist. As they state, "the learning of new techniques, and the familiarization with the constantly evolving world of social media and the other easements offered by the internet. They must be alert both for the management of information, but also the management of techniques, namely they must always acquire more technical skills and knowledge".

Regarding the skills and knowledge they acquire during their academic studies, the responses converge to the view that the academic education of a journalist does not cover and may not even be relevant to the profession of a journalist. Many participants point out that their studies are completely unrelated to the vocation, while, with respect to the knowledge acquired at universities or schools for journalists, they are deemed lacking in several important respects and their correlation to the profession of the journalist is minimal.
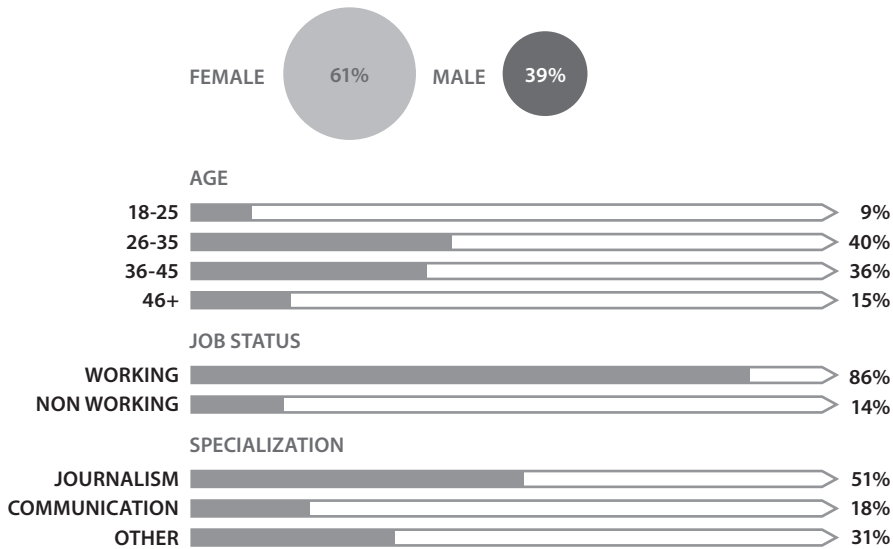
The majority of the sample value lifelong learning as an important and crucial factor to their professional advancement, especially in the current turbulent times and most of them are willing to invest in lifelong educational programs, but with the help of employees and institutional bodies that should, from their part, invest in their stuff and products. In addition, recorded in the responses is the existence of seminars by institutional bodies without, however, them being adequate or having the necessary content. They are principally characterized by the offer of a limited and sparse technical knowledge, which is extremely easy to be acquired through empirical use, while what is on offer in terms of continuing education and training by employers or collective bodies is registered as inadequate. They highlight the need for the development of new curricula for journalists, both online and offline as well as the fact that they appreciate the peer to peer transfer of knowledge. As far as it concerns distance learning, most of them have already participated in a distance learning program emphasizing the hypothesis that distance learning programs are on the top list for professional journalists when it comes to lifelong learning.
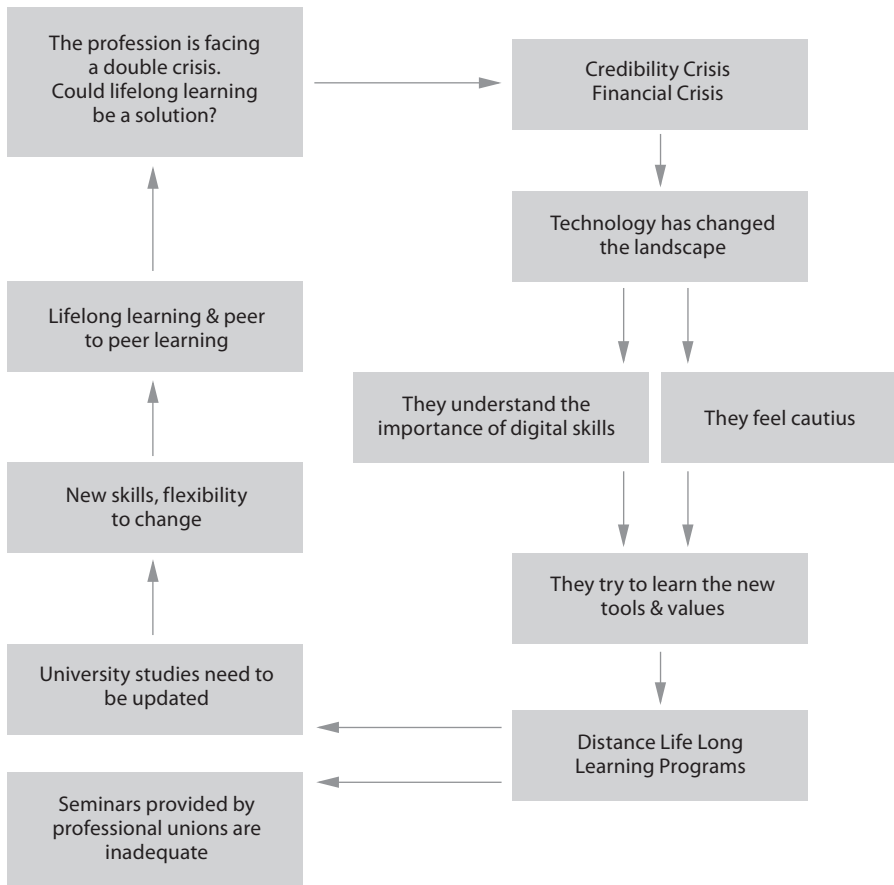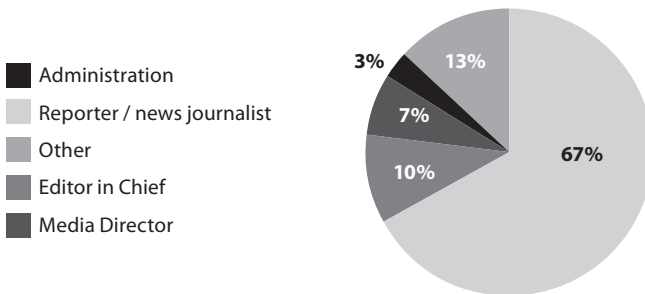
▲ *Graph 1*
Journalist's Interviews

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND DISCUSSION

In this paper we will present some preliminary findings from the questionnaire and we will focus on the answers given by journalists. So far we have gathered 331 responses by journalists and communication professionals. More specifically, 61% of the sample are women and 39% are men. The age range from 18-25 (9%), to 46 plus (15%). 86% of the sample works, while 14% is jobless. From the working percentage 51% works as journalists, 18% works in the communication field and 31% works in a different field, not related to journalism or communication.

FEMALE 61%   MALE 39%

AGE

18-25	9%
26-35	40%
36-45	36%
46+	15%

JOB STATUS

WORKING	86%
NON WORKING	14%

SPECIALIZATION

JOURNALISM	51%
COMMUNICATION	18%
OTHER	31%

▲ *Graph 2*
Sample's Profile

From those working in the journalistic field, most of them (27%) work for a news site, while 23% works in a traditional newspaper and 17% as freelancers. The majority of them work as news reporters. In addition, the majority of the communication professionals of our sample (43%) work in a Public Relations/Press Office of a company or political party/person. The percentage of people working as freelancers in this category is high as well (22%), demonstrating the crisis in the field, as lots of journalists have to work with different employers in order to remain active in the market.
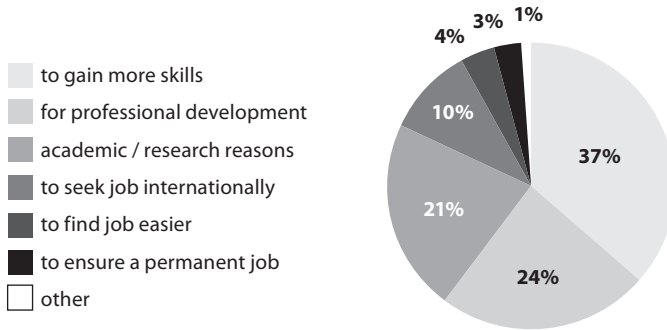
Administration
Reporter / news journalist
Other
Editor in Chief
Media Director

3% 13% 7% 10% 67%
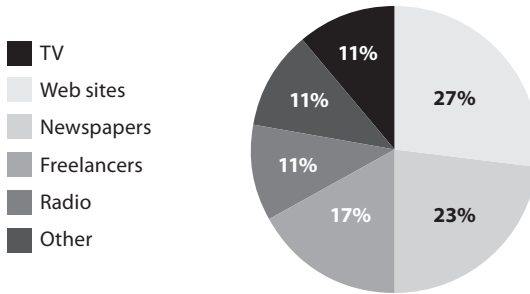
▲ *Graph 3*
Journalists' Profile

If we move to the findings, we can observe that the vast majority of them (86%) express the need of acquiring a postgraduate degree with 37% declaring that they would do it in order to develop more skills, and 24% in order to be able to get a job promotion/ upgrade. It is rather interesting that 22% of the sample claims that a postgraduate degree would help them advance in the fields of research and academic knowledge regarding their occupation.

In the question, where they would prefer to study they give a small precedence to Greek or Cypriot universities over universities abroad, due to the economic crisis. In addition, they don't seem to care if the university was private or public. Almost 90% agree that they would go for a distance learning institution due to better time management, while they all agree that a postgraduate degree should emphasize both theory and practice.
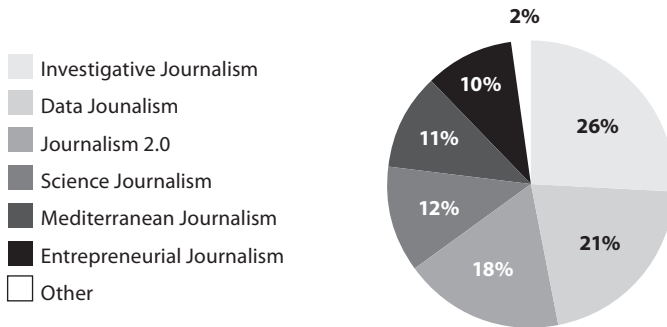
86% **YES TO A POSTGRADUATE DEGREE**
86% of the sample would be interested in acquiring a postgraduate degree

90% **YES TO LONG DISTANCE EDUCATION**
90% of the sample would choose a distance learning program

100% **YES TO THEORY AND PRACTICE COMBINATION**
100% of the sample agrees that a postgraduate degree should emphasize both in theory and practice

81% **YES TO SPECIALIZATION**
81% of the sample wants a more specialized postgraduate degree

to gain more skills

for professional development

academic / research reasons

to seek job internationally

to find job easier

to ensure a permanent job

other

▲*Graph 4*
Results Summary: Trends on Postgraduate Studies

If we go deeper into our findings and try to explore the reasons[5] why the respondents favor a specialized postgraduate degree in journalism and communication, we observe that the majority of the sample argues that the knowledge they obtain during their first degree was very generic and that they need to be up to date with current trends and needs. It is really interesting that both journalists and communication professionals agree to the above.

Finally, we asked the participants in the survey to give us their opinion on the proposed modules, both in journalism and communication, that they would like to be trained on. It is more than interesting that although there is a strong debate regarding the need for digital training for journalists, the professionals of the field highlight a more classical journalistic skill (investigative journalism) they would like to be trained on, while data journalism (21%) and digital journalism (18%) follow.

Investigative Journalism

Data Jounalism

Journalism 2.0

Science Journalism

Mediterranean Journalism

Entrepreneurial Journalism

Other

▲*Graph 5*
Results Summary: Trends on Specialization

5 This was an open ended question of the online questionnaire

CONCLUSIONS

If we attempt to describe the preliminary findings of our ongoing research, correlating the responses we gathered both through the interviews and the questionnaire, we could claim that Greek and Cypriots journalists agree that new media ecosystem is a challenging field and that there is a need to acquire new skills and face these changes with flexibility. The financial crisis played a crucial role to their understanding of the urgent need to adapt to the new global reality, developing skills in order to cope with the credibility and also the sustainability and crisis of professionalism they face (Spyridou et al., 2013). Technological skills, but also classical journalistic skills appear to be priorities for the journalists in our research, but also for journalists in Europe in general.[6] The majority of the sample states that the knowledge obtained during their studies needs to be constantly updated and related to the current media landscape. In this context, they choose to follow a lifelong learning program, such as seminars provided by professional unions. Though, they claim not to be satisfied by the quality of the trainings offered. This also aligns with a more global trend, as according Media Hackers WP3 Report on *Mapping Education and Training of Journalists in Greece, Belgium, Romania and Germany* (2012), "One out of three respondents is having or has had vocational training in digital technology for journalists, with the majority being fairly satisfied with the training provided". They would prefer to obtain a postgraduate degree through a distance learning educational institute with a specialization in specific skills and areas such as investigative journalism, digital and data journalism.

All the aforementioned could be a starting point for rethinking journalism curricula and creating new distance learning programs, combining theory with practice and answering the current needs of the contemporary journalist.

Jeff Jarvis once stated, "Indeed, education is one of the institutions most deserving of disruption and with the greatest opportunities to come of it". If we apply this disruption to journalistic educational institutions we might witness even the greatest opportunities.

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[6] According to Media Hackers WP3 Report on Mapping Education and Training of Journalists in Greece, Belgium, Romania and Germany (2012) "The needs recorded by the respondents can be classified into practical and theoretical training. It is noteworthy to see that the higher percentages are evidenced in the theoretical level, especially in regards to the changes journalism is undergoing online. In the technological sector, the interest is focused on the development of online media, CMS, Web TV and radio, even in blogs, followed by training needs for more traditional fields, such as photo, video and audio processing".

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ULOGA INSTITUCIJA ZA UČENJE NA DALJINU U RAZVOJU NOVINARSKIH VJEŠTINA: PRELIMINARNI NALAZI IZ NOVINARSKE PERSPEKTIVE

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SAŽETAK *Ovaj rad donosi preliminarne rezultate istraživanja u tijeku koje je fokusirano na proučavanje alata i procedura za učenje na daljinu. S obzirom na to da se svijet oko nas stalno mijenja, takvi alati i procedure mogu pomoći medijskim stručnjacima u boljoj prilagodbi. Autori nastoje definirati suvremenu ulogu i profil novinara te uočiti kako se njihov položaj promijenio pod pritiskom, ali i mogućnostima, novih tehnologija i globalne financijske krize. U istraživanju su se koristile kvantitativne i kvalitativne metode istraživanja, što uključuje dubinske intervjue s grčkim i ciparskim novinarima te online anketu upućenu novinarima i komunikacijskim stručnjacima. Autori proučavaju razvoj programa cjeloživotnog učenja, njihov utjecaj i rezultate s naglaskom na institucije za učenje na daljinu. Rezultati ovog istraživanja vode do zaključaka o potrebi restrukturiranja novinarskog obrazovanja i kurikula kroz uvođenje novih vještina. Čini se da je cjeloživotno učenje, u formi učenja na daljinu, prioritet za većinu novinara kako bi se prilagodili sadašnjem medijskom krajoliku.*

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