

Revisión

# Analysing the effect of the application of **constructive journalism** on the mindset and behaviour of journalists in **TRADITIONAL MEDIA**

Andrea Grijalva

agrijalvao@gmail.com

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**Andrea Grijalva** es periodista ecuatoriana con experiencia en medios de comunicación impresos y contenidos en plataformas digitales, enfocada en periodismo constructivo y de soluciones, con interés en crónicas periodísticas. Actualmente, es redactora judicial en el diario *La Hora*.



### **Abstract**

Journalism has portrayed the world with a “distorted lens,” focusing on problems rather than prioritizing a balanced perspective that includes solutions. Constructive journalism developed in response to this situation, and journalists and the media have implemented it. This paper analyses how the minds and routines of professionals have changed after moving from a traditional perspective to a constructive one, where journalistic values have been strengthened.

### **Keywords**

Constructive journalism, journalism of solutions, journalistic values, function of journalism

## **Análisis del efecto del periodismo constructivo en el pensamiento y comportamiento de los periodistas**

### **Resumen**

El periodismo ha representado el mundo con un “lente distorsionado” enfocándose en los problemas, en lugar de priorizar una perspectiva equilibrada que incluya las soluciones. Como respuesta, se desarrolló el periodismo constructivo, el cual ha sido implementado por periodistas y medios de comunicación. Este trabajo analiza cómo ha cambiado la mente y las rutinas de los profesionales después de transitar de una perspectiva tradicional a una constructiva, donde los valores periodísticos se han fortalecido.

### **Palabras claves**

Periodismo constructivo, periodismo de soluciones, valores periodísticos, función del periodismo

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## 1. Introduction

Journalism is essential to any society for it affects the core values and behaviours of the people it serves. It explains the world, holds people accountable, provides information, and contributes to democracy. However, these values have been corrupted or misunderstood, and an array of negative news has overrun the media producing a misrepresentation of the world by presenting reality through a “distorted mirror” (Pauly, 2009: 16).

Currently, traditional journalism is mainly focused on the negative side of the world and in its ‘watchdog’ role. Exposing corruption and wrongdoings are key motivations for journalists. Phrases such as “if it bleeds, it leads” and “no news is good news” have nurtured journalists into creating a newsroom culture centred on conflict that has become the lens through which we “understand and interpret the world” (idem). Newsworthiness is built around values that prioritise the elite spheres, the magnitude of events, and the surprise or the odd, while putting a low emphasis on good news (Tukachinsky, 2013; Harcup, 2009). Hence, it is crucial to grab the ‘whole picture’ of the world with news based on what is going well.

Multiple responses to this distorted journalism have come to light in the past decades. Public journalism appeared in the early 1990s to strengthen the “essential nexus between democracy and journalism” (Meritt, 1997: 14) and to promote the participation of the audience in public life. Solutions journalism came in the late 1990s with the objective of “reporting on efforts that seem to succeed at solving particular social problems” (Benesch, 1998: 37). Citizen or grassroots media reached relevance after 2000 by supporting citizens’ publications of news (Pavlik and McIntosh, 2017: 245).

The most recent response to the negative-bias in news is constructive journalism. Ulrik Haagerup coined the term ‘constructive news’ in 2001 to refer to a form of reporting that has a complete and contextualised perspective of the world. It seeks to expose problems with solutions and explain issues with a constructive perspective, while applying rigorous journalistic principles. Increasingly, journalists are changing their mind-sets and behaviours to incorporate a constructive approach. Media outlets are also including this kind of journalism as a part of their practices; for instance, The Guardian, the Huffington Post, the BBC, The Economist, The Correspondent and Perspective Daily now have this type of journalism as part of their ethos.



These are some of the digital media, studied in this research, that apply solution journalism.

Constructive journalism is gaining space and academic research is analyzing its impact on audiences and in relation to news framing. For instance, studies have defined constructive news (Haagerup, 2015; Jacobsen, 2010), determined tools developed with positive psychology principles (Gyldensted, 2015), and analyzed the changes on the representation of specific issues (McIntyre and Sobel, 2017; Zhang and Matingwina, 2016). However, there is a lack of academic studies on the effect of constructive on the journalists that are practicing it.

## 2. Traditional Journalism

### 2.1. Definition and roles

Journalism, from a simplified definition, is “the activity of gathering, assessing, creating and presenting news and information” (American Press Institute, n/da) with accuracy and credibility, separating facts from fiction and rumour (Picard, 2014: 508). It seeks answers for the five W’s --Who? What? Where? When? Why? (McQuail, 2010: 70).

Journalism has gained the title of the ‘fourth state of the realm’ as it is considered to be a pillar of democracy and a mediator between the state and the audience (Harcup, 2009). It is known as a ‘witness’ and a ‘committed observer’ responsible for providing relevant information to citizens so that they can actively participate in democracy (Florida Press Association, n/d; Picard, 2014). It is the ‘watchdog’ of governments and of the few in power, designed to expose corruption (Chalmers, 1959). It is the guide of public opinion, as it provides a “forum for public criticism and compromise” (American Press Institute, n/db). It functions to offer impartial, factual, and objective information uncoloured by propaganda or publicity and alerting people of the existence of conflict (Pauly, 2009: 13).

However, these roles have become, to some extent, a “litany of commonplaces” (idem). In fact, journalism has been criticized for being a “conduit that supports

the political system" (Shoemaker, 2006: 106), led by bottom-line pressures that commodify news, and leaving aside ethical principles in the process (Allan, 2005). In addition, it has been questioned because of its negative bias (Jackson, 2016), for providing 'soft news' without substance, and for having a sensational tone that "distorts people's perceptions of reality" (Patterson, 2000: 3).

These are not baseless critiques. In 'media-democracies' where the media can "set the agenda and influence how the population sees itself and the world" (Schmidt, 2015: 1), the exposure of wrongdoing has been favoured and the 'watchdog' role has become a defensive response. News is centred on conflict, drama, a crook, or a victim provoking growing cynicism (Haagerup, 2015; 2014), setting up a dilemma between being constructive or destructive (Huffington Post, 2011). Media has stopped being a useful 'burglar alarm' and has become a constant publicizer of "false alarms" that sound at an alarming rate (Bennett, 2003: 132).

This tendency can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century during the muckrakers' era (Chalmers, 1959), followed by the anti-authority riots of 1968 when activists became journalists, and later on with the Watergate scandal (Haagerup, 2015: 9). At present, almost all forms of conflict have become mediatized, creating conflict escalation (Hackett and Schroeder, 2008: 26 cited in Hamelink, 2011: 32). Media is even "enacting and performing conflicts" (Cottle, 2006: 9), while "representing an obstacle to forms of journalism that might seek to explore the causes of and alternatives to such conflict" (Lee et al., 2006 cited in Harcup, 2009: 42). Hence, journalism is not a 'witness' or a 'mirror' of reality; it is shaping and framing it (Gyldensted, 2015; Haagerup, 2015, 2014).

Consequently, in newsrooms, journalists are reconstructing reality by creating news waves of disproportionate coverage of events (Vasterman, 2005) and using 'pseudo-events,' such as press conferences, as if they were reality (Boorstin, 1961). As Roland Schatz said, "the problem is that the picture is wrong, because most news reporters systematically ignore the facts which do not fit into the traditional negative news angle" (in Haagerup, 2015: 11). This is in line with the framing effect of news, which is "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (Entman, 2007: 164); also known as 'decision-making bias' or the "motivations and mind-sets of journalists who allegedly produce the biased content" (idem: 163).

## 2.2. Explaining the News

There is no single definition of news; however, it is considered to be a social construct, a thing and a commodity that is deeply integrated into people's lives in such a way that its existence is not questioned (Shoemaker, 2006). According

to the American Press Institute, the news is the part of communication that keeps people informed of events, which empowers them to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their society, and their government (n/dc).

Journalists develop news following their instincts, based on the changing values and the “contradictory conventions of a peculiar culture” (Merrit, 1997: 3); indeed, sometimes judgments are made too rapidly “based on nothing more scientific than gut feeling” (Randall, 2000: 24). However, academics agree that events are translated into news for their relevance, importance, proximity, magnitude, element of surprise and entertainment. Negativity is also a common value (Leung and Lee, 2015: 289), as journalists embrace conflict as constitutive of their sense of professional identity (Pauly, 2009: 22).

Mental judgment and organizational constraints, work routines and political or commercial pressures (Tukachinsky, 2013), all of these determine news, which is “a selective view of what happens in the world” (Harcup, 2009: 41). In fact, while news “should involve careful balance of values, thoughtfulness, judgment, precise word selection, and attention to nuance” (Merrit, 1997: 20), journalists struggle with time pressures “to provide answers quickly and with certainty” (Hamelink, 2011: 33). In the end, the selection and construction of news “is probably as important or perhaps sometimes more important than what ‘really happens’”.

### 2.3. News Effects on Society

Regardless of how news is produced, it exerts an influence over the audience; hence, if news is predominantly negative, trivialized or fluffy, audiences will lack comprehensive information to feel empowered and act accordingly. A study revealed, “7 out of 10 people believed there is too much emphasis on bad news” (Haskins, 1981: 8-9). The audience’s perception is that bad news is considered to be undesirable (Leung and Lee, 2015: 290), “unpleasant or harmful” (Haskins, 1981: 5), conducive to a depressed mood, a hostile attitude toward others, a sense of helplessness, and a lower sense of self-efficacy (Jackson, 2016; Haskins, 1981). In the long term, it provokes disengagement, immobilization and apathy.

Currently, the excess of news has not translated into a better environment for consumers, concluded the Associated Press in 2008. Audiences are eager for in-depth content, but instead they receive “a steady diet of bite-size pieces of news in the form of headlines, updates and quick facts” with less journalistic substance, resulting in news fatigue (2008: 37-38). Audiences are disconnecting because the content has become irrelevant. For instance, the State of the News Media’s 2013 Report showed that 61% of people who left a news outlet were dissatisfied because the stories were less complete (Enda and Mitchell, 2013).

However, even though individuals are turning away from the news (Edgerly, 2015; Patterson, 2000), this is not producing any self-correction in the news system (Bennett, 2003: 133). The media “are not sure what audiences really want”, and “decision makers operate by a set of elaborate, long-held assumptions about what motivates viewers, reinforced by anecdote, inference and corporate mandate” (Rosenstiel and Chinni, 2007: 3). Eric Rasmussen claimed that the problem is not the media or the distribution of news, but the content that has become useless (n/d, cited in Haagerup, 2015: 17). His statement is in line with The Associated Press that confirmed that people believe that news did not offer “enough value” as it was “ultimately deemed unhelpful and ignored” (2008).

As a lateral effect, there is a rise in ‘social reflexivity’ (Cottle, 2006: 6), with people becoming ‘enlightened consumers’ who try to re-balance the quality of information they receive, finding the context and background by themselves (Associated Press, 2008: 46-47). The passive and silent audience is now producing and sharing information characterized by its fluidity, dynamism, and rapid transmission (Pavlik and McIntosh, 2017). Audiences, now considered as ‘prosumers’ or ‘producers,’ aim for a stronger engagement. Constructive journalism based on solutions has become a response that can increase the knowledge and sense of efficacy of the audience, while strengthening its connection with the news organizations and the issues that they report about (Curry and Hammonds, n/d).

### **3. Constructive Journalism**

#### **3.1. Definition and Characteristics**

Being constructive, publishing both the wrongdoings and what is going right, has been inherent to journalism, and journalists have applied it to some extent. It was not until 2008 that it was used to refer to a specific news format that derived into a type of journalism. Several definitions have been coined, but academic resources are still scarce. One of the first definitions was developed by the Danish journalist Ulrik Haagerup, who said that constructive news is “a mind-set to supplement the traditional criteria” (2015: 49) focusing on solutions, offering inspiration, calls to action, education, perspective and positivity (Fjum, 2014).

Building on this definition, Ad Fred Jacobsen agreed that constructive journalism is solution-oriented, but goes further by adding that it is mostly neutral with a low level of advocacy, while promoting citizens to be deliberative (Figure 1). His study concludes that it is a method or an angle to a story, rather than an additional news value (2010).

The screenshot shows a Guardian news article. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Support The Guardian', 'Subscribe', 'Find a job', 'Sign in', and 'Search'. Below that are category links: 'News', 'Opinion', 'Sport', 'Culture', 'Lifestyle', and 'More'. The main headline is 'UN to urge media to take more 'constructive' approach to news'. A sub-headline reads 'Officials say many people feel disempowered by the news and it needs to offer positive alternatives'. The author is 'Jasper Jackson' with a profile picture and social media links. A photo of Sir Martyn Lewis is shown. A small caption below the photo says '▲ The UN initiative is backed by NCVO chair Sir Martyn Lewis. Photograph: Dan Wooller/REX/Shutterstock'. On the right, there's an advertisement for 'The Guardian Digital Pack' with a '50% off' offer.

In 2016, United Nations called for the world's media to take a more “constructive” and “solutions-focused” approach to news. Screenshot.

A more recent definition explains that constructive journalism is a “rigorous, compelling reporting that empowers audiences to respond constructively by presenting a fuller picture of truth while upholding journalism’s core functions and ethics” (International Journalism Festival, 2015; Constructive Journalism Project, n/d). In this sense, it seeks to answer the question ‘What now?’ –in addition to the traditional Ws— to thoroughly explain and contextualize current events, show what can be done and the solutions that work.

Even though it has been presented as being new, there is a stance that supports that it is only another name for ‘good journalism’. Cathrine Gyldensted considers that in an ideal world, with fair balanced journalism and without negativity bias, there would not be a need for a new label (in Tenore, 2014). On the same line, the co-founder of the Solutions Journalism Network, Tina Rosenberg (cited in Ellis, 2014), asserts that journalists should report on how people are responding to problems with the same intensity that they report on the problems. Similarly, Danielle Batist emphasized that it has been applied before it had that name (cited in Aberra, 2017; International Journalism Festival, 2015), and Samantha McCann noted that people are naming something that had been done for a long time (cited in IJNet, 2016). Moreover, the latest study published by Karen McIntyre and Meghan Sobel (2017), and a paper written by McIntyre and Gyldensted (2017), propose the inclusion of three types of news under the label “constructive journalism:” peace journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative.

In this context, it is necessary to specify what constructive journalism is not: telling positive fluffy stories; or ignoring relevant issues, problems, and conflicts

(Jackson, 2016; Haagerup, 2015; Gyldensted, 2015). It is neither uncritical, without substance, nor is it advocative or unbalanced (International Journalism Festival, 2015; Verheyden, 2015). It is not public relations (AIBD, 2017); and it is not naive, superficial, irrelevant, or boring (Haagerup, 2015: 74).

The branding of this type of journalism has been questioned and criticized. Anton Harber has raised the concern that it could lead to a “sleepy, complacent society” when journalism should be making people see things in a different way and making them think and think again (in Tullis, 2014). Robert Wiesner alerts that constructive journalism “has pulled the teeth from the watchdog” transforming it into a “little pet” and making it idealistic (Fjum, 2014). Furthermore, Herman Wasserman claims that the line that separates positive from constructive journalism is not yet clear; hence, the possibility of the latter being uncritical persists (in Tullis, 2014). This is because “many ‘good news’ is badly executed [...] and ‘positive’ pieces are often written quickly, poorly, in a saccharin tone, or they are formulaic” (Benesch, 1998: 38).

In response to these concerns, Yanqiu Zhang and Simon Matingwina argue that constructive journalism is neither uncritical nor exclusively positive, but combines critical journalism with narratives that explore solutions and contribute to the representation of complex issues (2016). In their study on the representation of Africa by Western and non-Western media regarding the coverage of Ebola, these scholars determined that news with a constructive perspective worked as ‘counter-narratives’ that “offered alternative perspectives by celebrating accomplishments and finding heroes in situations and areas long depicted as backward and uncivilised” (idem: 33). In addition, Justin Ellis emphasized that it exposes problems along with developments, and identifies how change can be applied and how people can act (2014). David Bornstein also affirms that it provides information to help people understand the world and do better when facing conflicts (Ivoh, n/d) “by fostering conversation, collaboration, consensus building and challenging power to be proactive in providing solutions;” also, it can be powerful to hold people accountable (Constructive Journalism Project, n/d).

### **3.2. Put it into Practice**

Constructive journalism is based on how journalists report, rather than on what they report (International Journalism Festival, 2015), as “probably any story can be [constructive]” (Batist cited in Aberra, 2017). Consequently, when journalists develop a constructive piece, they include the context to explain an event, corroborate the information about an issue and search for proven solutions. In this way, it becomes a tool that can be applied to every story or on selected pieces (Kasriel, 2016). It is a complementary part of journalism (Inter-

national Journalism Festival, 2015) that covers the classic beats and “genres: breaking news, top stories, features, interviews, investigative journalism and debates” (Gyldensted, 2015: 48).

Journalists use constructive journalism to highlight “effective responses to problems in order to spur reform in areas where people or organizations are failing to respond adequately” (Curry and Hammonds, n/d), thus maintaining the ‘watchdog’ function. They need to be fair, and accountable (Gyldensted, 2015: 51). The notion of objectivity is avoided, while a balanced approach is preferred (Constructive Journalism Project, n/d).

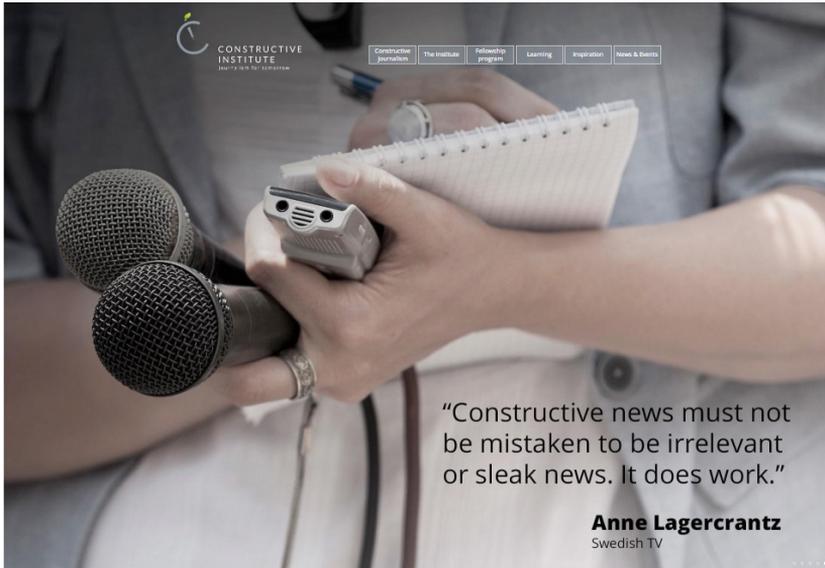
Currently, constructive journalism is spreading in newsrooms in two ways: it is becoming the only approach to news, as in the Dutch news website De Correspondent and the German web magazine Perspective Daily, or it is used in specific projects, like ‘World Hacks’ from the BBC, ‘Keep it in the ground’ from The Guardian and ‘What’s working’ from The Huffington Post. This change in newsrooms has represented a shift in journalistic culture.

It is in the newsrooms where the interiorised values of the journalists become evident. In the media culture, journalists are considered good if they have solid working practices and know where to look and where not to (Randall, 2000: 31), while also asking aggressive questions, digging into the wound, unsettling the interviewees and acting as “prosecutors in charge of things” (Gyldensted, 2015: 105). On the contrary, constructive journalists are recognised as remaining critical, but not attacking the sources as they look for background, interaction, analysis and understanding (Haagerup, 2015: 78, 109).

In order to become a constructive journalist, one needs to have a “change in identity, in culture, in approach, in workflow, in the questions we ask, in the headlines we write, and in the content we produce” (Haagerup, 2015: 114). To do so, Cathrine Gyldensted proposes techniques derived from positive psychology, starting by expanding the mind, which requires not being fixated on an angle or an assumption of a story. These techniques modify how interviews are conducted, asking questions related to resilience and learning curves rather than using phrases that victimise the interviewees. Finally, it tells stories ‘right’ and finishes them with a constructive closing paragraph. In the end, the product is meant to be constructive, newsworthy and “equally suitable front-page material” (2015: 76).

Applying constructive journalism techniques require time and work due to the amount of information that demands the publication of one piece. “Serious solutions stories are harder to write than traditional pieces” (Walljasper cited in Benesch, 1998: 38). They “can be tougher and more demanding” (Kasriel, 2016), because “the journalist needs to lay out the problem, point to a solution, and

then critically examine that solution” (idem). For example, constructive stories require to “spot patterns, to pinpoint the key to success” (Bornstein in Benesch, 1998: 39) and “dig into what the problems are, how they got that way, and what ideas offer some promise for change” (Walljasper cited in Benesch, 1998: 39). Hence, constructive journalism can be risky because “if you are wrong about a problem, it is a lesser offense in the eyes of journalism than being wrong about a response to a problem” (McCann cited in Yitzhar, 2015).



The Constructive Institute (Journalism for tomorrow) combats trivialisation and degradation of journalism. Screenshot.

## 4. Transiting Approaches

There is a gap in the research on how constructive journalism has influenced the thoughts, behaviours and routines of journalists. Although constructive journalism has been theorised to some extent, as exposed previously, there is a scarce understanding on how these changes have been experienced by journalists. At present, the only study referring to this process revolves around the practices of journalists before and after the 1994 massacre in Rwanda (McIntyre and Sobel, 2017). For that reason, it is imperative to analyse the influence that constructive journalism exerts on the work and practices of journalists.

### 4.1. Methodology

To understand the adaptation process experienced by journalists who decided to apply constructive journalism, a qualitative research was conducted. This methodology allows exploration to help understand the values,

beliefs and experiences of a group of people (Kumar, 2014). To proceed with the study, a deductive approach was used. It started with the hypothesis that traditional journalistic values changed with the application of constructive journalism, and consequently, practices, methods and approaches to stories differed. Finally, changes led to a perception of a stronger engagement with the audience. These hypotheses became the basis of the research.

Determining whether these hypotheses were true was possible by answering the how, why and what of the event or behaviour through in-depth semi-structured interviews (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). These interviews permitted to gain knowledge about pre-existing values, the way journalists encountered constructive journalism for the first time, their motives to use it, and the changes in their values and routines at the moment of selecting stories, interviewing sources, and publishing news. It was a process of “meaning-making partnership” (Corbin and Strauss, 2015: 102).

Participants were deliberately selected according to a purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007). Although this technique does not require a specific number of informants, it grants flexibility to data collection until it reaches a saturation point (Kumar, 2014: 247-248). Interviewees needed to have experienced the transition, and they were from different countries, as constructive journalism has been spreading progressively. The five interviewees were: one from *Perspective Daily* in Germany, one from *Devex* in the United States, and three from the BBC in Great Britain.

Interviews were conducted through video-calls (four) and in person (one), due to geographical and schedule limitations. All were recorded with permission from the interviewees and later transcribed. This study kept the anonymity of the journalists: they did not talk on behalf of the media they work for. To obtain the relevant primary data needed for this study, the interviews were coded and analysed to identify any categories and themes (Charmaz, 2014). The saturation point was not met in this study. Additional interviews would have given further information. Nevertheless, the results obtained are substantial enough to offer a better understanding of the transition process.

#### 4.1.1. Results and Discussion

Codification of the primary data permitted to identify two core themes: first the mind-set and behaviour in traditional journalism and second, in constructive journalism. The categories derived from the core themes highlight the aspects pointed out by the journalists regarding their transition from traditional to constructive journalism. The categories, listed below, are then explained and contrasted with the existing literature.

Traditional Journalism	Constructive Journalism
Mindset	Mindset
Motivations	Constructive values
Main functions of journalism	Full picture of the world
Serve democracy	Highlight/Find solutions
Explain/mirror the world	Future perspective
Hold people to account	Change in mindset
Prioritized journalistic values	New values
Truth	Reinforcement of values
Balance	Behaviour
Fairness	Routines
Objectivity	Selecting stories
Behaviour	Relating to sources
Routines	Audience engagement
Feelings	Colleagues and network
	Constrains
	Routine
	Culture

### 4.1.1.1. Traditional Journalism

#### 1. Mindset

#### 2. Motivations to become a journalist

The first aspect to consider is the background of the participants. Regardless of how they got into journalism, their primary motivation was to “contribute and work in favour of society” and to “influence change.” This follows the academic premise that journalists “influence thought processes and decision making [on] how people, voters, politicians think and act” (Gyldensted, 2015: 167). It is noticeable that four were interested in doing so through storytelling, while also presenting under-reported elements and producing in-depth reporting. Having the motivation to serve society reflects the consciousness of the power of journalism and the need to uphold its values, as stated by one participant in particular:

*You have to have core values. I think that's why people get into journalism. I think that's why a lot of people stay in journalism even though it's not the best paid, even though around the world journalists get killed or are under threat. (A)*

#### Functions and values of journalism

Awareness of the role of journalists in society reveals that the most relevant function is to serve democracy. For journalist D, “journalism is an integral part of society...and contributes to people living together.” This role seeks to avoid “just

lying passively on the page, but someone taking some action from it,” according to interviewee A. The journalist’s stance matches a study made by the Pew Research Centre that evidenced that 6 out of 10 professionals consider journalism as a distinctive profession because of its contribution to society (1999); it also confirms the theoretical position that journalistic functions have remained consistent over the decades and are “deeply ingrained in the thinking of those who produce news” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014: 17).

The primary purpose of journalism relies on the principle to serve democracy: “to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (idem). This means “the ability to reach the public with thoughtful things that would help them to make better decisions about the world” (D) and the functionality to “raise a discussion [because] when the story gets a lot of engagement you can end up having a national debate.” (C)

In addition, two other functions were considered important. The first was to “be a window to the world” or a “gatekeeper” (A), which means to “explain some things that may be new to the reader or the listener and by that give a broader understanding of how, on a bigger scale, the world works” (D). The second was the “power” to “sound the alarm” on the things that are not working, with the expectation that “some things will get better...and somebody will do something” (B). It is about “highlighting the things that should have not happened” (C) or to “shine a light and try to work out who’s really acting here or holding the government or people accountable for what they were doing” (B). This position is aligned with the American Press Institute, which noted that it “must serve as an independent monitor of power” (n/db).

Once the functions were determined, participants showed a certain degree of common ground on the main values that they believe characterize traditional journalism. Telling the truth was prioritized. For the journalists, this means to expose the truth “as you see, as you come across it” (A), “accurately portraying the facts” (C) and presenting a truthful version of the world by “not just focusing on what is broken, but to look at what’s working” (E). To do so, they considered necessary to have a questioning attitude in order to publish news that is “100% based on facts” (C), statement supported by David Bornstein, who insists that “the only bias in solutions journalism should be towards evidence” (cited in Dyer, 2015).

However, this raises the question of ambiguity regarding how to determine what the truth is. Some authors say that this is the “first and most confusing principle in journalism,” unanimously accepted as fundamental yet without any clarity about what it represents (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014: 49). Moreover, it is considered shackled by journalists who “reconstruct a world of illusions around their reader’s dreams” (Chalaby, 1998: 193). This ambiguity was evident

in the participants' position on objectivity. One interviewee stressed that it should be implemented to avoid having personal feelings in a story, while another recognised it is not possible to abstain from including individual perspectives, for which fairness had to be applied. The response of Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel to this stance is to seek a 'functional form of truth', which does not mean "*truth in the absolute or philosophical sense,*" but "*the truths by which we can operate on a day-to-day basis*" (2014: 56).

## **Behaviour**

### **Applying traditional journalism**

Having core values and embracing specific journalistic functions does not necessarily represent carrying them out in practice, due to the principles that the media emphasise, as explained by the participants. When they worked in a media environment that exclusively applied traditional journalism, three characteristics were preponderant while publishing stories. First, the pieces were "*always things that were new, newsworthy*" (D); hence, pointing out the controversy raised by Riva Tukachinsky about which factors turn events into news (2013). Second, the journalists indicated that the news was fragmented; therefore, the audience received a partial version of reality. This fragmentation confirmed the Pew's Research Centre finding that people leave news outlets because the stories are less complete (Enda and Mitchell, 2013). Journalist D explained this situation in this way:

*You always picked up a very small part of what's happening [and] the most important fragments [you picked] were the usual W questions like where, when and who and so on. And what was left out was, basically, the constructive journalism question: What happens next? Or what from now?*

Finally, according to journalist B, the pieces "*were always quite negative,*" with the purpose of "*always (...) trying to sound the alarm on the latest or next crisis*" to an extent that the way the story was told, or the information was gathered, or the questions were asked, had a negative frame on them. "*Somebody would cry normally,*" recalls the same interviewee, who would constantly frame his stories on the narrative of heroes and villains. A similar practice was shared by interviewee C because of her focus on data journalism, which "*by its nature has generally been sort of quite hard hitting and negative in a way that is sort of highlighting bad things that happen to people [...] that shouldn't be happening.*" In this context, it is relevant to notice that the journalist described her activities as "*almost instinctive*" proving David Randall's asseveration that reporters have a "*sharp news instincts*" (2000: 31).

However, there was another approach that the participants referred to when explaining how they exercised journalism. This workflow was described by four

of the interviewees as a routine that combined traditional stories with pieces that, although not labelled as constructive at that moment, had its characteristics. Journalist A was straightforward about it:

*I've been doing solutions journalism as part of my values pretty much since the day I started, before the buzzword of solutions, constructive journalism came into play.*

Not all experienced the combined routine with the same intensity as interviewee A. For example, participant B “was often interested in how to solve problems,” so his journalism revolved around those stories. Interviewee E was constantly searching for pitches around “what’s working” in the world, and journalist D was doing longer pieces that included the deepest context of a situation. This reality of working with an approach currently labelled as constructive was also registered by a research conducted in Rwanda. The interviewed reporters and editors “rarely used the terms peace journalism, solutions journalism, or restorative narrative, (but) many of the techniques used (...) can be seen as examples of solutions journalism and restorative narrative at play” (McIntyre and Sobel, 2017: 14).

Regardless of working strictly with a traditional approach or a mixed perspective, the routines that the journalists used had an effect on them, which was translated in to a combination of feelings. On the one hand, the participants mentioned being satisfied with the traditional journalism they had been performing due to three reasons: they learned from it, they were able to include constructive elements, and they considered it as being the best method to portray the world accurately. This reaction to traditional journalism is not uncommon. A similar behaviour was registered by the Pew Research Centre in a survey of 552 media workers, which established that “nearly all journalists say they are proud of what they do for a living, and they express general satisfaction with the values (...) of their own news organisations” (1999).

On the other hand, the participants experienced a sense of frustration because of the tone of the pieces they were publishing. These ambivalent feelings can be noticed from their expressions:

*I was satisfied when I could do longer pieces and I felt that [the classical form of journalism] was good for my skills, to do the quick and very fragmented business because it is always a challenge to your approach, to language and to news topics in general. But it did not so much reflect (what happens next). (D)*

*I'm not completely tired of doing negative stories because, you know, the world isn't perfect and you got to cover those stories. But I think people consuming news can get tired of it and you're also serving your audience. (C)*

*In the early part of my career, just like the rest of the news media, I was reporting on crisis and bad things, and as a young journalist, that was a good beat to be covering (...) After I'd been doing it for a while I became, not desensitized, but less shocked by how bad things can be in this world. I suppose I got personally frustrated that I just wanted to spend more of my time exploring what is the solution. (B)*

### 3. Constructive Journalism

#### Mind-set

#### Getting to know it

After reflecting on their work in traditional journalism, participants were asked to reflect on how they encountered constructive journalism. Their experiences differed. Interviewee A felt she had been writing stories that would fit into the constructive journalism model even before she knew about it. Interviewee B became “vaguely aware” of it through either Solutions Journalism Network or during a media conference. Interviewee C recently heard of it through a colleague. Interviewee D was introduced to it while reading about the media outlet where he works. Interviewee E looked at examples on other media platforms and started to implement it.

How these journalists encountered constructive journalism had a certain influence in their reactions towards it, considering that some of them had already been working with constructive elements. Their first reaction was one of scepticism, either before they started using it or if they thought about its possible flaws. However, they accepted it with certain ease once it was already being practiced. Interviewee C interpreted her experience as follows:

*Initially, I wasn't really that interested because I didn't understand what it was really about. I didn't put that much attention to it, until I had a moment to sit down and I thought: is this just all about positive news stories and happy stories and stuff? (...) I've never been interested in those types of stories. I've always been interested in harder stories. My perception was: this is just the end of the running order happy story. (C)*

And journalist B said:

It might sound that I am a great convert to solutions journalism, but actually I was very sceptical about it for quite a long time.

#### Delving in to its meaning

One of the first steps taken by the participants after learning of the existence of constructive journalism was to try to understand its meaning and reach. The initial concept they developed was that constructive journalism aims to present a complete version of the world by exposing the problems with possible

solutions or responses. Progressively, they were able to identify other characteristics of this approach:

*We often say that solutions journalism is just good journalism. It's telling the whole story, presenting responses to problems that might not otherwise make it in the media and pointing it out to an audience that might then try something similar or join forces. (E)*

*This approach [is about] not to only criticize things and point the finger to the wounds, but also to pull it out again and to try to heal it or to ask for how can it be. (...) It is not only to focus on the very small fragments of incidents, but also to see the whole picture; [to have a] future perspective and a construct system in a way that tries not to just demolish something, but rather see what's behind it and to build up things. (D)*

*This isn't just about a happy news story. This is about finding a solution to a problem. It's not PR. (C)*

Understanding the meaning and characteristics of constructive journalism derives from a conscious or unconscious process of adaptation from traditional journalistic values to constructive principles. Participants referred to two effects on their values: they changed their perceptions about journalism and they reinforced the values they already had. First, there was a shift of focus: the awareness of the constructive perspective lead them to be alert about finding stories that would fit into that category. For instance, journalist C mentioned: *"it's something that is kind of not in the back of my mind, but kind of close to the front of my mind."* Consequently, she is *"more receptive to it"* and believes it is *"something else that I ought to be thinking about."*

Second, realising how they had those values already, and how they were reinforcing them, represented a transition for them:

*I think I was already quite drawn to this sort of thinking. (B)*

*I think it has mostly reinforced my values. It certainly made me more excited about being a journalist. It has made me rethink what it can mean to be a journalist. (E)*

In their cases, having a constructive mind-set meant highlighting what they already believed, which resembles the experience of journalist A. She has become more aware of the values she upholds and the need to be open to different perspectives:

*I think as long as you're open, your values will change. It's like news; news is not static. And so, as a journalist, as a human being, you can't be static. You have to accept that your values change. One core thing will be static like a tree. But other things will have to change.*

Journalist D, who had a similar appreciation, also perceived the change in mind-set, where certain values remain and gain strength in the practices:

Every journalist does constructive pieces from time to time, but really sub-consciously. The unique approach of labelling your work is that you always do this kind of approach and always think in a constructive direction. I think differently in a daily basis meaning that I always focus more on the future and on the possible next steps that any issue could take. For me, it was very easy to adapt because I never felt opposed to it.

From his expression, it is noticeable the weight in addressing the work as constructive or solutions-based. It is not only having a different way of thinking, but also about being able to configure this way of thinking under a name. This premise was not exclusive to one participant, as it was emphasised that having a label empowers journalists and enhances the work that they perform, as it will be seen in the following section. Journalist B highlighted that:

Many of my BBC colleagues have been doing very good solutions journalism for many years. It just was never called that and it was also not necessarily packaged up and powerfully promoted as solutions journalism.

And journalist A mentioned that:

We'll get more buzzwords that look at more elements of the core values highlighted; they are new values. We should be doing that as part of our natural journalistic capability. We should be looking at ways of changing people's lives; it's in the DNA.

### **Behaviour**

With a different mind-set, the exercise of the profession was affected as the journalists realised that constructive journalism is a *"tool,"* an *"approach,"* a *"framework,"* a *"practice,"* or a *"path"* to be added to their current practices. This meant that the participants started to apply it in specific projects, in pieces along their normal workload or as the focus of the media they worked for. They *"look for solution stories,"* ask different questions, and *"look for the whole picture,"* while maintaining the journalistic principles that they had already been using.

Moreover, they have reconceptualised their role as journalists. For journalist B, *"you're something else: you are the solution thinker,"* whereas for participant E, *"you move from being a watchdog to a guide dog"* (E). Revitalising their roles is crucial for the interviewees, echoing the perspectives of several scholars. Erik Rasmussen argues that revitalization is essential to prove that journalism is one of the main pillars of democracy because, otherwise, journalists would be

undermining their importance and risking a justified critique for weakening democracy (cited in Haagerup, 2015: 17). While, David Bornstein notes that to help society self-correct, new and better recipes are needed (cited in Dyer, 2015). Other scholars also revisited this process and registered the transformation between faultfinders to pathfinders (Gyldensted, 2015: 169-172).

As this is a different way of thinking and working, the journalists recognised that it has been a process of successive attempts. Journalist C mentioned that she is in the stage of trying to apply it, but it takes some time to understand, while journalist B pointed out that he *“didn’t know exactly what we were doing on the first day.”*

Consequently, the routine of all the interviewees differed from their previous work. They recognised the need to be more rigorous and careful when developing a story, in order to *“cover a beat to drive impact”* (E). To achieve this requirement, journalist E developed a mechanism that includes: *“asking critical questions, asking for evidence of impact, asking for limits of that response, trying to put a response to a problem in context, and maybe noting what I don’t know as well.”* Another way of being more rigorous was found by journalist D, who goes one step back from the story to be able to *“get the bigger picture (...), add something that would otherwise be missing in explaining topics,”* and explain the connections between the parts of a story. Finally, interviewee C insisted that when finding solutions to problems, she has to make sure to challenge them and not just to accept them.

As constructive journalism requires a more rigorous reporting, the journalists agreed that it can be more difficult to apply than traditional journalism; in fact, journalist E mentioned that it is *“hard, but it’s worth it. It’s easier to write about what’s wrong and it takes more work to write about what is working.”* This made her *“really afraid to get it wrong,”* a feeling that was also shared by journalist C, who said she would be *“constantly thinking: is this correct? Am I doing this right? Am I going down the right path with this?”* For this reason, journalists are eager to learn more about their field, as noted by participant B:

You have to do a lot of reading before you go there to understand what the latest evidence is in the field. Otherwise, you might not understand what you’re seeing.

In addition, they might look to enrol in additional courses, not just to try to understand the issues that they are covering, but also the audience that they are serving. As a result, they recognised feeling better positioned to find good solutions-based stories.

### Selecting stories

In the process of applying constructive journalism, developing stories is as crucial as it is in traditional journalism because, similarly, they “are not invented, but they are constructed, that is, the raw material has to be observed, selected and processed into something recognisable to audience and colleagues alike as news” (Harcup, 2009: 46). However, the constructive angle or the solutions to the problems have to be found, which requires additional techniques. For instance, journalist E prioritises stories that relate to solutions and reports on the insight of a story, rather than just inspiring. Her strategy is to “*highlight what is working,*” bearing in mind that “*not every story lends itself to solutions journalism*” and that she will be looking for responses to issues where “*failed responses to problems can still be solution journalism stories.*”

Following a similar line, journalist D believes that any topic can have a constructive approach, even breaking news, confirming theoretical studies that discard the myth that constructive news is not hard news or cannot be used in any genre (Gyldensted, 2015). Consequently, whenever it is “*hard to figure out a solution,*” he takes into account that:

You should not expect that there’s always a solution in the end or even in the middle of the text. It’s that you can try to use the same mind-set and framing to explore topics, that there’s no easy solution for and ask constructive questions about how to move on.

Therefore, in every interview and reportage he researches for, he always sticks to the question ‘what now?’ and looks for deep information and context. Thus, when he is writing a story, it never ends with a problem, which avoids “*leading someone to a cliff, but showing: OK, there is a problem, but there are also solutions to it.*” This follows on from the proposal of implementing positive psychology, to have an ending with a constructive message, as it is one of the main aspects that the audiences will remember (Gyldensted, 2011). Similarly, what journalist A does is to research “*what’s happening elsewhere in the world*” and the actions that other communities are implementing, “*delving into a world where people are making a real big difference with very limited resources.*” In both cases, the objective is to “*try to broaden the audience’s view about topics that they wouldn’t naturally engage in.*”

This stage of finding stories was a learning process. For journalist C, it started with the understanding that a constructive story is not ‘fluffy’ or ‘happy,’ followed by the acquisition of a “*completely different way of looking at stories,*” and finding additional information. Nonetheless, she recognised that she has not “*quite nailed it yet,*” as this approach is still new to her. On the other hand, interviewee B has already exerted constructive journalism for a period of time

and has allowed him to create a frame that delimits the kind of stories that have solutions-based standards. This frame consists of finding a solution, questioning it, seeing if it has been tested, the method that has been applied to test it, and the evidence that is available. Therefore, when 'loony ideas' appear without facts, they are either rejected or published only as a small piece. Interviewee A, aside from using the traditional tools to look for stories, also considers "*seeds of an idea*" in different media and "*go back to my values and investigate that idea*".

### Relating to sources

The relationship with sources, as explained by the participants, has two components. First, they will look out for interviewees that were not part of their traditional bank of sources. Second, they will be clear on the type of relationship that they will have with them. For instance, three participants were emphatic in that once they find a person or organisation that responds to a problem, they will not write a PR piece for them. Rather, they will research what they are doing to understand what is being done differently. They will have a certain degree of scepticism. Finally, they will ask for evidence that the solution worked and the limitations, in case it is applied somewhere else.

This process has not been easy, as explained by journalist B:

In the early days of World Hacks (a BBC project), me and the other journalists struggled with this idea of what tone to use in the interviews (...) because you already act as if you are friends and you are not supposed to do that. So, we struggled...am I supposed to turn you into the hero? Or am I supposed to turn you into the villain?

The conclusion to which they arrived was this: "*not intrinsically be hostile, not automatically be suspicious;*" and remembering that their duty is not to the source, but to the audience. In this way, the principle of maintaining an independence from those who are covered was fulfilled, echoing the literature that notes that what matters in the relationship is how it will serve the audience, as the journalist's loyalty should be to them (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014). This principle was achieved, according to another participant, by being clear on the need to challenge the solution, while building a strong relationship with the sources.

*In the past, I would interview, say thank you very much and, afterwards, send the link (of the story) on email. Now I'm writing a story, sending the link and saying: OK what did I miss? What would make sense in the follow up story? Because the journalist is missing potential for impact if they don't ask for feedback and act based on it." (E)*

### Colleagues and networks

In the routine of journalists, the relationship with their colleagues is important. However, in the context of constructive journalism, it has become more relevant due to the need to feel supported and inspired, as mentioned by two of the participants. Indeed, for journalist C, it has been useful to know people who are actively working in the field, to talk about the concerns or doubts that arise from it. Interviewee E said she has been inspired by the work of her colleagues, as she has gained tools. The same applies to networks; for instance, interviewee A mentioned that they are key structures for her work.

This behaviour of pursuing bonding between peers is supported by psychological theory. In fact, in the research conducted by Cathrine Gyldensted, it has been established that 'High Quality Connections' between members of a newsroom can create a supportive work environment (2011: 34-36). Therefore, she suggests implementing these types of relationships in newsrooms, as they can foster "creative, flourishing and high performing employees" (idem: 36).

### Audience engagement

Using a constructive approach has allowed journalists to engage with their audiences more profoundly, proving what scholars affirmed: stories without a negative bias produce "a strong engagement [of the audience] with the stories reported, as well as a loyalty to the brand" (Jackson, 2016: 33). With the ideal of contributing to society, which is reached by having a better engagement, journalists have a stronger commitment and responsibility when informing. They "*take into account more reflection with the consumers*" (D).

At the same time, they recognised that audiences look for information that goes beyond the wrongdoing version of the world and add value to their lives, a finding that is consistent with the recommendation made by the Associated Press that says that audiences seek news that they can use (2008). In relation to this, journalist B said that he:

[j]ust began to realize that these generations are very constructive (...). There is some appetite out there to make things better, especially on certain issues. Somehow that tone is not present in our news stories. That's why I sort of thought that solutions journalism will be not only a good thing to do, but also quite a popular thing.

And journalist C added that:

People do get very tired of non-stop negative stories, so you need to find another way of engaging the audience, and constructive journalism is a way. You have to be mindful of presenting other ways of looking at the world, people providing solutions to things.

Journalist E also shared this affirmation: there is more engagement when people can see not only the problems they are familiar with but also the solutions. In this case, she considers that the story *"really stands out because it is not just what you see in the typical news cycle."* Hence, *"engagement is huge because people spend more time on the page, feel they have something to learn, that the news actually bring them some value."* This is not only a perception; it can be measured. According to journalist B: *"We were just getting huge numbers. The comments underneath the videos were fairly engaged."*

Consequently, participants are inclined to create a dialogue with their readers, and in that way, generate trust in the media. This is a very interesting finding considering that surveys have concluded that trust in media is gradually decreasing (Grierson, 2017; Swift, 2016). Therefore, having better content with stronger engagement is fruitful, according to journalist C:

It would surprise an audience to be presented with something that they are not usually expecting and the more you can surprise them, the more likely you will retain them.

In this context, journalist B believes that audiences are willing to *"give us permission to think a little bit,"* to present the solutions to problems, while also questioning them because they will believe that the media *"is seriously trying to tell me what's happening."*

As a result of constructive journalism, participants not only perceived a bigger engagement, but also a deeper and more fruitful one. For instance, journalist D asserted that the audience of the media where he works *"are quite constructive in the way they reply to things."* Furthermore, strangers among the audiences are networking towards a topic and starting to act about an issue, which for participant A is a *"mark of success"* because *"people are seeing reasons to pay attention to each other because they can learn"* (E).

### **Challenges and constraints**

For journalists, constructive journalism has meant dealing with additional constraints, which are added to the regular challenges of traditional journalism. They can be categorised into routine constraints and cultural constraints. In the first category, participants identified time, money, and the model of media as restricting, which has also been a constant complaint made by journalists and scholars regarding traditional journalism (Harcup, 2009; Randall, 2000; Merritt, 1997).

First, all concurred that in order to produce constructive pieces, they require more time, which is an already scarce resource in newsrooms. Journalist C was aware of the issue:

The only thing that prevents me from fully applying it is time. You got to build time in your week. With something new you tend to invest time to fully understand it.

Journalist E added that the problem is not only time but also workload, which affect the rigour that every piece requires:

Definitively, one challenge is deadline pressure. I'm probably writing 20 stories simultaneously. I must get stories out. I have to produce a certain amount each week.

Second, according to participants, developing constructive pieces is influenced by the difficulty to access economic resources, either from media or external funding. The concern of participant A is that *"if you can't find somebody to be a stakeholder, stories will get lost."*

Finding resources leads to another barrier: media reluctance to try new or different approaches to journalism. In fact, this is the main factor evidenced as a cultural constraint. Owners and editors reject implementing innovative projects or developing constructive stories lead by misconceptions on what they are. This is also because they are firmly attached to certain traditional principles. Two of the participants were exhaustive on this topic:

*There is huge clash of cultures in a way that old and conventional style journalists don't think that there should be anything different. The biggest critique about constructive journalism is that it's not really sufficient because some say it is just positive, imaginary and colouring the world journalism, which is not. (D)*

*Journalists pitch editors who in many cases might not totally get it. They might still think solutions journalism is PR or fluff or all the things we have made it clear it is not. There's not an open mind to who they are pitching. They can have a real struggle. (E)*

If the journalist proves with facts that constructive journalism can produce positive results, the constraints will diminish gradually:

*What you need to do is show that you can do it and then get some audiences for it. The early constraints would have been scepticism about whether it is really journalism, but when you do stories about serious subjects that are done seriously and then they also still get large numbers (of engagement) ... then a lot of that goes away because people say: OK this seems what it looks like. (B)*

Participants identified that it is not enough to change their own mind-sets and their practices, if there are cultural barriers as well. The change needed has

to come also from the editors and media. Only if the editors *“really buy into it, this journalism is going to work,”* insisted journalist B. Otherwise, journalists will *“have a harder time to switch”* and *“see this as part of our mandate,”* said participant E. They insisted that it has to be a process that starts with an individual who can influence his or her environment and can get support to implement the new ideas. In the words of journalist A:

People can make the accusations all they want, but if you can make a story that they wouldn't think about and make it relatable to your audience and make them go out and take action, then you've done your job. If it falls under the banner of solutions- constructive journalism, even better”.

## 5. Conclusion

With the existing theoretical background on constructive journalism, this research has aimed to expand the knowledge regarding the application of constructive journalism through the lens of the journalists who have experienced the process of transitioning from the values and functions of traditional journalism to the principles of constructive journalism. Through in-depth interviews with five participants, it was possible to determine the stages of adapting to the use of constructive journalism, which became evident when the interviewees found the mechanisms to select stories, approach sources, form networks, and discover constraints.

This research started with the hypothesis that constructive journalism changes traditional journalistic values. However, participants challenged this premise, as their practice of constructive journalism does not completely differ from the practice of traditional journalism. In fact, journalists did not change their values. They included constructive principles to an extent that their mindsets and routine practices were transformed.

Current media practices have distorted the roles and functions of journalism. In fact, serving democracy, holding people accountable, and explaining the world are currently considered commonplaces (Pauly 2009: 13). This has led to upholding a negative and flawed perspective of reality and the world by describing almost exclusively only what is broken (Haagerup, 2015; Jackson, 2016; Gyldensted, 2015). This distortion in journalistic values has affected the way in which the journalists portray the world, as noted by the participants, who have published or broadcasted fragmented or incomplete images of reality due to lack of information about the solutions or responses to the problems that they reported on.

When the practice of journalism was focused on a negative or distorted version of journalism, it produced feelings of frustration because participants were

aware of the lack of constructive elements in a segment of the stories they developed. However, even though there was a level of questioning towards conventional journalistic practices, these were not completely rejected. Participants valued the learning outcome, the conviction of the need to combine traditional and constructive journalism, and the belief that being a 'watchdog' and publishing reality as crude as it can be is essential for journalism. Consequently, this research has made it evident that journalists have ambivalent feelings towards traditional journalism.

## 5.1. Changing the Hypotheses

From the literature, it was noticed that traditional journalism had affected the perspective of journalists leading them to tell stories through a distorted lens and with a negative mind-set. However, the primary data and its analysis showed that although the journalists did execute part of their job from a negative frame of mind, it was neither their motivation nor their prioritised value. In fact, this study reveals that journalists –before encountering the label of constructive journalism– were already practicing, to some extent, its principles. This means that in their mind-sets, they already had constructive elements, which needed to be reinforced or strengthened in order to fully apply constructive journalism or to label their work as being solutions-based.

From the beginning of their careers, participants had a motivation to search for stories that presented solutions to problems, positive elements or versions of the world that show they are working. Therefore, their work presented a mixture of stories, which combined negative and constructive elements, although the negative ones tended to be more dominant. When facing constructive journalism in its fullest potential, the four participants, who were already inclined to look for a fuller picture of the world, implemented it in a more natural way. This was very different to the one journalist who had not such an experience. In this way, this research contributes to the existing knowledge by showing that constructive principles are part of journalistic core values, but they are either not practiced or poorly executed.

The initial hypothesis changed. Constructive journalism does not add new values to traditional journalism, but it reinforces its holistic values if they are not already distorted by media practices. In this sense, it works as an enhancer of the core values of traditional journalism, and gives broader opportunities to work under a new label. This study showed that journalists began to think with a constructive mind-set every day. When they look for stories, interview sources and information, they seek to answer the question 'what next?' or 'what is the solution?' The ultimate purpose is to have a greater contribution to their audience with a fuller picture of the world in hand resulting in more engaging media.

Considering that the main conclusion of this study is that journalists can reinforce their values through constructive journalism and, consequently, reconceptualise their role in society, this study aligns with previous research, which sustains that applying this type of journalism is crucial and it can be implemented alongside other forms (Gyldensted, 2015; Haagerup, 2015). Moreover, this study supports the labelling of the journalists' work under the name of constructive journalism to promote the enhanced values, to improve the routines in newsrooms and to increase the engagement with the audience.

## 5.2. Limitations and Further Research

As this research did not reach the saturation point needed for a qualitative research methodology, the results cannot be extrapolated to all journalists that have decided to implement constructive journalism. However, it has given revealing information regarding how the adaptation process works. Further research is necessary to delve into the impact of constructive journalism in the work of journalists, by differentiating the media outlets where they work, the period of time that they have published under the label and the country or culture that they live in to discover possible additional constraints and opportunities. Additional research can also point to the adaptations required according to the business model of the media in order to analyse the challenges, opportunities and facilities that journalists and the market experience when the outlets have incorporated the new label or that have been created as a result of the new label.

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