



Routledge Research in Journalism

INNOVATIONS IN JOURNALISM

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH IN FIVE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Edited by

Klaus Meier, Jose A. García-Avilés,
Andy Kaltenbrunner, Colin Porlezza, Vinzenz Wyss,
Renée Lugschitz, and Korbinian Klinghardt



“In contrast to its industry relevance, journalism innovations remain significantly uncharted research territory. This outstanding volume addresses this gap, for the first time on an international comparative scale. It offers fundamental groundwork, rigorous empirical findings, and aids journalism’s transformation, making it a valuable recommendation for both research and industry professionals.”

Dr. Christopher Buschow, *Professor of Digital Journalism,
Hamburg Media School and Hamburg University of
Technology, Germany*

“The pace and extent of innovation in journalism is breathtaking. This volume explores these profound changes and how they will shape the future of European journalism. With a comparative analysis spanning five nations, it examines the evolving socio-political landscapes, the impact of technological advancements on funding and formats, and critical areas of innovation such as AI, collaborative investigations, data journalism, fact-checking, and podcasting, as well as how journalistic organizations are adapting to these shifts, from new funding models to structural reconfigurations. If you’re a scholar, student, or practising journalist striving to grasp the gritty reality of European journalism’s recent evolution, this book is essential reading.”

Professor Lucy Kueng, *Senior Visiting Research Associate,
Reuters Institute, Oxford University, UK*

“A compact, profound and up-to-date overview of research on key questions of journalism. The volume shows in an excellent way what science can do for journalistic practice: It discusses innovative ways in which journalism can overcome its crisis.”

Christoph Neuberger, *Chair und Professor of Communication,
Freie Universität Berlin, Director of Weizenbaum Institute
for the Networked Society, Berlin, Germany*

“Nothing like an innovative book to study innovation. Researchers interested in media transformation processes, as well as editors, news managers, and media executives should read this outstanding volume that provides a deep insight into the nature, conceptualization, and implications of journalistic innovation for news organizations. From a thorough revision of previous scholarly research in the field, a hundred interviews with international experts and an empirical analysis of media outlets in

five European countries, this collective work addresses key issues to understand why innovation becomes crucial to help media outlets better adapt themselves to the ongoing changes in audience behaviour, business, and technology in the current news ecosystem.”

Jose Luis Rojas Torrijos, *Assistant Professor of Journalism,
School of Communication, University of Seville, Spain*

“An important and impressively detailed contribution to advancing both practical knowledge and theoretical conceptualization of the ongoing transformations in journalism. Drawing on a rich data set that encompasses 100 case studies in five Western European nations, the authors systematically explore a wide range of significant journalistic innovations and their relevance to democratic society.”

Jane B. Singer, *Professor Emerita in Journalism;
City, University of London*

Innovations in Journalism

This volume explores innovations in journalism: the goals and expectations associated with them, promoting and hindering framework conditions, and their social and industrial impact.

Drawing on an international research project conducted in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, and the United Kingdom, the book takes a complex approach, considering media policy preconditions and the social impact of journalistic innovation from a comparative perspective. The key findings are examined and presented on different levels: theoretical, methodological, and – as the focus – empirical.

Having identified the most relevant innovations in each of the five countries, a total of 100 case studies are examined to explore the influence of these innovations on the quality of journalism and its normative role in democratic societies and to analyze which preconditions support or inhibit the development and implementation of the innovations in news organizations. The interdependencies between journalistic innovations and their media policy preconditions are compared in a system-analytical way – concluding with the lessons that can be learned from the macrolevel (policies) and the mesolevel (organizations).

This insightful and truly international volume will interest professionals, scholars and students of journalism, media and communication studies, media industry studies, and related fields.

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Innovations in Journalism

Comparative Research in Five European Countries

Edited by Klaus Meier, Jose A. García-Avilés, Andy Kaltenbrunner, Colin Porlezza, Vinzenz Wyss, Renée Lugschitz, and Korbinian Klinghardt



ROUTLEDGE

Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2024

by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-63039-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-63044-1 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-63041-0 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781032630410

Typeset in Sabon

by SPi Technologies India Pvt Ltd (Straive)

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Preface

The perspective on journalism changes under palm trees. More than 200,000 of the tall “*Phoenix dactylifera*” can be found in the Spanish city of Elche and hundreds of them on the campus of its Universidad Miguel Hernández. In 2018, a small group of journalism researchers from Eichstätt, Vienna, London, and Zurich met there with Spanish colleagues to look at the evolution of media and journalism. Without an agenda, without panels, without a precise schedule and protocol, we wanted to compare experiences in a relaxed way: to recount the specific national developments in journalism, to highlight data and actions in changing media landscapes, and to discuss current research findings and observations of very recent practical projects.

After earlier joint work, research on media digitization or studies on the analysis of newsrooms, we were asking ourselves many questions in that creative Mediterranean ambience: why does journalism research describe some things as innovative in some countries that are irrelevant or not even new in others? What are the innovations that are relevant for journalism and its audience? Can this be evaluated in a structured scientific way? Above all, what do such innovations in journalism contribute to the development of our democratic societies?

The casual brainstorming sessions and relaxed debates under palm trees turned into a joint research project that formally started in 2020 under the title “Journalism Innovation in Democratic Societies.” We are now presenting a publication on this project. It was carried out as a so-called D-A-CH cooperation between the Catholic University of Eichstätt (D); the Medienhaus Wien Research Association and the Austrian Academy of Sciences and University of Klagenfurt (A); the Zurich University of Applied Sciences with partners at the University of Lugano (CH), at the City University in London; and, of course, at the Universidad Miguel Hernández, where the discussion started. However, it became much more than a German-language, navel-gazing project. Especially the comparison with developments and research findings in the “Atlantic” media system of the United Kingdom and those in the “Mediterranean” of Spain provided many additional insights. There were numerous questions asked by 24 researchers¹ (ranging in age from 22 to

61 years) from these five countries. For three years, they remained persistent at the core: what is an innovation other than just a shiny new thing? How does this innovation enter the world of journalism? What impact does it have on assorted media systems and our democracies?

We should mention that the start of the international project was not easy. The first phase coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and the initial lockdowns throughout Europe. For this reason, the work on innovation issues was necessarily as innovative as possible: on many channels, with new tools and a lot of digital interaction across borders. More than a hundred interviews with experts, structured for international comparability, were conducted in this first research phase, along with dozens of informal discussions with experts on media landscapes and journalism innovations. This book describes in detail how this project worked methodically, which of the 49 recognized pan-European innovations were refined by each country to a cluster of 20, and which 100 case studies were conducted across the United Kingdom, Spain, and the D-A-CH region.

Our thanks go to those several hundred people with experience in innovation research from various disciplines and with development and journalism experience in established media houses, as well as start-ups who have dealt with our questions over the last few years. They had time for digital conferences, face-to-face meetings, and online surveys, as well as relaxed exchanges of ideas and opinions that worked well over coffee and cake breaks. We also thank Routledge for their immediate interest in our work and for hosting this book production. Special thanks also go to the English language editor of this book, Marcus Denton of Derettens, who meticulously pointed out and corrected linguistic weaknesses.

We had given the acronym “JoIn-DemoS” to our research project. At the final face-to-face meetings of the teams in participating countries starting in 2021, an exclamation mark was often included. “JoIn-DemoS!” is intended to make the exciting developments in journalism clearly audible and readable.

Many media and journalists have recently gone through a vale of tears of difficult transformation; some found new ways and methods to ensure the profession, and others we got to know as winners and new beginners after that “creative destruction” that also occurred in many other industries as outcomes of digitalization and globalization. We wanted to keep one area special and significant in the research focus: journalism as the backbone of democracy that enables uprightness.

Innovation, we have learned, cannot be designed only on the drawing board. In journalism, there needs to be courageous announcements and disagreements, quality as a core target, and a great deal of trial and error. Innovation needs a lot of open discourse and exchange of experience, whether in palm groves, editorial offices, or research centers.

We express our sincere thanks for the funding by national basic research institutions of the D-A-CH countries: The German Research Foundation

(DFG) project no. 438677067 and 512640851; The Austrian Science Fund (FWF) project no. I 4797-G; The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) project no. 100019E_190126.

Klaus Meier, Jose A. García-Avilés, Andy Kaltenbrunner, Colin Porlezza,
Vinzenz Wyss, Renée Lugschitz, and Korbinian Klinghardt
Eichstätt, Elche, Wien, Lugano, Winterthur
October 2023

Note

- 1 We would like to take this opportunity to thank the research assistants Edith Michaeler, Giulia Ferri, and Francisco de Borja Quiles. Additionally, we thank Konstantin Holtkamp, Annina Bolien, Steffen Grütjen, Maximilian Weidmann, Antonia Ambron, and Johanna Moerk for their supporting work.

Introduction

Journalism is undergoing profound transformations, and innovations in journalism play a key role in this process. The increasing use of data and artificial intelligence, the search for new business models, alternative audience-engagement strategies, and the impact of social media are all shaping the current news ecosystem, forcing journalism to continuously adapt to new phenomena. Thus, innovation becomes a crucial element for journalism to adjust and to (re-)invent itself in the light of ongoing changes.

But what exactly are the most significant innovations that have characterized and marked journalism throughout the last decade? How can we describe the nature of these innovations, and what kind of impact do they have on the function of journalism in democratic societies? To answer these questions, a total of 24 communication scientists from five countries (Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) have worked together in a three-year project called “Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies: Index, Influence and Prerequisites in International Comparison” – *JoIn-DemoS*. The project’s goal was to identify the most important innovations in journalism in the last ten years in all participating countries and what factors promoted or deterred the introduction of innovations in media companies. In addition, the researchers sought to answer the questions of whether and to what extent the media system affects the implementation of innovations. We grounded the project on normative democratic theories of journalism, according to which journalism is an existential condition for democratic societies. In our understanding, journalism is responsible for informing people, holding the powerful to account, and empowering individuals to participate in society. Overall, the aim of the project was not only to generate empirical findings and to advance theory in the field of journalism innovation, but we also wanted to create empirically guided practical recommendations for journalists, media managers, and policymakers so they can improve the quality, as well as the democratic function, of journalism.

But what do we mean by journalistic innovation? The concept is somewhat diffuse in both academic and professional literature. Few authors offer a precise definition of innovation and often identify it with newness, invention, change, or creativity, but all these are separate concepts. Innovation combines the discovery

2 *Introduction*

of a problem or need – the development of an idea to provide a solution with a practical application to obtain successful results. Moreover, innovations are not limited to new products or technologies but can also be based on an original combination of existing ideas, processes, or resources. This book explores, therefore, the transformation of the media landscape by looking at innovations regarding the production, organization, distribution, and commercialization of news content. For the exact definition we have applied, see Chapter 1.

The aspect that needs to be considered is that innovation does not automatically guarantee either quality or sustainability, but it does provide a differentiated value to the company. However, journalistic innovations not only have repercussions for the organizations that apply them, but they can also generate trends or provoke shifts in the industry, and some might even exert a social impact due to the magnitude of the value provided.

Nevertheless, innovations are not independent of the context in which they emerge. In other words, any innovation is simultaneously a child of its time and subject to the economic and socio-political framework of a specific country. They are also closely linked to technological developments. For instance, market penetration of the internet put pressure on the traditional revenue models of the news media at various speeds in the countries studied. While the United Kingdom adopted a digital transformation strategy early on, the German-speaking countries in the sample (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland) had more time for innovation development due to favorable macroeconomic data and relatively stable markets with increasingly concentrated ownership. In Spain, the news media industry and journalism suffered from the economic crisis in 2008. This led to several media collapsing and massive job losses in journalism, but at the same time, it was the starting point for an experimental start-up phase. Around 3,000 new journalistic digital media, both at the national and local levels and often based on new financing models supported by diverse communities, emerged in the 2010s. For us to obtain a thorough impression of why journalistic innovations emerge in any country, several factors need to be considered, such as macroeconomic conditions, socio-political changes, and state interventions.

What can we learn from the findings? We argue for a structured approach to innovation and advocate an open-minded management that encourages tinkering and experimentation, and implements innovation based on quality management systems. One challenge with journalistic innovations is that senior management sometimes overlooks the complexity of implementing innovations in newsrooms. Prerequisites for success are strategic planning, resource allocation, interdisciplinary teams, and, above all, flexibility and adaptability. The principle of recursion is pivotal in driving innovation success by continuously redefining and refining rules, combined with allocating resources within a structured quality management framework. Ultimately, the book also serves as a strategic guide for media managers navigating the complex innovation landscape, highlighting the need for a systematic and deliberate approach for sustained success in the ever-evolving media arena.

In the context of the structure of the book, there are six parts. The first lays the groundwork for the empirical analysis and presents the theoretical framework on which the actual research is based. The book offers not only a definition of innovation but also seeks to answer questions such as “why innovation in journalism is useful not only for the media industry itself but also for society as a whole.”

Part II presents the methodological approach that we used in the project. The study is mainly based on qualitative methods such as interviews and text analysis. For instance, to identify the most relevant journalism innovations of the past decade, we conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with experts in each of the five countries. We then used textual analysis to code and analyze the interviews, clustering the results into the main forms of innovations that can be compared across countries. We also adopted a multiple case study design in which we analyzed specific innovations across countries. In addition, we also applied quantitative methods such as an online survey among those people working for the companies in the case studies.

In Part III, we describe the framework conditions for innovation in journalism of each country. In other words, we analyzed the socioeconomic context in which journalistic innovation emerges. Our main focus is the period 2010–2020, but in our analysis, we also needed to go back in time to consider long-term developments (e.g., the shift of advertising to social media platforms) or pivotal events such as economic crises. This is done for each of the five countries to allow for a better understanding of the emergence, development, and use of some of the journalistic innovations.

Part IV focuses on the main empirical results, which are the most relevant innovations in journalism. We discuss every journalistic innovation individually – for example, artificial intelligence, data journalism, or new digital storytelling – but also from a comparative perspective. For each innovation, we look at the following aspects: the aim of the innovation, supportive and obstructive conditions, and societal impact. For each innovation, there are also country-specific case studies.

Part V consists of a comparison of the assorted media systems in the sample in terms of emerging innovations. This part brings together both the individual innovations and the framework conditions and offers an in-depth analysis of what kind of innovations specific socioeconomic conditions favor or impede.

In Part VI, we discuss our empirically driven conclusions concerning the most relevant innovations and offer practical recommendations for journalists, media managers, and policymakers. Finally, we also outline the theoretical knowledge gained from the project.



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Part I

Theoretical framework



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1 Innovations in journalism in democratic societies

Theoretical concepts, definitions,
and preconditions

Klaus Meier and Michael Graßl

Innovations in journalism: concepts and definitions

Technological development has historically been journalism's constant companion. However, it is not only technology that causes transformation and change in journalism: political, economic, and social development lead to changes in media markets, audience behavior, and editorial strategies, which, in turn, impact journalism. Numerous studies have identified innovative approaches across areas of media. Over the last two decades, transformations have brought, for example, new distribution channels for journalistic content, analytical tools for more precise insights into the audience, intermediary structures to integrate external platforms (Hermida and Mellado 2020), and new forms of newsroom organization (García-Avilés et al. 2018; Lischka 2018). Some studies have evidenced that complex interplays facilitated the implementation of innovative news media products, services, and processes that meet user demands and needs (Storsul and Krumsvik 2013). Journalists and technical experts interact and collaborate more closely through open-source engagement, which fosters values such as transparency, tinkering, iteration, and participation (Lewis and Usher 2013).

New formats and coverage patterns have been introduced and established in the face of new challenges in a post-truth age and in an increasingly complex and confusing world, such as fact-checking (Graves and Cherubini 2016), “constructive journalism” (Meier 2018a) or “slow journalism” (Le Masurier 2015). Journalism's development has most recently been influenced by digital products and digitized processes, such as social media acting as new publication channels (Schützeneder et al. 2022), mobile journalism (Bui and Moran 2020), new organizational forms of content creation (Buschow and Suhr 2022), and artificial intelligence and automated content production (Dörr 2016; Graßl et al. 2022; Porlezza and Ferri 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has been an additional driver in many areas of innovation (García-Avilés et al. 2022), for example, in the field of data journalism (Bisiani et al. 2023) and remote working (Reyna 2023).

This multifaceted process of disruption is accompanied by an inflationary use of terms like “innovation,” “change,” and “transformation,” which, on

the one hand, are often used as synonyms, but on the other hand each has a distinct meaning and frame. Furthermore, there is the misconception that something “new” is innovative because newness is not the same as innovation; indeed, as Van Kranenburg (2017, 5) asserts, the term is often confused with invention. For this reason, critical understanding and differentiation of the terms innovation, change, and transformation are necessary and useful in the context of innovations in journalism and were, therefore, the starting points of our research project.

Innovation has been a buzzword in public communication for decades (Meier et al. 2022). On the one hand, the term is general and used to advertise brands and products. On the other, innovation is differentiated analytically (Schützeneder 2022): regarding products, processes, marketing, and distribution. The notion of “innovation” implies the capability to adapt to change and to meet and overcome challenges. Innovation achieves this by combining existing knowledge and using creativity, and can thus solve a problem or cover a specific need by finding an original solution and by implementing it successfully, sometimes in a rather disruptive way. Journalism innovation as a concept not only focuses on media products but also on organizational structures and processes (Meier 2007). Moreover, there is often an overlap between product and process innovation (Dogruel 2014) and innovation-enhanced services that add value to customers and to the media organization (O’Sullivan and Dooley 2008). Whereas the process of disruptive media innovation has diminished the privileged position of traditional journalism and brought with it new organizations that often label themselves as start-ups (García-Avilés et al. 2018), the legacy media have shifted resources to digital publication formats. This shift has created the multifaceted possibilities of innovative organizational media models described today as “newsroom convergence” (García-Avilés et al. 2014, 2017) or have established their own in-house innovation labs (Hogh-Janovsky and Meier 2021; Cools et al. 2023).

Media enterprises that want to implement innovative strategies to develop multi-platform products and to simultaneously improve news quality must meet a lot of requirements, such as effective communication from management, as well as a general upgrade of production processes (Westlund and Krumsvik 2014); a “change of culture” (Küng 2013); and quality management (Wyss 2023). Studies on media innovation, therefore, have focused their attention primarily on internal processes within the media organizations and on the overall newsgathering processes (García-Avilés 2012).

Research on media innovation explores change and transformation in several aspects of the news media landscape, from the development of new media platforms to ways of producing and distributing media content. Francis and Bessant (2005) identify four ways of targeting innovation: product, process, position, and paradigmatic. These four approaches are not tight categories, as they have rather fuzzy boundaries, nor are they alternatives. Companies can pursue all four at the same time. Storsul and Krumsvik (2013)

list ten key factors that influence media innovation: (1) technology, (2) market opportunities and user behavior, (3) behavior of competitors, (4) regulation, (5) industry norms, (6) company strategy, (7) leadership and vision, (8) organizational structure, (9) capacity and resources, and (10) culture and creativity.

Following all these considerations and a critical review of the scientific literature, especially the definitions by O’Sullivan and Dooley (2008, 5) and García-Avilés et al. (2018, 27), enabled us to formulate a precise as possible definition. Journalism innovation is the performance of reactions to changes or transformations of news products, processes, and services irrespective of size, radicality, and incrementality through the use of creative skills that allow a problem or need to be identified. Once the problem has been recognized, journalism innovation solves it through a solution that results in the introduction of a new aspect that adds value to either or both the audience and the news organization. The innovation helps to cope better with change or to drive transformation.

Henceforth, the terms “change” and “transformation” used in this definition are differentiated more precisely, as either the corpus of literature does not clearly define them (Hitham et al. 2023) or authors often use them synonymously. When developing a theoretical framework for our research project, we became aware that these terms need more conceptual rigor to clearly express and analyze the topic of journalism innovation. The nature of the process is the decisive factor:

External influences mark and trigger “change.” Change drives humans, who merely react. By contrast, transformation is a strategic process that humans actively initiate and manage, and often model on (industrial) changing processes, such as the shift from mechanical and analogue technologies to digitalization. In this context, the starting point and the aims of the process are usually known and preformulated at the organizational level; transformation is thus a systematic, longer-term process of learning, searching, and changing, often extending over several decades (Hölscher et al. 2018). While change can be characterized as a reaction to external environmental influences, transformation concerns observing the environment and using those observations to modify basic beliefs and long-term behaviors. In other words, transformation is the strategic response to change. Innovations, in turn, can be driven by change or can be an element of a strategic transformation. They focus on a specific problem that is being solved or a new need under address. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic as an externally triggered change process spawned innovative formats in science journalism, while digitalization as a long-term transformation process of media organizations led to the introduction of paywalls (Meier et al. 2022).

As the definition mentions, two degrees of innovation impact have been observed: radical and incremental (Christensen 1997). Radical innovations include novelties with far-reaching consequences on the economy and the market through creative destruction (Schumpeter 1943). Incremental

innovations refer to gradual improvements in which specific components and processes of the organization are modified – for example, in products and services or automation processes. Storsul and Krumsvik (2013, 18) note that most innovations in journalism are incremental because they “do not challenge the economics or logic of the media market.”

Missing pieces in research on innovation in journalism

Both scholars and practitioners observe a growing relevance of media innovation research. Though a connection between media innovations and social transformation in general seems obvious (Storsul and Krumsvik 2013; Bruns 2014; Dogruel 2014), there is still a lack of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings on questions such as: How do we approach and evaluate the impact of journalism innovations on the quality of news and, in a broader sense, their influence on a democratic society at large? Media innovation, thus, seems to be insufficiently defined and poorly covered by purely quantitative methods based only on scarce statistical data (Bleyen et al. 2014). Most research in this field relies on a technology-driven innovation concept and on its practical implications in the products and new narratives implemented by journalists and developers in digital media (e.g., Meier 2018b). However, Buschow (2018) argues there is a focus on the question of whether entrepreneurial journalism and journalistic start-ups are economically more successful models.

At least theoretically, some factors such as financial resources, corporate culture, or role perceptions are identified as drivers of innovation in journalism (Steensen 2009; Picard 2016; Deuze and Witschge 2017; Kramp and Loosen 2018; Hendrickx and Picone 2020), but often, they are only roughly differentiated at the macro level of media organization and the micro of individuals (Waschková Císařová 2023). There is still a lack of a broad empirical basis for framework conditions that support or impede innovations in journalism. Furthermore, scholars have not yet examined the extent to which the processes and outcomes of media innovation vary across international markets and the implications for media organizations, and a research gap exists in comparative studies about journalism innovations in international systems and markets. As Livingstone (2012, 421) argues, “[I]t is no longer plausible to study one phenomenon in one country without asking, at a minimum, whether it is common across the globe or distinctive to that country or part of the world.”

Innovation, journalistic quality, and democratic societies

To analyze these complex interdependencies and research gaps, the field of innovations in journalism requires a combination of normative media theories (Christians et al. 2009) and “theoretical and empirical approaches from economic and social innovation theory as well as media-specific frameworks” (Dogruel 2014, 62). The hypothesis that news media, with their innovations, are only viable in the long term if the latter contribute to the quality of

journalism (Pavlik 2013) has yet to be sufficiently and empirically examined and validated. According to our perception, studies on innovations in journalism should no longer focus on product and technology-related aspects alone but also on news quality, as well as on societal impact and public welfare contributions. We follow Mumford (2002, 253), who contends social innovations cover “the generation and implementation of new ideas about how people should organize interpersonal activities, or social interactions, to meet one or more common goals.” In short, social innovations are new ideas that enhance society’s capability to act (Loader and Mercea 2011). Thus, besides their economic value, media innovations impact communication capacities at the societal level, the organizational, as well as the individual.

Against this background, we based Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) on a normative theory of journalism that has proven to be a reliable, tried and tested common ground for the definition and evaluation of journalism, journalistic quality, and media performance in contemporary divergent, pluralistic, and democratic societies (McQuail 1992; Christians et al. 2009; Meier 2019). Even though it is more difficult to define journalism in the digital era because of its blurring boundaries (Carlson and Lewis 2015; Malik and Shapiro 2017, Meier et al. 2022), the central role of journalism in pluralistic, open societies is oriented toward a spatially and functionally differentiated society. Since societal subsystems, such as politics and economics, tend to drift apart, journalism is a vital binding force to interrelate, realign, and synchronize these subsystems and to provide them with a common repertoire of social topics and issues (Arnold 2009; Urban and Schweiger 2014; Meier 2018c). Therefore, it is an abstract but essential mission of journalism to actively generate a common public sphere (Habermas 2006) and thus contribute to ensuring that the basic values of democratic societies (freedom, justice, equality, order, and solidarity) are realized (McQuail 1992). In more concrete terms, this journalism role brings about three core tasks (Christians et al. 2009; Meier 2018c, 15ff.): (i) providing information, (ii) critical evaluation and monitoring (watchdog role), and (iii) citizens’ participation. Three fundamental values emerge from these tasks, on which quality is based and which can be used as indicators for properly assessing quality (Neuberger 1996; Scheuer 2008, 44–49; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014): Truth/Facticity, Relevance/Context, and Independence. These values are mutually interlinked in the current discourse framing the umbrella term “objectivity.” McNair (2017, 1331) argues objectivity “has never been more important to the health of liberal democracy” but must be accompanied in a post-factual era by the norms of transparency of journalistic products and processes (Meier and Reimer 2011) and appropriate tools that strengthen the accountability of journalists and newsrooms (Fengler et al. 2013; Porlezza 2018).

In principle, these core values and the resulting norms, as “standards of journalistic excellence” (Gladney 1996), have been analyzed by journalism research for decades (Deuze 2005). However, in the face of increasing

information overloads in the digital media world (with communication from governments, political parties, businesses, and organizations of all kinds), autonomy as one core value seems to be particularly crucial, which

is the central feature for the distinction of descriptions of reality that are either journalistic or alien to journalism, in the sense of independence from individual communication interests, as they tend to be expressed in campaigns, public relations, content marketing, or advertising.

(Wyss and Keel 2016, 3)

Even though this consensus regarding the goals and duties of journalism mainly expresses a socially desirable and rather idealized set of practices, it can be used to distinguish between journalism and non-journalistic communication. The label of journalism today is often applied to media content that does not refer to journalism at all, and this trend is set to continue, as the Swiss Media Commission, in addressing the issues of subsidizing media and journalism from a practical perspective, explains, “Already today and especially in the future, however, there are a variety of alternative forms of content generation and dissemination that are similar to and compete with professionally run journalism” (Emek 2017, 13). These other formats of public communication are driven by new means, such as public engagement and activism, native advertising, corporate publishing, content marketing, and entertainment. These activities increasingly want to participate in the overall reputation of journalism by simulating its storytelling practices but without adhering to its methods, goals, and quality standards. For this reason, if we consider its normative role in a democratic society, this cannot be called journalism but, as McNair (2017, 1318) defines it, “quasi-journalism.” The importance of this clear differentiation increases regarding the challenges for open and transparent democratic societies in the contemporary era of “disrupted public spheres” (Bennett and Pfetsch 2018).

Drawing on the literature (Malik and Shapiro 2017; Meier 2018c; Kaltenbrunner et al. 2019), our project defines journalism as the regular process of researching, producing, and distributing information for the purpose of providing orientation for the general public and transparency for society at large. The actor conducting this process is an organization that commits itself to sustaining democracy and to principles such as independence, non-partisanship, monitoring and scrutinizing politics, business practices, topicality, relevance, correctness, and general comprehensibility in order to guarantee this claim.

Media system and journalistic culture as framing preconditions of innovation

Both the understanding and the role of journalism depend on the structures of society, politics, and media organizations in which it is embedded (Giddens

1984; Altmeppen 2006). Above all, the following parameters must be analyzed for media innovations in general: media systems, media policies, media/newsroom organizations, and journalistic cultures. Hallin and Mancini (2004) contribute significantly to the classification and systematization of media systems and categorize the Western (democratic) pluralist countries into three types: (i) the democratic corporatist model, (ii) the liberal model, and (iii) the polarized pluralist model. Just one decade later, Roger Blum (2014) similarly classifies the Western media systems into three models: (a) public service, (b) liberal, and (c) free clientelist. However, research can barely keep pace with the rapid changes and transformations journalism and the news media now undergo. Nielsen et al. (2013, 83), thus, call for “further institutionally and system-oriented mixed-methods of comparative research to advance our understanding of how current changes are impacting journalism, the news media, and ultimately politics in different settings.”

Established models for distinguishing and classifying media and journalism cultures (especially those by Hallin and Mancini 2004) describe several typical parameters for assessment and historical derivation. Further framework conditions, such as more recent media guidelines and political regulations or national economic specifics and types of technology rollout, play a major role in innovation processes in journalism. In contrast to the “democratic corporatist model” of the three Central European countries of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, the North Atlantic “liberal model” (e.g., the United Kingdom) and the Mediterranean “bipolarized pluralist model” (e.g., Spain) have a different innovation experience (Meier et al. 2022). Innovation in journalism in those two regions began quite earlier, both in traditional media houses and later in new entrepreneurial projects, complete with in-depth discussions on the future of journalism (Franklin 2014).

In the United Kingdom, for example, developments such as digitization in print-media houses and the integration of multiple channels in a common newsroom (e.g., *The Daily Telegraph* as of 2007, *The Guardian* as of 2009) were pushed and driven forward several years earlier than the newspapers of most Central European countries (Kaltenbrunner and Luef 2017). In Southern Europe, the effects of the deep economic crisis of 2007–2009 forced many journalists to join forces and seek new opportunities within and beyond the unprofitable and shrinking traditional media market. García-Avilés et al. (2018, 25) clearly indicate that “journalism innovation occurs at the margins of the traditional news industry and, for the most part, innovation is expanding among digital native media outlets, niche initiatives and start-ups.” Thus, in contemporary Spain, almost 3,500 “cybermedia” are active as digital information service providers (Salaverria Aliaga et al. 2018) composed of small, start-up entrepreneurial journalistic projects as well as growing general interest web portals with dozens of employees. Only about one-third of these “cybermedia” are digitally native. By comparison, Buschow (2018, 207), in a broad 2015 survey of Germany’s new, publisher-independent journalistic initiatives, identifies just 74 start-ups.

Conclusions and outlook

In summary, the research area “Innovations in Journalism” contains quite a few challenges and has a lot of theoretical groundwork, but still leaves questions unanswered, and the complexity of concepts, conditions, and impacts is often not holistically thought through. In our three-year international research project JoIn-DemoS, we wanted to address these challenges and contribute not only to answering open questions but also to analyzing the complex interplays. In this chapter, we have set the theoretical foundations. While the literature provides clear evidence for an unambiguous definition of innovation in journalism, we had to make our own distinction between the terms “change” and “transformation,” which underpin the concept of innovations. “Change” is triggered by external influences, whereas transformation is a strategic process that humans actively initiate and manage. Innovations can be driven or even enforced by change or can be an active element of a strategic transformation. Moreover, we have explained that, as well as why not only the gained value for the industry or the media organization itself but also for the normative function of journalism in a democratic society is a crucial yardstick for the evaluation of innovations. In this context, we also emphasized the importance of a cross-national, comparative dimension that has received scant research to this point and which JoIn-DemoS in five selected countries will address. Chapter 2 explains the phases and methodology of the project, which build on these theoretical foundations.

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Part II

Methodological approach



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2 Research methods in the JoIn-DemoS project

Korbinian Klinghardt and Klaus Meier

Methodology and work program

Although media innovation research has become popular in the last decade, there is still much to be done in terms of theoretical conceptualization of innovation and empirical studies (see Chapter 1 on the theoretical framework). Communication science has generated broad knowledge, e.g., about the drivers of innovation in journalism. However, there are still research gaps on how traditional media companies and start-ups introduce innovation and associated data. What are the goals; what factors promote or hinder their implementation; what is the technique to evaluate their impact on society? Our research project, Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS), tackles these deficits and challenges. We investigate the impact of innovation in legacy and contemporary news media on the quality of journalism and its role in a democratic society and, furthermore, the influence of specific preconditions on the emergence of individual innovations, as well as their societal impact.

The first aim of the JoIn-DemoS project was to identify the most important innovations in journalism over the past ten years in Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Based on this data, we examined the implementation of the innovations and their influence on society in the five countries. The comparative perspective also aims to find out what influence the respective national media system has on the development and introduction of innovations in journalism. The applied methodology is primarily qualitative but combines qualitative with quantitative techniques in a triangulation. In the following, the individual research questions are first presented before the methodological designs developed for each are explained in more detail.

Overview of the research questions

The first empirical step was to identify the most important innovations in journalism in the countries participating in the research project from 2010 to 2020. The central research question was as follows:

- *RQ1: How can innovations in journalism be distinguished, classified, and evaluated in the five countries?*

The identification of the most important innovations in journalism serves as the basis for the following empirical studies. To gain insights into how the innovations were implemented in traditional media companies and start-ups (the second empirical study), country-specific paradigms of each category were chosen. Those examples in the context of each respective innovation either played a particularly formative role or could be regarded as a best-practice paradigm. The research question was therefore:

- *RQ2: How are innovations implemented in legacy media and start-ups?*

The following subquestions were specified for RQ2:

- *RQ2.1: What were the aims of the innovation?*
- *RQ2.2: What factors have promoted the development and implementation of the innovation?*
- *RQ2.3: What factors have inhibited the development and implementation of the innovation?*
- *RQ2.4: How is the impact of innovation in journalism on society assessed?*

In the third empirical step, the focus was on the question of how employees involved in innovation projects in journalistic media companies and start-ups evaluate the innovation and its influence on the quality of reporting. In essence, the subquestions regarding RQ2 were adopted but played out to a larger number of employees. The qualitative expert survey conducted as part of the second empirical study was thus supplemented by a quantitative, online survey with staff of journalistic organizations. The survey of the employees generated three broader insights into each innovation: (a) the aims; (b) the supportive and obstructing aspects of implementation on the levels of the macro- (media system and politics), meso- (media organizations and editorial staff), and microlevels (individual persons); and (c) the social added value.

The three empirical studies in the JoIn-DemoS project occurred in distinct phases over a period of about two years. The realization of the individual studies in the five countries, on the other hand, proceeded in parallel. Following these studies, the results were considered holistically and in relation to each other. A theory-based analysis of the data took place at the end. Based on an intensive theoretical study of the country-specific media systems, media policy, media organization, and the respective journalism culture, the differences and commonalities of the empirical results ought to be explained (see Part III, “National Framework Conditions for Innovation in Journalism”). By relating the empirical studies to each other and on the basis of the theory-based analysis, the following questions should also be answered.

- RQ3: What implications for media professionals can be derived from the empirical findings?
- RQ4: What theoretical added value do the studies of innovation research in communication science offer?

In this sense, the project was always based on the idea that the scientific findings should provide impulses and food for thought for journalistic practice and innovation research. For example, the insights gained could guide media professionals in how to implement innovations in journalism sustainably and successfully. The implications for journalistic practice are presented in condensed form in Chapter 28. The methodological approaches and the empirical findings of the JoIn-DemoS project shall contribute to the theoretical foundation of innovations in journalism research. Chapter 29 is therefore dedicated to the theoretical added value of the JoIn-DemoS project on journalism research.

Methodological design for research question 1: how can innovations in journalism be distinguished, classified, and evaluated in the five countries?

To approach “a research problem from more than one viewpoint” (McNabb 2021, 363), it might be helpful to use a variety of methods and elaborate a more complex study design, and the mixed-methods design offers this possibility. “The *mixed methods approach*” gives, McNabb explains, “researchers the ability to validate their results by linking the data extracted from one method with data collected by other means and in other forms” (2021, 363). Thus, by combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the findings can be substantiated: “Applying a complementary method in the design may help to corroborate the findings developed by a single method” (McNabb 2021, 363).

The project, in the first phase, developed a complex study design guided by the numerous research questions that was predominantly qualitative but also included quantitative data collection and analysis steps in the sense of mixed methods. Through the mixed-methods study design, we could “mix data types and mix logics of interpretation” (Olsen 2022, 3). The combination of assorted methods by triangulation helped to reduce the vulnerability of the empirical findings (Häder 2019, 288).

To identify those innovations in journalism that were significant in the five countries in the period from 2010 to 2020, a qualitative research approach was chosen. Since there was scant empirical knowledge on innovations in journalism, this research gap was closed with the help of qualitative guided interviews with journalism and innovation experts. Interviews with experts “are a widely-used qualitative interview method often aiming at gaining information about or exploring a specific field of action” (Döringer 2021, 265). This semi-standardized form of questioning enables the interviewees to provide more than just keywords and allows the interviewers to follow up on

any ambiguities during the interview situation (Brosius et al. 2022, 111). The benefit of these qualitative data goes “beyond simple description of events and phenomena; rather, they are used for creating understanding, for subjective interpretation and for critical analysis” (McNabb 2021, 241).

To obtain as holistic a view as possible of innovations in journalism, the sample of interviewees was divided into three categories: (1) *media-creating actors* who, in our understanding, work directly for media companies, for example, as editors in chief, and are thus responsible for the production of journalistic content. (2) *Media-assessing* and *media-advising actors* who, for example, as jury members, are responsible for awarding prizes for special journalistic achievements or advising media companies as members of external innovation labs. (3) *Media observing actors* who observe and study journalism and innovations from a scientific perspective and include communication scientists and journalism researchers. Based on this classification, a sample of at least 10 to 23 people was created for each country, in which all the expert groups outlined earlier should be represented. The researchers deliberately selected the experts based on factual considerations (Brosius et al. 2022, p. 69), i.e., their special practical and theoretical knowledge of innovations in journalism. In addition, a balanced proportion of gender and age played a decisive role in the development of the expert sample. Finally, a total of 108 journalism experts across the five countries were asked about what they considered to be the most important innovations in journalism in the last decade. The expert interviews were mainly conducted online via video call, as personal interviews were difficult because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions. This first empirical study was mainly conducted in the period from winter 2020 to spring 2021.

To ensure comparability of the results, the project developed a questionnaire that was used across all five countries. The questionnaire was essentially divided into two categories of questions. The first asked respondents to list what they considered the ten most relevant innovations in journalism in the period from 2010 to 2020. The guide to the questionnaire explained that innovations could refer to various entrepreneurial levels, such as production, organization, process, or commercialization, by which the experts avoided being influenced in their naming of innovations in journalism by either a specific conceptualization or a concise definition of the term. In order to obtain at least ten mentions of innovations, further innovations in journalism were asked. Therefore, the questionnaire provided various memory aids that the researchers were able to draw on during the survey. Following the survey, the interviews were transcribed, partly with the help of the transcription software Trint. In some cases, the interviews were coded immediately while listening to the audio file of the interview.

The first step of analysis, following the procedure by Meuser and Nagel (2009), coded all the innovations in journalism mentioned by the experts during the interviews, which enabled around 1,000 mentions of innovations to be identified across all five countries. Based on the context and reasons given by

the experts, the mentions of innovations were then bundled into innovation areas. The initial clustering of the mentions of innovations occurred at the level of the individual countries. Subsequently, the clusters were compared across countries and aligned with each other based on jointly developed definitions. In this way, a total of 49 uniform innovation areas were developed inductively across the five countries. The clustering made clear that, for example, collaborative-investigative journalism, the introduction of paywalls, and data journalism were considered to be important innovations in journalism in the past ten years across all five countries. However, country-specific areas of innovation could also be identified. For example, editorial quality management systems (EQMS) were only considered an innovation by the Swiss experts.

To identify the 20 most important innovations in each country from a normative point of view, an evaluation matrix was developed and applied to all innovation areas. It consisted of three parameters: (1) *number of mentions* of innovations within an innovation area: one point was awarded for each mention by an expert, which meant that each innovation area could receive a maximum of 20 points; if the expert named an innovation where they were involved, e.g., in the development of the innovation, only half a point was awarded; (2) *impact on society*: a high impact on society was rewarded with ten points, a low with zero points. The assessment of the impact on society was based on the United Nations' Social Sustainability Concept and Bruns' (2014) innovation concept; (3) *impact on the industry*: if the impact of the area of innovation on journalism was classified as incremental, five points were awarded. If the influence was rated as radical, ten points were awarded. This differentiation between incremental and radical innovations was primarily based on Christensen (1997) and Tidd and Bessant (2005). Thus, the maximum number of points that an innovation area could receive was 40. The awarding of points was up to the individual country teams. The result was a list per country with the 20 most important innovations (see Table 2.1).

Meier et al. (2022) published the results of the first study, in which 8 of the total 49 innovation areas were present in the 20 most relevant innovation areas in all five countries in the study. These included data journalism, collaborative-investigative journalism, engagement on the basis of data, news on social media, diversity and inclusion, paywalls/paid content, AI/automation, and new organizational forms and teams. New digital storytelling, citizen participation, mobile media services and live journalism, audio/podcast and tools, and management/remote work were important areas of innovation (top 20) in four countries each. Fact-checking, membership models, newsletters, media labs, and donation and crowdfunding were considered top innovations in journalism in three countries each. There were 17 areas of innovation that only one, or at most two, countries considered the most important in journalism. The decisive factors for the identification of these most important innovations were not only the naming by the experts but also the scoring by the scientists. Meier et al. (2022, 711) also “found significant differences in journalism innovations between countries with different media cultures, but also within the

Table 2.1 The 20 most important, evaluated by country experts to a maximum of 40 points, areas of innovation by country for 2010–2020 in the JoIn-DemoS project

<i>Austria</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Spain</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>
Collaborative-investigative journalism (26.5)	Collaborative-investigative journalism (33.5)	Data journalism (33)	Start-ups (32)	Data journalism (29.5)
Mobile media services and live journalism (25.5)	Engagement on the basis of data (31.5)	New (digital) storytelling (30.5)	Citizen participation (27.5)	New (digital) storytelling (29)
Data journalism (23.5)	Citizen participation (30)	Fact-checking (28)	New organizational forms and teams (27)	Engagement on the basis of data (28.5)
Paywalls and paid content (23)	News on social media (30)	News on social media (26.5)	Data journalism (26.5)	Collaborative-investigative journalism (28.5)
Diversity and inclusion (23)	Data journalism (27)	Mobile media services and live journalism (26)	Targeting (26)	Fact-checking (21.5)
Audio/podcast (22)	New (digital) storytelling (25.5)	Membership models (23.5)	New (digital) storytelling (25)	Local journalism (21.5)
Start-ups (20)	Constructive journalism (25)	Audio/podcast (23)	AI and automation (24)	Tools and management/remote work (21)
Tools discourse quality (19)	Audio/podcast (24)	Newsletter (21)	News on social media (23.5)	Citizen participation (20)
Personal/digital meetings (18)	Membership models (24)	Paywalls and paid content (21)	Engagement on the basis of data (19)	Diversity and inclusion (19.5)
New organizational forms and teams (17.5)	Diversity and inclusion (22)	Tools and management/remote work (21)	Local journalism (18.5)	AI and Automation (19)
AI and automation (17)	Fact-checking (22)	Para-journalistic actors (20)	Quality management (18)	Mobile media services and live journalism (18)
News on social media (17)	New organizational forms and teams (19)	AI and automation (19)	Para-journalistic actors (18)	Constructive journalism (17.5)

Citizen participation (17)	Paywalls and paid content (19)	Engagement on the basis of data (19)	Collaborative-investigative journalism (18)	Paywalls and paid content (16.5)
Newsletter (16)	Science journalism (19)	Foundation funding (19)	Tools and management/remote work (16)	Niche media (16)
News only TV channel (16)	Mobile media services and live journalism (17)	New organizational forms and teams (17)	Diversity and inclusion (16)	Foundation funding (16)
Engagement on the basis of data (15)	AI and automation (16)	Collaborative-investigative journalism (17)	Audio/podcast (13)	Media labs (14)
Media labs (15)	Donations and crowdfunding (15)	Diversity and inclusion (17)	Paywalls and paid-content (13)	Other financing models (14)
Video by print media (15)	Tools and Management/remote work (15)	Science journalism (17)	Newsletter (12)	Membership models (14)
Entrepreneurial journalism (13)	Corporate culture (14)	Media labs (17)	Niche media (10)	New organizational forms and teams (13.5)
Donations and crowdfunding (12)	Other financing models (14)	Branded content (13.5)	Donations and crowdfunding (10)	News on social media (13)

Source: JoIn-DemoS project research data

D-A-CH countries that share similar media systems and journalistic cultures.” Meier et al. (2022) suggest the rise of journalistic start-ups in Spain can be seen as a reaction to the numerous layoffs in the context of the economic crisis in 2008, whereas in Central European countries, such as Switzerland, only later did start-ups take on a significant role. Moreover, Meier et al. (2022, 711) define the aspect of cooperation as an “overarching principle in journalism on many levels” that is manifest, for example, in the innovation area of collaborative, investigative journalism, under which cross-media house (and international) cooperations with a view to investigative research are summarized. Holistically, this study can be seen as “the first attempt to sort out the hitherto complex and opaque field of journalism innovations, to identify fields of innovations and to justify them methodically” (Meier et al. 2022, 712).

Methodological design for research question 2: how are innovations implemented in legacy media and start-ups?

In the second empirical step, the 20 most important areas of innovation were examined in greater depth through the case studies. The aim was to find out how traditional journalistic media organizations and start-ups developed and implemented these innovations. First, each country selected a media organization or start-up for each of the project’s most important areas of innovation. The selected units could be considered formative for the respective area of innovation, either because it implemented early on a specific area of innovation or had a lighthouse role. One hundred case studies were thus conducted across countries. For the innovation area of collaborative-investigative journalism, for example, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)* was chosen as a case by the researchers in Germany because *SZ* initiated the revelations of the Panama Papers and can thus be considered a best-practice example for this innovation area. Regarding the innovation area of fact-checking, in the case of Spain, for example, *Maldita.es* was chosen because it played a pioneering role in the Spanish media market in debunking fake news.

To find out more about the goals of the innovations, the supporting and obstructive aspects as well as the potential influence on society, qualitative, guideline-based interviews were conducted with experts. However, the status of the experts in the case studies differs from the role of the experts in the first study. The experts interviewed here are, without exception, representatives of the case studies – i.e., they are media practitioners who were familiar with the respective area of innovation in their media company and had either or both a responsible task and a managerial role. Regarding the innovation area of donations and crowdfunding, for example, *Dossier* was selected as a case study in Austria because it was considered a first mover of this financing strategy. Florian Skrabal, the founder of *Dossier*, was interviewed as an expert on this area of innovation. To give the interviewees as much freedom as possible in their response behavior, the questions were formulated in an open-ended way. One to three experts were interviewed for each innovation area in the five countries. If media organizations can be considered pioneers or leaders in more than one

area of innovation, the corresponding media organizations were selected for several case studies. In addition, the decision in favor of a media company was also influenced in part by its size, geographical location, and newness or permanence. *Dossier*, for example, was not only chosen as an example in Austria for the area of innovation donations and crowdfunding but also for collaborative-investigative journalism. In total, 137 media professionals were interviewed across countries, mainly from autumn 2021 until autumn 2022. Similar to the first empirical study, the experts in the case studies were generally interviewed online via video call. In some cases, personal face-to-face interviews were also conducted on the premises of the media organization. See Table 2.2 for the selection of journalistic media organizations, editorial offices, or formats as examples in each country for the study of the respective innovation. The table starts first with the innovation areas that occur in all countries. At the bottom of the table, those areas of innovation are listed that were mentioned only occasionally.

The interviews with the 137 media professionals that were conducted across countries were then transcribed and examined with content analysis methods. Following Mayring's strategy of structuring within the framework of qualitative content analysis, the central variables (goals of innovation/facilitating and obstructive factors/societal impact) were deductively derived from the guideline (Mayring 2022, 96–103). This strategy of structuring includes developing categories before analyzing the data material to then systematically record all those text elements that can be subsumed under those categories (Mayring 2022, 96). The analysis software MAXQDA and Microsoft Excel were used for the coding process. To be able to compare the data across countries, the codes were subsequently transferred into a uniform Excel data mask. In this way, the researchers were able to compare and correlate the data and identify similarities, but also differences, for example with a view to the aims of the innovation. In each country team, the most important findings from the interviews were summarized in working documents together with general information about the selected media organization.

The quantitative online survey, as the third empirical step, was conducted in spring 2022. The questionnaire that was created with the help of the survey tool Qualtrics consisted of a total of seven closed questions. The main purpose of the online survey was to obtain employees' assessments of the implementation of an innovation area in the respective media company. For example, on a five-point Likert scale, they were asked to rate various aspects, such as the importance of interdisciplinary teams or the role of state media funding, in terms of their significance for the introduction of the particular area of innovation in their media company. To increase the response rate to the online survey, the experts who were interviewed in the case studies were asked to forward the survey to their employees. Eventually, responses from a total of 239 people across the five countries were evaluated. The following overview shows the number of study participants, broken down by area of innovation and selected journalistic media company (see Table 2.3). The number of participants includes all those who took part in the survey for a specific innovation area across all countries.

Table 2.2 Areas of innovation ($n = 35$) and country-specific representatives, ranked by incidence across all five countries

<i>Name of Innovation</i>	<i>Austria</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Spain</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>
Data journalism	ORF ZIB data team	BR Data	Datadista	NZZ visuals team	Our world in data
Collaborative/ Investigative	Dossier	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Civio	Tamedia	Bellingcat
Engagement on the basis of data	Vorarlberger Nachrichten (Ländlepunkte)	Ippen Verlag	El Español	Ringier Inc.	Financial Times
News on social media	Zeit im Bild ORF ZIB	3	4	SRF tagesschau	BBC
Diversity and inclusion	Biber academy	Auf Klo	Pikara Magazine	SRF	Black Ballad
Paywalls/paid content	Kleine Zeitung	Bild-Zeitung	El Mundo	Tamedia	Financial Times
Automation	APA Media Lab	Rheinische Post	Newtral.es	Software Lena	Urbs Media
New organizational forms and teams	Kleine Zeitung	Mainpost	El País	Südostschweiz	The Bureau of Investigative Journalism
New digital storytelling	—	Der Spiegel	RTVE	Reflekt	BBC
Citizen participation	Regionalmedien Austria (Regionauten)	Westfalenpost	—	20 Minuten/ Tamedia/TX Group	Bristol Cable
Mobile media services and live journalism	Der Standard	n-tv	Diari Ara	—	The Times
Audio/podcast	Erklär mir die Welt	Die Zeit	Podium Podcast	Durchblick	—
Tools and management/ remote work	—	VRM	El Heraldo de Aragón	We.Publish	—
Fact-checking	—	BR Faktenfuchs	Maldita.es	—	Full Fact
Membership models	—	Steady	eldiario.es	—	The Economist
Newsletter	Falter.morgen	—	Kloshletter	Heidi.News	—
Media labs	APA Media Lab	—	El Confidencial	—	BBC
Crowdfunding	Dossier	Correctiv	—	Hauptstadt	—
Journalism start-ups	Die Tagespresse	—	—	Bajour	—

Local journalism	—	—	—	Tsüri.ch	The Bureau Local
Constructive journalism	—	Perspective Daily	—	—	Tortoise
Foundation funding	—	—	porCausa	—	The Conversation
Para-journalism	—	—	Mr Underdog	individual company	—
Science journalism	—	Science Media Center	Materia	—	—
Niche media	—	—	—	Babanews	On Our Radar
Other financing models	—	Relevanzreporter	—	—	Axate
Targeting	—	—	—	RSI	—
Quality management	—	—	—	Radio Central/ Sunshine	—
Tools discourse quality	Der Standard	—	—	—	—
Personal/digital meetings	Der Standard	—	—	—	—
News only TV channel	Puls24	—	—	—	—
Video by print media	krone.tv	—	—	—	—
Corporate culture	—	SWR X-Lab	—	—	—
Entrepreneurial journalism	diesubstanz.at	—	—	—	—
Branded content	—	—	Vocento	—	—

Source: JoIn-DemoS project research data

Table 2.3 Areas of innovation, selected country-specific media initiatives, and number of participants

<i>Area of innovation (in alphabetical order)</i>	<i>Selected country-specific media initiatives</i>
Automation	<i>Austrian Press Agency (AT), Rheinische Post (DE), Newtral (SP), LENA (CH), Urbs Media (UK)</i>
Audio/podcast	<i>Erklär mir die Welt (AT), DIE ZEIT (DE), Podium Podcast (SP), Durchblick/Blick (CH)</i>
Corporate culture	<i>VRM (DE), Heraldo de Aragón (SP), We Publish (CH)</i>
Citizen participation	<i>RegionalMedien (AT), Heimatcheck/Westfalenpost (DE), 20 Minuten/Tamedia (CH), Bristol Cable (UK)</i>
Collaborative-investigative journalism	<i>Dossier (AT), Süddeutsche Zeitung (DE), Civio (SPA), Tamedia (CH), Bellingcat (UK)</i>
Data journalism	<i>Österreichische Rundfunk (AT), Bayerischer Rundfunk (DE), Datadista (SP), Neue Zürcher Zeitung (CH), Our World in Data (UK)</i>
Diversity and inclusion	<i>Biber Academy (AT), Auf Klo/funk (DE), Pikara Magazine (SP), Chance 50:50 (CH), Black Ballad (UK)</i>
Donations and crowdfunding	<i>Dossier (AT), Correctiv (DE), Hauptstadt (CH)</i>
Engagement on the basis of data	<i>Ländlepunkte/Vorarlberger Nachrichten (AT), Ippen Media (DE), El Español (SP), Star (CH), Financial Times (UK)</i>
Fact-checking	<i>#faktenfuchs/Bayerischer Rundfunk (DE), Maldita.es (SP), Full Fact (UK)</i>
Media labs	<i>Austrian Press Agency (AT), El Confidencial Lab (SP), BBC News Lab (UK)</i>
Membership models	<i>Steady (DE), eldiario.es (SP), The Economist (UK)</i>
Mobile and live journalism	<i>Der Standard (AT), n-tv (DE), Diari Ara (SP), The Times (UK)</i>
New (digital) storytelling	<i>Der Spiegel (DE), RTVE Lab (SP), Reflekt (CH), BBC Global News (UK)</i>
Newsletters	<i>Falter (AT), Klostletter (SP), Heidi.News (CH)</i>
Paywalls and paid content	<i>Kleine Zeitung (AT), Bild (DE), El Mundo (SP), Tamedia/TX Group (CH), Financial Times (UK)</i>
News on social media	<i>Zeit im Bild/ORF (AT), Tagesschau/ARD (DE), Sphera Sports (SP), SRF tagesschau (CH), BBC (UK)</i>
Tools and management/remote work	<i>VRM (DE), Heraldo de Aragón (SP), We Publish (CH)</i>

Source: JoIn-DemoS project research data

In summary, the numerous, diverse research questions of the project required the complex methodological program just outlined. Especially the inductive formation of innovation categories based on the experts' explanations in the first empirical study has proven to be a successful method for clustering. This enabled the study to ensure that the mentions of innovations were grouped together with a view to their specific innovation potential. This method, as well as the scoring matrix that JoIn-DemoS created, can be further developed and fruitfully adapted for other journalism research projects.

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Part III

**National framework conditions
for innovation in journalism**



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3 Country report Austria

Difficult departure from the comfort zone

*Andy Kaltenbrunner, Renée Lugschitz, and
Matthias Karmasin*

Introduction: historical context and preconditions of the Austrian media market

In geographical terms, Austria is a small country, and its national media market is limited by a potential audience of around nine million inhabitants. In the following, we provide a summary of the special conditions of its media system and the status quo of journalism on the macro-, meso-, and microlevels, which serves as a background to the results of the international JoIn-DemoS project presented in this book (for the reports of the other participating countries, see Chapters 4 to 7).

Austria's media landscape is still widely characterized by legacy media, often moving in (too) close proximity to politics. This relationship of dependency is ensured by state support for the press and media funding, which has always been oriented toward maintaining the existing media and is strongly influenced by party politics. Furthermore, competition and cooperation with media offerings from the ten times larger same-language neighbor Germany play an important role. The national print media market in Austria, which was economically very stable for a long time, was rarely a catalyst for independent, innovative developments or experiments. Another feature of the ponderous media system is the very late admission of private providers to the broadcasting market, which did not occur until around the turn of the millennium. Such rather hesitant developments, as well as the rather slow introduction of rapid digital infrastructures, made Austrian journalism and most traditional media companies laggards in renewal processes: interested, but with little investment in innovation.

The roots of these specifics of Austria's media and journalism culture lie in the era after World War II, during which four phases of media development can be identified (Kaltenbrunner 2019a): (1) in the founding period after 1945, numerous regional newspaper titles were launched; on the national level, party newspapers were successful; print journalism as well as radio were under the control of the post-war administration of the Allied Forces. (2) With independence regained in 1955, a new, democratic market emerged, with newly founded tabloid media, strong regional newspapers, and new

magazines. Journalism gradually positioned itself as a more independent fourth power. The national broadcaster was formally reestablished in 1957 under the name ORF as a monopoly organization. In this initial phase as a state-owned company, there was the strong influence of the government. The ORF became a public corporation in 1971 with less immediate governmental influence and a more diverse “board of trustees” (“ORF-Kuratorium”). (3) In the 1980s, the media market saw a period of concentration in ownership. Outstanding in this context at the time was the German WAZ Group’s (today: Funke) 50% shareholding in the two largest daily newspapers, *Kronen Zeitung* and *Kurier*, and its numerous magazine subsidiaries. The concentration processes led to a tightly intertwined market with only a few players and little journalistic diversity (Trappel et al. 2002; Steinmaurer 2002, 2003; Kaltenbrunner 2006, 2019b; Seethaler and Melischek 2006; Trappel 2019). (4) In this rather rigid market, only a few media embraced the dawn of the digital age. *Der Standard*, for example, founded only in 1988, was one of the first daily newspapers in Europe to launch its website in mid-1995, and ORF launched *orf.at* in 1997. The ORF-designed website was soon to become the leading news portal on the wide world web. The ORF was reconceived as a “foundation” under public law in 2001, managed by a new board of trustees (“Stiftungsrat”). On the regional level, some strong publishing groups such as *Vorarlberger Nachrichten/Russmedia* have been pioneers in using the possibilities of the internet from the very beginning. In addition to the regional publishers, which have been able to maintain their position in print as de facto monopolies in several federal states, two free tabloid newspapers have emerged that are mostly dependent on public-sector advertising and achieved wide coverage with their free model, especially in Vienna and the surrounding area.

Already in the early years of digitization and globalization of the media markets and further from 2010 onwards, which was our core observation period for innovations in journalism, the economic basis for investment in a dynamic digital media market would have been favorable in Austria. The gross domestic product per capita is around one-third higher than the European Union (EU) average.¹ The unemployment rate, on the other hand, is slightly below the EU average. The market penetration of the internet had risen quite rapidly, roughly in line with the Central and Western European average, whereas in 1996, only 9% of the population were recorded as at least occasional users of the new and slow World Wide Web; by 2010, almost 75% were users; and by 2020, already 88% of Austrians were online.² However, according to comparative international studies, the roll-out of high-speed connections for all citizens in Austria was very slow in the 2010s (Akamai 2015, 36). The international banking and economic crisis that began in 2008 affected Austria’s media industry less than those in other countries. Temporary declines in advertising revenues were largely offset by savings and new revenue streams, such as higher subscription prices (Trappel and Tomaz 2021, 136). Thus, legacy media managed, on the one hand, to

keep their respective submarkets well occupied and, on the other hand, to give national digital disruptors little surface for attack. Due to this comfortable position, the need to innovate seemed less urgent. The expansion of cross-media editorial structures and strategies in the established newsrooms and digitization of the existing media houses took place only hesitantly (Carvajal et al. 2009; Kaltenbrunner and Luef 2017). Journalistic digital native projects that were not tied to traditional media remained rare.

The media landscape and its development since 2010

In 2024, as described, Austria's media market is still dominated by traditional media titles, which in turn have been intertwined by their owners in the private sector for decades in a few dominant groups. However, the strongest media company in terms of revenue (around 1 billion euros annually) is the public broadcaster ORF (Der Standard 2022a). More than two-thirds of ORF's revenue comes from user fees, which are to be converted to the German model of household fees from 2024 (Der Standard 2023). Well behind, with sales of 300–400 million, are those groups that dominate the print market but, in many cases, have also invested in private broadcasting and various digital platforms. Mediaprint, with its newspaper titles *Kronen Zeitung* and *Kurier*, and the Styria Group, established as a Catholic foundation and owns the *Kleine Zeitung*, which is dominant in southern Austria, and the national quality paper *Die Presse*. An unusual market player is the Red Bull Media Group (RBMG), with its station ServusTV, numerous print magazine titles, and online activity, all of which are predominantly cross-financed by revenues from the global beverage company Red Bull. The RBMG is the only media group in Austria, which has managed to expand strongly after the turn of the millennium and can be described as a successful corporate publishing project.

Overall, Austria continues to be a leading print media country, and not just in Europe. 42% of all Austrians still use print media as a source of news, putting it in second place behind India out of a total of 46 countries surveyed in the internationally comparable market analysis by the Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2022, 65). However, the print market, which at first glance appears to be enormous, is an illusory giant that is shrinking under close examination. From 2010 to 2020, the number of daily newspaper readers had declined significantly: in the traditional national survey "Media-Analyse" from 73.7% to 58.3% and most recently to 52.7% in 2023.³ The traditional market leader, the high-circulation tabloid *Kronen Zeitung*, lost more than one-third of its readership from 2010 to 2020. A dampening factor in the loss of print media circulation was the launch of two free newspapers, *Heute* and *Österreich/oe24* (Stark and Magin 2009), in the early 2000s. However, in terms of media economics, this put additional pressure on traditional newspapers for price reduction and the issue of free promotional copies. Today, only about half of all daily newspapers distributed in Austria are paid-for issues via

subscriptions or at newsstands.⁴ In addition, the number of daily newspaper titles has fallen continuously over the years to only 12 dailies at the end of 2023.⁵

The erosion of readership was accompanied by a continuous decline in advertising revenues, mainly due to the outflow of these funds to international platforms. In 2022/2023, initial surveys showed that, for the first time in Austria, more advertising budget went to Google/YouTube, Facebook/Instagram, Amazon, etc., than to all national media companies combined (see, e.g., *Der Standard* 2022b). Such a change in the advertising markets had begun much earlier in the USA but also in some European countries (see, e.g., *Handler* 2017; *Jacobsen* 2019).

Also, because economic disruptions in the Austrian media landscape came later than in many European countries and the USA, the pressure to change and the willingness to innovate grew only slowly and partially. Even though *Hallin and Mancini* (2004) argue Austria's media and journalism culture traditionally falls into the same category as that of Germany and the Scandinavian countries, there are still major visible differences. Though in surveys of the proponents, the need for change and renewal in media management (*Kaltenbrunner* 2013) and journalism (*Seethaler* 2017) in Austria was repeatedly addressed, it usually led only ponderously to the implementation of concrete projects and structural measures. One of the few continuous developers of innovative projects with a strong technology tangent has been the national Austrian Press Agency (APA). Since it is under cooperative ownership by ORF and almost all Austrian newspaper publishers, this was one of the rare innovation drivers for the national industry, as, for example, the founder of a national digital video platform for all media houses or with its current attempts to use artificial intelligence in journalism. Thus, the digital change with stronger integration of various playout channels for journalistic content in newsroom operations only began in the mid-2010s (*García-Avilés, Kaltenbrunner, and Meier* 2014; *Kaltenbrunner and Luef* 2017).

In the broadcasting market, after the gradual breaking up of the ORF monopoly, but not until the turn of the millennium (*Segalla* 2009; *Mitschka and Unterberger* 2018; *Pensold* 2018), did competition for the public broadcaster ORF increase after a delay, especially in the TV sector. Parallel to the dualization of the market, the discussion about the special "public value" of public broadcasting became a characteristic feature of the media policy debate on the legitimization of fee financing for linear ORF radio and TV (*Karmasin* 1996, 2011). The four TV channels of the former monopolist ORF had a market share of about one-third at the beginning of the 2020s, after a decade of annual small but continuous losses (*Silber* 2023).⁶ The largest private holders of national terrestrial TV licenses, *ServusTV*, *Puls4*, and *ATV*, are each a very long way behind public TV, with market shares of around 3%–4%. In addition to the national channels, the German providers are the most widely used in Austria, with public broadcasters such as *ZDF* and *ARD* slightly ahead of private broadcasters such as *RTL* and *Sat1*, all with market shares of around 2%–4%. Nevertheless, the share of linear TV

consumption systematically declined. At the same time, a variety of digital offerings, VoD, pay TV, Netflix, Amazon, and other streaming platforms, such as YouTube, have boosted average daily online video consumption in Austria to an average of more than four hours (RTR 2022). Young audiences in particular were largely lost to the linear TV channels.

In such tight market conditions, the development of large innovative projects and formats is difficult, even for the major private TV providers. Puls4 and ATV, which had merged in 2017 are jointly dependent on the strategies of the German Pro7Sat1AG as their 100% owned Austrian TV subsidiaries. Austria's first 24-hour news channel Puls24 was launched in 2019, which was perceived as a successful innovation for Austria in the expert interviews of the JoIn-DemoS project (see Chapter 2 on methodology).

So, while the conditions for investment in innovation in the dual TV market were unfavorable for private TV providers, the public broadcaster ORF remained extremely restricted by law in its scope for development. At the insistence of Austrian print publishers in particular, ORF was prohibited from online-only production beyond the accompaniment of existing linear TV and radio formats, as well as largely from using social media channels, which expanded rapidly in the 2010s (Silber 2021). While public broadcasters in Germany were already allowed to operate YouTube channels, and new young-oriented formats for ARD and ZDF were streamed via Funk on many platforms, it was not until the 2020s that the broader discussion on the digital future of ORF began (see, e.g., Dobusch 2021). Thus, over the decades, the legislature had given public broadcasting a particularly tight corset to prevent expansion in the digital space. Private broadcasters once again feared that more digital leeway for public broadcasting would threaten the existence of media companies in the negotiations on the new ORF 2023 law.⁷ To counteract this fear, Austria's publishers' association, VÖZ, was, once again, able to push through relevant restrictions on the ORF's digital publishing options – for example, a significant reduction in the legally permitted number of text articles on orf.at. This large internet site of the ORF, called the “blue site” because of its color, is the clear leader among Austria's news websites, with more than five million unique users per month.⁸

Media policy and innovation framework

One specific feature of the Austrian media system is the continued strong relevance of political parties and governments for the constitution of the media system with its roots in the early decades of media foundations (Muzik 1984) and with continuity in the Second Republic (Kaltenbrunner 1998; Seethaler and Melischek 2006). Moreover, one of the most relevant decisions of media policy, quite unanimously across various government coalitions of the 20th century, was the lengthy maintenance of the broadcasting monopoly. In 2001, the ORF was transformed into a foundation only little before national, private competition had been allowed. The ORF's decision-making

bodies, however, the “Stiftungsrat” (Foundation Council) and the “Publikumsrat” (Audience Council), remain in close relationship with political parties, with appointment mechanisms for easier majority procurement for the governing parties (Der Standard 2020).

For Austria’s print media market, one relevant element of state support and regulation over the decades was “press subsidies,” which, following Scandinavian models from the 1970s onward, provided financial support for economically weak papers in their traditional production and distribution models but hardly funded any research and development nor any start-ups or digital innovation in the print media sector (Murschetz and Karmasin 2014).

Thus, the breakout from traditional production and business models of the publishing houses remained a rather particular commitment, for example, of early adopters of the internet as DerStandard.at on the national level or regionally of the Vorarlberg Russmedia Group. New funding instruments such as paywalls were first implemented at the Styria Group (see Chapter 14), which also invested relevantly in additional digital markets, for example, with Austria’s current largest buying and selling platform willhaben.at.

Innovations were not supported by state subsidies in our core observation period from 2010 to 2020. Accordingly, it was difficult for newly founded online journalism projects, such as the investigative journalism platform Dossier, which in our research was often cited as a role model, to enter the market. There was also no public funding for the late start of podcast platforms, which also included a variety of well-developed journalistic formats. Starting only in 2020, the “Wiener Medieninitiative” (Vienna Media Initiative), funded by the City of Vienna, provided targeted support for journalistic innovation projects independent of the distribution channel with start-up funding. However, this special funding model is only aimed at journalistic projects in Austria’s capital.

Traditional press subsidies on the national level became less important in quantitative terms after the turn of the millennium, while the use of public money, especially for advertisements, grew systematically and became a critically important source of revenue for Austrian publishers. This statistic includes the advertising expenditures of federal and state governments, cities and municipalities, as well as those of companies with a significant public shareholding, such as public transport companies or energy companies. They amounted to between 200 and 300 million euros, a multiple of the per capita advertising budgets in Germany. Thus, they became a significant factor in influencing the market but lacked transparency (Kaltenbrunner 2021, 2020). The government’s close connections with tabloid newspapers led to investigations by the Public Prosecutor’s Office for Corruption against Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, his close associates, and the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) for misuse of public funds for personally motivated advertisements and publication of polls in the free newspaper Österreich/oe24. Due to these allegations, Kurz resigned in 2021.⁹ Further investigations into advertising corruption followed involving the two other major tabloid media Kronen Zeitung and Heute.¹⁰

While the main state media subsidies of the past were not aimed at innovation, a new program was launched at the end of 2022 with a subsidy for “digital transformation.” This almost exclusively supports traditional media titles and long-standing business models while at the same time making it more difficult to invest in innovation in journalism and for new journalistic players, for any media start-ups, to enter the market (Binder 2022).

The corruption scandals in particular also led to a (further) significant drop in Austria’s ranking in the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index from 17th to 31st place.¹¹ The EU Commission’s Rule of Law Report described this close symbiosis as a threat to Austria’s media pluralism and political system because there were “no rules ensuring a fair distribution of state advertising among media outlets” (European Commission 2020). Instead of serving the public, the state uses advertising placement to its advantage, often distributed according to political preferences, disregarding the notion that “the quality of the public and the quality of democracy are also related to quality journalism” (Karmasin 2019). These Austria-specific opaque relations between politics and journalism probably reinforce the internationally perceptible trend of growing distrust in the news. In 2022, only 40.65% of Austrians believe that they can trust the domestic news media (Newman et al. 2022).

Apart from the democratic political risks, the high expenditures for advertisements in printed media and linear TV as a form of indirect media subsidy led consecutively to a lower willingness to innovate for journalism in Austria.

The economic conditions have been quite favorable: in the Global Innovation Index of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Austria in 2021 was ranked in 10th place among 39 European countries evaluated.¹² However, in journalism-related production areas, the study by the UN organization WIPO finds clear weaknesses for Austria in an international comparison. The EU Commission’s “European Innovation Scoreboard” shows a similar trend.¹³ Overall, Austria is well above the EU average in its willingness to innovate, but in our core observation period from 2010 to 2020, it lags behind, especially in terms of government investment in research and development and in areas that are important for innovation in the media sector, e.g., in the category “Use of Information Technologies.”

Professional development in journalism

Between 2006 and 2018/2019, according to overall national surveys for the Austrian Journalism Report, there was a decline in full-time journalists by about a quarter, to 5,350 people (Kaltenbrunner et al. 2020). At the same time, traditionally strong role models committed to journalistic objectivity continued to gain in importance, probably to distinguish the professional journalist from the new semi-professional and journalist-like actors: Austrian journalists feel first and foremost obliged to “informing the audience as neutrally as possible,” “conveying complex facts,” and “depicting reality exactly as it is” (Kaltenbrunner et al. 2020).

Print media are still the largest employers: Well over half of Austrian journalists worked for such legacy media, and about a third of all journalists worked for daily newspaper publishers. A critical factor is that journalistic staff aged along with their audience. In the 2019 overall survey, one-third of journalists were over 50 years old, and only one-tenth were under 30. One positive development to be observed was the continuous professionalization and the growing academization of the profession. Above all, the advancement of well-educated, young women into newsrooms led to (almost) gender equality, but not at the management level. Two-thirds of journalists in leading positions are men. In addition to the low representation of younger generations in Austria's newsrooms, the low number of journalists with a migration background was also identified as a problem (Kaltenbrunner and Lugschitz 2021; Kaltenbrunner, Lugschitz, and Luef 2021). Such a general lack of diversity (see also Chapter 11) also makes it difficult to innovate content for more audience interest and audience engagement in general (Borchardt et al. 2019). Only about one-third of journalists worked at least bi-medially, for example, for print and online channels or radio and TV (Kaltenbrunner et al. 2020). After more than two decades of international convergence development (Menke et al. 2018) and a lot of founding of journalistic digital native media – for example, in the USA or Northern and also Southern Europe (Küng 2015; Ramón Salaverría 2019) – this Austrian development of online journalism was structurally rather ponderous. At the same time, the work pressure for the journalists in their traditional production structures and channels became ever greater (Beaufort and Seethaler 2014; Seethaler 2017; Hanitzsch, Seethaler, and Wyss 2019).

Under such often unfavorable conditions, a remarkable aspect is that some dominant legacy media houses with a will to change and a few digital native start-ups have, almost without economic help, succeeded in establishing innovative initiatives.

Conclusion

Austria's media landscape is essentially characterized by the interdependence of politics and the media. It is concentrated in ownership and strongly influenced, equally in print and broadcasting holdings, by the German market, which is ten times as large in the same language. In publishing, a record number of readers of newspapers stabilized traditional business models until well into the 2010s and made digital developments and innovations in online media significantly more hesitant than, for example, in Northern and Southern Europe. The broadcasting market experienced the late admission of private radio and TV providers at the turn of the millennium. Coupled with sharp restrictions on the options of the market-leading public broadcaster in the online sector, this meant a severe but equal limitation of development opportunities for both sides in the dual market of private and public broadcasting.

Systematically, public funding via advertisements and subsidies became a core factor for the financing of media and journalism, with legacy print media being supported in their traditional production and business models and with significant public support for (free) tabloid newspapers via high public advertising expenditure. At the same time, journalism was weakened, with about a quarter of jobs being lost as of 2006. This environment explains why, in a country with generally strong economic data, the indicators for innovation in journalism were relatively weak and why media owners and journalists were often interested observers of international developments rather than shapers of change in Austria.

Despite these unfavorable framework conditions for innovation in journalism, some projects in legacy media have set standards in the early transition to the digital age, and a few new journalistic players have succeeded in establishing themselves in the Austrian media market.

Notes

- 1 https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/513/01_OEsterreich_innerhalb_der_EU.pdf.
- 2 <https://www.integral.co.at/media-center/studien?topic=digital-internet&author=#show>.
- 3 <http://www.media-analyse.at>.
- 4 www.oek.at.
- 5 The *Wiener Zeitung*, a daily newspaper owned by the Republic, was discontinued by the federal government in July 2023. It was until then the oldest daily newspaper still published in the world, founded in 1783. The conservative party newspaper OÖ Volksblatt was discontinued in December 2023.
- 6 https://mediendaten.orf.at/c_fernsehen/console/console.htm?y=1&z=1.
- 7 <https://www.diepresse.com/6157053/neues-orf-gesetz-chefredaktionen-sehen-medienvielfalt-in-gefahr>.
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4 Country report Germany

The media system as a brake on journalistic innovation development

Maike Körner

Introduction

Germany, with a population of 84.3 million is not only the most populous country in the European Union (EU) but also has the largest gross domestic product in the association of states with 4075.4 billion US dollars (IMF 2023; Statistisches Bundesamt 2023). However, economic strength differs in the various regions: the states of the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) generally still have a larger gross domestic product (GDP) than the “new states” of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) 30 years after the German reunification (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2023). It is interesting to note that the GDP strongly coincides with the innovation index in Germany. The German states that also have a strong per capita GDP were ahead of the states with a smaller GDP in the innovation index ranking. The ranking provides “information about the level of innovation capability in the period under consideration” (Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg 2021). In 2020, Baden-Württemberg led the ranking, followed by Bavaria.

Within the population, 92% use various news services several times a week, and although there is strong criticism of the lack of digitization in Germany, the communications industry is the frontrunner in terms of digitization (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz 2022; Newman et al. 2022, 80). This is also related to the statistic that news is consumed more online and constantly available instead of linearly in the classic media (Newman et al. 2022, 10).

The following outline of the German media system serves as a starting point for the comparison of the framework for innovations in journalism (see Chapter 26). Based on the extra-media sphere background, this chapter will provide a contextualization of the German media system, its historical developments, and categorization of journalistic professionals, which in turn will serve as a basis for explaining the emergence of the individual innovation areas of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project.

Historical developments of the media

In Germany, freedom of communication is considered the central basis of the media system. Historically, these freedoms of communication have not always been liberated. Although they had already played a role around the German Revolution in 1848, they were at the time unable to establish and consolidate themselves under Bismarck's press policy and the subsequent First World War. During National Socialism, the dictatorship abolished these freedoms. After the Second World War, a media landscape shaped by the Allied victorious powers emerged. Newspaper licenses granted by the Allies gave rise to the most important print products still in existence today, such as *DIE ZEIT*, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* or the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Meier 2018, 148). It was not until 1949, with the founding of the FRG and the introduction of the constitution, the *Grundgesetz*, that citizens were firmly guaranteed these freedoms of communication (Beck 2021, 39). In addition, the State Press Laws were enacted during the same period (Papier and Möller 1999, 449).

At about the same time, the first public broadcasting service (ARD) was set up in Western Germany; the British BBC acted as a reference model in the case. However, due to Germany's history, public broadcasting was to be more federally fragmented in order to ensure its independence. Therefore, State Broadcasting Laws were established, on the basis of which the regional, third-party programs of ARD, such as the *Bayerischer Rundfunk* (BR), *Hessischer Rundfunk* (HR), *Radio Bremen* (RB), *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* (SDR) and *Südwestfunk* (SWF), were created (Pürer 2015, 110). In the field of private broadcasting, there was no strong development until the 1970s and 1980s. Here, various circumstances, such as technical progress, a stronger media policy or broadcasting rulings by the Federal Constitutional Court, supported the emergence (Pürer 2015, 127). In contrast is media development in Eastern Germany (1949–1990). There, a centralized media system was developed, led, and directed mostly by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), in which both broadcasting and the press were strongly tied to central state or state-affiliated organs and not independent (Meier 2018, 148). After the reunification of the FRG and the GDR in 1990, the East German system was adapted to that of the West. Newspapers were (partially) taken over by West German publishers, and public broadcasting stations were also introduced in the “New Federal States” (Pürer 2015).

Shortly after the German reunification, an originally western German news magazine became a pioneer in the field of online news. On 25 October 1994, *SPIEGEL Online* published the world's first news website (with a one-day lead over the US *Time*), uploading free articles that they reused from the print magazine (Hans 2014).

In recent decades, journalism has been strongly characterized by digital change. In 1997, 7% of Germans used the internet occasionally, whereas in 2020, 72% of the population (54 million) were using the internet on a daily

basis (Beisch and Koch 2021, 488). Media companies also adapted strongly to the development and shifted their content to where the users were on both the internet and social media. The diversification of online presences and the increasing offerings were also one of the reasons why the legitimacy of public broadcasters has been questioned more strongly in recent years (Sehl 2021). Sehl suggests representatives of a market-liberal perspective have been increasingly harsh in their criticism of the public broadcasters because there already exists a diversity of offerings, which is why the public media would become superfluous.

Media system and media policy

Mostly because of Germany's history, Article 5 of the Basic Law (Grundgesetz) ensures that the state cannot intervene in the affairs of the media or even control them. This is where defensive rights against state interference take effect: freedom of opinion, individual freedom of information, and freedom of the press and broadcasting (Meier 2018, 83). Moreover, because of this deliberate distance, there is no general, central media law in Germany, as is the case in many other countries. It is the judiciary that guides the media landscape. For example, the Federal Constitutional Court interprets the Basic Law regarding media decisions, but the Basic Law is not the only source of media guidelines (Beck 2018, 37). Due to Germany's federal structure, there are many state treaties (states) and laws (federation) that regulate the media landscape.

Role of print media

In Germany, the press culture has had strong roots for several centuries. Even compared to broadcasting or other digital media, newspapers still hold a key role. The regional offering of subscription newspapers in particular shapes the picture; a centralization of the news offering, as is the case in the United Kingdom, for example, cannot be observed in Germany. These local offerings are also supplemented by supra-regional quality and tabloid media (Beck 2018, 175). Due to the (financial) independence of the press from the state, Beck (2018, 175) explains that state media policy is "limited to a non-discriminatory fiscal subsidy and privileging of the press." It is argued that the press occupies a public, indispensable role.

Nonetheless, a political parallelism can be observed in the German press, which does not shape the newspapers in terms of party politics but does reveal political tendencies (Hallin and Mancini 2004). The most important daily or weekly newspapers are said to reflect the spectrum of opinion. Whereas, for example, the *Welt* addresses older and more conservative readers, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is left-liberal oriented, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is seen as a conservative-liberal newspaper. Another big newspaper in Germany that displays an alternative leftist point of view is the

tageszeitung (Deutschland.de 2012). Even though the newspapers have (financial) independence from the state, one outcome is an economization of the media system, which makes economic enterprises out of newspapers that must survive in a capitalist system. Local newspapers are, therefore, being purchased by large publishers, local editorial offices are being closed, and newspapers' supra-regional sections are being printed in the same way across regions. This limits media diversity, and media concentration is becoming ever stronger. In 2020, the market share of the five largest publishing groups for daily newspapers was around 41.3% (Röper 2020). This media concentration is kept within bounds by specific controls.

In addition, newspapers are struggling with a reduction in both readership and advertising revenues (Hasebrink et al. 2017). Whereas in 2013, around 63% of respondents in Germany still read print media, in 2022, this figure was just 26% (Institut für Medien- und Kommunikationspolitik 2022). The development can also be observed in advertising revenues: in 2003, printed newspapers still earned around 4.68 billion euros from advertising; in 2020, this figure had fallen to only 1.87 billion euros (PwC 2022). At the same time, the circulation of daily newspapers has been decreasing sharply since the early 2000s (22.6 million in 2003 vs. 13.63 million in 2022, including online issues) (BDZV 2023). Increasingly, newspapers are barely offering free information on the internet; they are using different payment models for digital editions. Subscriptions to digital editions are becoming increasingly attractive. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, for example, sold 288,000 print copies, including 99,000 ePaper editions and 159,000 digital subscriptions in the first quarter of 2023 (IVW 2023). At 447,000, that's more subscriptions in total than print copies sold in the heyday of the print era in 2000 (427,000) (Institut für Medien- und Kommunikationspolitik 2012).

The strong audience loyalty to printed daily newspapers with fixed subscriptions and the extensive newspaper landscape with around 309 regional newspapers and half a dozen national newspapers has been a major reason why the decline in reach and circulation of printed newspapers has been milder in recent decades than in other countries (BDZV 2023). As a result, there has been little pressure in Germany to invest in innovative digital offerings.

Role of broadcasting

The private sector includes both radio and TV. The radio landscape is dominated by local and regional stations, with around 300 local and regional radio stations, including internet radio (Die Medienanstalten 2023). In the television sector, around 160 private stations are broadcast in Germany (KEK 2023), but the industry is strongly dominated by two large media companies: Bertelsmann with the RTL Group and the ProSiebenSat.1. This is contrasted by public broadcasting. The radio sector comprises 9 ARD stations with 73

regional radio programs (including online radio) and Deutschlandradio with 4 programs. The public TV stations are also located in the nine regional ARD stations, and both ARD and ZDF are listed as cross-regional stations.

The private broadcasters are mainly financed by advertising revenues, whereas the public broadcasters are financed by a license fee, which every household in Germany must pay each month (18.36 euros, Status July 2023). By receiving broadcasting fees, public broadcasting has an educational mandate and must meet certain quality criteria. The dispute over funding and fees frequently involved the Federal Constitutional Court, which brought several broadcasting rulings onto the scene that continue to shape broadcasting today. In addition, each of these public broadcasters is controlled by basically two bodies: a broadcasting council and an administrative board. The broadcasting council is responsible for ensuring compliance with the programming mandate and verifies that state treaties are being observed. The administrative board, on the other hand, is not concerned with program compliance but oversees the management, determines the budget, and controls the participation of companies. The members of both bodies are made up of associations that are defined by law and are supposed to represent a cross-section of the population. For example, trade unions, representatives of the church, or members of sports associations are represented in both bodies (Schwartz 2022).

The stable financing of public broadcasting in Germany, with a very large number of programs, especially on the radio, not so much on TV, has hardly created any pressure to innovate in the editorial departments. For some years, however, broadcasters have noticed that the audience has become older, especially for linear TV. Since the broadcasting fee, and thus the financing of public broadcasting, is supposed to function as a solidarity model, the radio stations had to address younger audiences again, who, in turn, could no longer be catered to because of the linear use of the formats. Innovation labs, therefore, developed digital formats for a young audience, which have been bundled under the funk internet service since 2016 (Frank 2016).

Role of digital media

Due to the increasing use of smartphones and the possibility of greater cross-mediality online, around 70% of Germans used news sites as a source of information in 2020, whereas in 2012, 61% of the respondents said they had consumed online news in the past week, this source of information was in last place in the ranking (TV with 87%; print and radio with 68% each) (Newman 2012, 12; Newman et al. 2020, 71). The technical possibilities have also shaped journalism in recent years: a multi-media approach without having to change the medium, the expansion of the offerings of already established media houses, as well as the possibility of adapting content to users have changed the media landscape. The ability to disseminate news is becoming more accessible to all, so “journalistic websites are also facing

unprecedented competition, which raises the question of the future of journalism” (Meier 2018, 160). Many legacy media have been shifting their main focus to the web, but the established media houses have fierce online competition, with groups like Facebook or Google vying for users’ attention. But it is not only increasing economic competition that journalistic editorial departments must contend with. Since the first news website in Germany in 1994, online content has been offered free of charge. This “freebie mentality” still plays a major role, especially on the internet: a PwC (2019) study shows that 40% of the German respondents would not be willing to pay for journalism on the internet even 30 years after online articles originated. Another transformation can be observed in terms of technology. As technology becomes increasingly widespread and accessible, more funding opportunities for journalistic houses, as well as for other companies, are emerging, with personal behavior and profile data being used as a business model (Beck 2018, 325). Legally, various regulations take effect in this context. The State Media Treaty acts as the authority for regulating journalistic content, whereas the Telemedia Act is responsible for all technical and economic issues (Beck 2018, 314).

News consumption

Over the past decade, media use has changed dramatically in Germany. The Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2022, 11) not only found that progressively more people disconnect from news consumption, but they also selectively avoid news. That “underlin[es] the critical challenge news media face today: connecting with people who have access to an unprecedented amount of content online and convincing them that paying attention to news is worth their while.” This can partly be observed in Germany: various studies (including Obermaier 2016 cited by Reinemann et al. 2017) show that trust in the media in Germany has always been between 30% and 40% since the 1980s. The current Digital News Report (2022) sees Germany at a 50% trust rate, which has increased since 2019 from 47% (Newman et al. 2019, 86). Nevertheless, since 2008, society has become increasingly divided according to how much they trust the media; trust is growing, but so is distrust (Uni Mainz 2021).

Germans generally inform themselves less through journalistic publications. Even though the use of online media and social media channels has increased since 2013 (online: 2013: 60%, 2022: 68%, social media: 2013: 18%, 2022: 32%), the use of all other media studied (TV, print, and radio) has declined significantly (Newman et al. 2022, 81). The audience’s interest has also decreased. Whereas in 2015, around 74% of respondents were still strongly or very strongly interested in news, in 2022, the figure was only 57%. Although the figures are still considered very stable in an international comparison, they still show declining tendencies and need to be considered (Newman et al. 2022, 81).

Direct and indirect innovation funding for journalism

German media policy has tended to take a rather negligible view of direct funding for innovations in journalism. Nevertheless, a funding landscape has developed in recent years, with various initiatives awarding funds for innovation projects (Buschow and Wellbrock 2020). These include private and public programs that combine start-up capital and coaching (for example, MediaLab Bayern or the Journalism Lab of the Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia), innovation funds from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie 2020), or government funding from the federal budget for the “promotion of the digital transformation of publishing, for the promotion of sales and distribution of subscription newspapers, magazines and advertising journals” (Deutscher Bundestag 2020).

At the same time as direct funding, indirect structures have been developed to create incentives for newsrooms to innovate further. One important point in this regard is tax discounts, which are “granted either depending on a company’s volume of innovation or its expenditure on research and development” and tax breaks for journalistic start-ups (Larédo et al. 2016 cited by Buschow and Wellbrock 2020, 30).

The industry: performance of companies

Today, Germany’s broad-based media landscape is still based on the historical developments the country has undergone over the past 80 years. Compared to its German-speaking neighbors in Austria and Switzerland, however, the largest media company in 2021 was Bertelsmann SE & Co. KGaA, with annual revenues of around 18.6 billion euros (Institut für Medien- und Kommunikationspolitik 2022), but it is not organized under public law. However, only part of the Bertelsmann Group’s business flows into the creation of journalistic products: Bertelsmann brings together smaller divisions, which, according to its own information, are decentralized and thus act independently of one another (Bertelsmann 2013). In the area of journalistic companies, this includes both RTL Group and its subsidiary Gruner + Jahr (Institut für Medien- und Kommunikationspolitik 2023). The second-largest media group is ARD, a public broadcaster with third-party programming, with 6.9 billion euros (Institut für Medien- und Kommunikationspolitik 2022).

The groups that follow the big two in the ranking represent a large part of the media landscape in Germany. These are both public broadcasters, such as ZDF (approximately 2.4 billion euros), and private groups with various TV stations, such as the ProSieben Sat.1 Group (approx. 4.5 billion euros). There are also publishing groups like Axel Springer SE (approx. 3 billion euros), which, as a result of increasing digitization, no longer combines just print products but also online websites and TV stations (Institut für Medien- und Kommunikationspolitik 2022).

Professionals

Since “journalist” is not a protected job title in Germany, the figures from surveys vary. According to the “Agentur für Arbeit” (the German Employment Agency), around 130,000 people were working as journalists in newsrooms in 2021 (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2022). However, this agency also statistically counts people as editors who are not employed full-time in journalism or engaged in journalistic work – e.g., technical editors. By contrast, there were about 41,000 full-time journalists across all media. This figure does not include part-time media professionals or freelance journalists who earn less than 50% of their income from journalism. Likewise, there are also around 122,000 freelance full-time and part-time journalists and amateur journalists working in the field who shape the image of the journalism landscape (Steindl et al. 2019). Meier (2018) stresses that full-time freelance journalists earn less compared to their permanent colleagues. A study by Hanitzsch and Rick (2021, 5) shows that 44.4% of journalists work as freelancers, while only 24.9% have a permanent, unlimited employment contract with a media company.

In the area of leadership positions by medium, the distribution of the (binary) gender ratio still plays a predominant role. Women¹ are still underrepresented in positions of power in editorial offices (Janson 2019), especially in print media, where only 10.2% of leadership positions were held by women in the year 2019. Nonetheless, women are finding their way into newsrooms. Hanitzsch and Rick (2021, 4) explain that 37.7% of respondents reported being female and working full-time as a journalist. This compares to 61.7% male and 0.6% diverse colleagues. German journalism has a diversity problem, and not only in gender distribution. Although almost one in four of the German population has a migration history, surveys by the *Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen* show that just 6% of editors-in-chief have an immigration history. Of these, half come from neighboring countries and not from other major immigration countries (*Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen* 2020, 3).

Moreover, German journalists identify with different understandings of their roles, as the *Worlds of Journalism (WoJ)* study (Hanitzsch et al. 2016) notes. A small standard deviation in the classic journalistic role models (e.g., report things as they are) revealed that journalists in Germany were mostly in agreement in the survey that these role perceptions are strongly valuable to the profession. In this context, Hanitzsch et al. (2016, 3) report that a large part of the respondents rejected the so-called brown envelope journalism and that a strong normative worldview is rather standard among German journalists. However, Hanitzsch et al. (2016) do note that the job description had changed significantly in the years leading up to the *WoJ* survey in 2016. The journalist-respondents talk about technical changes, such as the use of social media or a stronger focus on user-generated content but also of an augmentation of “market-related influences” and audience replies and feedback (Hanitzsch et al. 2016, 5).

Conclusion

The historical development of the German media landscape has been strongly characterized by technical change and relatively little influence from state institutions since the Second World War. Still, with the dual broadcasting system, private publishing houses, an increase in online journalism, and the usage of social media by established media companies, the media landscape can be perceived as quite diverse. Political parallelism (albeit less pronounced than in other countries) can be observed in the German press landscape, especially in the context of supra-national issues, representing different schools of thought. Nevertheless, a few large media companies dominate the market, especially in the print sector. The market share of the five largest publishing groups for daily newspapers was around 41.3% in 2020 (Röper 2020, 332). These same media companies are buying up small, important local newspapers and thus spreading their print brands – furtively – across regions.

Nevertheless, German society has become increasingly divided according to how much they trust the media (Uni Mainz 2021). Further, a negative trend can be observed in trust in journalism, but still, “trust remains relatively high by international standards, even if there has been a small decline overall, with most brands also showing marginal decreases” (Newman et al. 2022, 81).

Due to a (in part) lack of willingness to pay on the part of users and the freebie mentality established in the early years of online journalism, the profession of journalism is slipping into precarity. For this reason, a trend can be observed in the growing commercialization of journalism, with media houses needing to innovate in the context of improving their revenue streams. Therefore, they have the urge to be creative in terms of financing. Also, due to the loss of income for media companies, journalist positions are often not filled. This means that just a quarter of the people working as journalists have permanent positions, and about 44.4% work as freelancers (Hanitzsch and Rick 2021, 5).

Based on the findings, two sides of the innovation framework can be identified. On the one hand, various intra- and extra-media system circumstances and developments lead to the potential to innovate. Examples include the financial strength of the few large media companies and the scant innovation support provided by the German state. On the other hand, there is the partial unwillingness of users to pay for their news, which also contributes to the precarity of journalists. In contrast to that, newspapers, as well as private broadcasters, still have a loyal usership; the range of local newspapers (although they are nevertheless also financed by larger companies) is still so large that there is often no strong pressure to innovate. Public broadcasters have been more under pressure from upcoming critics about their structure and scandals about corruption and nepotism, but still, the mandatory user contributions finance time-honored journalistic products.

The system, with all its developments, has innovation potential that has been or is still being used by some media companies. For example, media companies are getting creative in using systems and associated benefits to convince people who were previously unwilling to pay for online content to pay for journalistic content after all.

Note

- 1 The term “woman” is understood in the context of this paragraph in a binary gender relation. Flinta* (Female, Lesbian, Intersex, Trans and Agender, and * for all who do not identify as cis men) were not included in the studies listed.

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5 Country report Spain

Surfing the waves of crises – Spain’s framework conditions for innovations in journalism

Miguel Carvajal and José M. Valero-Pastor

Introduction

This chapter explores the framework conditions for innovation in journalism in Spain by examining three interconnected levels: macro (historical and social preconditions), meso (industry conditions), and micro (professional and cultural preconditions). We have drawn from the national systems of innovation theory (Lundvall 2016), which suggests that modern Western nation-states have historically acted as “engines of growth” through their social institutions and policies for economic transformation and innovation. However, innovation is influenced not only by science and research and development (R&D) but also by learning from entrepreneurs and professionals and their routine activities for production, distribution, and consumption, which shape the direction of innovative efforts (Lundvall 2016). Individual entrepreneurs are also key players in introducing innovations into the economic system (Schumpeter 1983).

Spain’s population of nearly 48 million increased during 2022 thanks to a positive migratory balance, which offset a negative birth rate and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Spanish economy ranked fourth in the European Union in terms of nominal gross domestic product (Eurostat 2021) and has faced a severe recession and a significant societal impact since the 2008 financial crisis, which also affected media industries. The unemployment rate peaked at 27% in 2013 before dropping to 13% in December 2022. Like other countries, Spain has several distinct regional systems with varying levels of cultural, economic, and technological development. Madrid, Catalonia, Navarre, and the Basque Country excel in all aspects related to knowledge generation, R&D-focused businesses, universities, and innovative firms. The remaining regions belong to two distinct groups: moderate innovators (Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, Castilla y León, Aragón, Murcia, Comunidad Valenciana) and emerging innovators (Castilla La Mancha, Extremadura, Islas Baleares, Andalucía, Canarias) (European Commission 2021).

In Spain, 93.9% of the population between the ages of 16 and 74 years use the internet, and 2021 marked the first time that internet usage surpassed

television consumption in terms of audience penetration, with magazines (26%) and newspapers (13.8%) trailing. Trust in news remains low, and emerging habits include a rise in online news subscriptions and podcast listeners (Newman et al. 2022; PwC, 2023). The evolution of Spain's media industry has been marked by a series of major changes that have transformed the landscape over time. During the Francoist regime, there was free enterprise in the written press, a concession system for radio (concomitant with state radio), and a state monopoly in television. The elimination of the state monopoly on broadcasting in the 1980s led to the commercialization of radio and television, resulting in the creation of numerous channels on national, regional, and local levels (Artero-Muñoz et al. 2021).

One of the most significant developments in the 1990s was the emergence of new media groups driven by mergers, acquisitions, horizontal expansions of newspaper chains, and vertical integrations of television and editorial groups. The Media Pluralism Monitor (2021) proves this area is at high risk due to the cross-media concentration of ownership and competition. Although media law provides ownership restrictions in the sector, specific cross-media concentration limits are not established. From a national market perspective, newspapers, magazines, and broadcast media form part of a broad oligopoly, made up of approximately ten competitors in each industry, which has been fairly stable over the years (*Planeta, Prisa, Vocento, Unidad Editorial, Mediaset, RTVE, Cope, Prensa Ibérica, Godó, and Henneo*). Another key aspect of this evolution is the gradual decline of the public sector's influence on news outlets (Artero-Muñoz et al. 2021).

The Spanish media system's economic weakness in comparison with other European countries can also be seen in the public innovation framework. Although the creation of the Ministry of Science and Technology in 2000 aimed to modernize public administration, the evidence does not support this as an example of adapting to EU governance. The Ministry consolidated competences and resources, but its overarching National R&D Plan did not resemble EU program operations (Cruz-Castro and Sanz Menéndez 2022). This is reflected in Spain's relatively low Global Innovation Index (GII) compared with its European neighbors (WIPO 2022). Spain's performance in 2022 shows an improvement compared with previous years because it produces more innovative outputs relative to its level of investments, but it is ranked 18 out of 39 European economies. The GII shows the country's innovation performance relative to GDP is in line with its level of development.

Lastly, another negative key factor for innovation is the entrepreneurial environment in Spain, which experienced a severe collapse in 2021 when it was ranked 41 out of 51 economies (GEM 2023). COVID caused a significant disruption in business operations, clearly impacting both the commercial productivity of companies and the nation's entrepreneurial endeavors. The most noteworthy decreases in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor scores were found in government policies for entrepreneurial programs and support, as well as excessive taxation and bureaucracy.

Media system, policy, and innovation framework

Spain's relatively young democracy has played a decisive role in shaping its media landscape. Following the institutional transformations driven by the adoption of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, the country has witnessed the dramatic evolution of its media system as it consolidates its parliamentary democracy and adopts European media regulations (Llorens and Muñoz-Saldaña 2023). The 2008 financial crisis led to political instability and the fragmentation of political parties in Parliament. A progressive coalition led by PSOE, Podemos, and various nationalist parties has been leading the government since 2019, although the far-right party VOX is gaining strength and contributing to a growing polarization in the country.

The Spanish media structure is defined by a highly polarized system with strong political parallelism, described as the typical Mediterranean model of southern Europe (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Indeed, Hallin and Mancini argue, “[T]he capacity of the state to intervene effectively is often limited by a lack of resources, lack of political consensus, and clientelist relationships that diminish its capacity for unified action” (2004, 119). Government action in the media sector has primarily been limited to a controlled public broadcasting system (*RTVE*), with minimal support for innovation in journalism, adding significant challenges for media organizations that seek to innovate and engage with audiences. The most relevant change in recent history for *RTVE* was the new financing law of the *RTVE* Corporation, which was passed in August 2009 and ended the state public television's advertising income.

Direct press subsidies that began in the 1980s have survived only in some of Spain's regions, where they are usually justified on the basis of promoting the local language (particularly in Catalonia and the Basque Country). The recipients have primarily been regional and local newspapers that promote their local languages. The lack of transparency and political advertising has created an uneven playing field for media organizations, further undermining trust in news sources (Fernández Alonso and Blasco Gil 2014). The over-politicization of the press differentiated Spain's media system from its Western European counterparts (Papatheodorou and Machin 2003; Hallin and Mancini 2004; de la Sierra et al. 2012).

The evolution of Spanish policy in science, technology, and innovation over the last decade has been closely tied to the global economic crisis (Cruz-Castro and Sanz Menéndez 2022). Despite increased public intervention in innovation policies, the decline in R&D expenditures has led to fewer “innovative enterprises” and a continued low level of business contribution to R&D. According to OECD data, Spain is not one of the top spenders on R&D in Europe based on the percentage of GDP. Compared with other European nations, Spain holds a mid-tier position (1.429%).

The Science Law (Law 13/1986) was enacted in 1986 to address Spain's lack of stimuli for scientific activity led to the creation of the National Plan

for Scientific Research and Technological Development, which did stimulate research activity. Communication and journalism research was initially overlooked due to the absence of a specific program, but this changed in 2010 when the topic became a separate discipline within Social Sciences. As a result, the number of funded communication science projects increased, with the mean number of projects per call rising from 14 (2004–2009) to 25 (2010–2017) (Martínez Nicolás 2020). The growing amount of research on innovation in journalism highlights the importance of the industry and its rapid changes (Carvajal et al. 2022).

The absence of considerable subsidies and public allocations for media innovations poses a major challenge for Spain's media system (de la Sierra et al. 2012). The Spanish government has never viewed digital newspapers as equal recipients of aid and institutional advertising as traditional print newspapers, despite failing to provide solid reasoning. This media policy decision distorts the information market and slows industry transformation by being unhelpful concerning the inclusion of new players (Manfredi Sánchez et al. 2019).¹

At the same time, Spain's institutional framework has not prioritized media literacy development, leaving citizens ill-equipped to navigate the complex, polarized media landscape (Vidal et al. 2017; Sádaba Chalezquer and Salaverría 2023). The lack of comprehensive media education programs has hampered the public's ability to discern reliable news sources and think critically, weakening the potential audience for innovative journalism and hindering the expansion of a sustainable media ecosystem.

The great exception to this lack of general investment in media innovation is the case of the innovation laboratory at *RTVE*, the largest audiovisual group in Spain and the public broadcasting corporation. In 2007, *RTVE* restructured its business strategy to create an interactive media division that promotes digital and participatory development initiatives for in-house productions. As a state-owned company, *RTVE* is committed to quality, innovation, and public service, investing its financial, technical, and human resources in new technologies (Zaragoza-Fuster and García-Avilés 2019). The laboratory is one of the main sources of innovation within public service media and can become a catalyst for the change required by public corporations (Zaragoza-Fuster and García-Avilés 2022).

Media industry: corporate performance

The shift toward digital media has defined the evolution of the media industry (Carvajal et al. 2022; Salaverría and Martínez-Costa 2023). As new digital native media groups have emerged, they have challenged traditional media players and reshaped the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed. This shift has had far-reaching implications by prompting traditional and new media groups to adapt to the changing landscape and cater to the evolving needs and preferences of their audiences (Artero-Muñoz et al. 2021).

The 2008 financial crisis, coupled with a lack of media policy to foster sustainability and innovation in journalism, resulted in a shortsighted and defensive strategy approach by legacy media (García-Santamaría and Pérez-Serrano 2020). The performance of Spain's media groups was already impacted by several structural challenges, such as low newspaper penetration and readership rates. Fifteen years ago, the penetration of print newspapers among Spaniards was 41%, and in 2023, it was just 13.8%: a sharp accumulated drop of more than 8.6 million readers since the beginning of the industry crisis in 2008 (AIMC 2021). Or in circulation figures from the 4,000,000 daily issues in 2008 to the 885,000 in January 2023, an almost 80% loss. The crisis led to a significant drop in traditional advertising revenue due to financial instability and shifts in consumption patterns (Vara-Miguel et al. 2021).

The media conglomerates that emerged from the crisis are starkly different, especially financially, from 20th-century groups. This has led to a historic loss of opportunity in embracing digital innovation that new entrants and rivals have capitalized on (De-Lara-González et al. 2015; Negrodo et al. 2020). Legacy newspapers such as *El País* and *El Mundo*, along with regional groups like *Vocento*, *Prensa Iberica*, and *Godó*, now have counterparts in the form of thriving digital outlets that include *El Confidencial*, *Eldiario.es* (González-Esteban 2014), and *El Español*.

Newsrooms in Spain, like *El Mundo*, began the process of multimedia integration at the end of the 2000s (García-Avilés et al. 2014). During that key era, and despite facing structural and financial challenges, legacy media organizations maintained a slightly paternalistic view of native digital journalism in Spain, as if it were a lesser industry (Manfredi Sánchez, Juan Luis, Ufarte Ruiz and Herranz de la Casa 2019). Up until 2017, the Spanish Newspaper Publishers' Association had not opened its doors to other media outlets, including paid, digital native, or print. The creation of the Information Media Association (AMI in Spanish) to replace the Spanish Newspaper Publishers' Association (AEDE in Spanish), which was founded in 1977, reflects the business vision of the new competitive environment (Manfredi et al. 2019).

The COVID pandemic further exacerbated the already devastated landscape, but media companies recovered slightly in 2021, albeit without reaching pre-pandemic revenue levels (European University Institute et al. 2022). During the pandemic, newsrooms embraced new ideas, and management used its leadership to promote primarily incremental innovations in content production, editorial organization, distribution, and commercialization. COVID-19 also led to the rise of data journalism (see Chapter 10) due to the vast amount of data and the audience's preference for hard news.

Spanish publishers accelerated their pivot to subscription and membership models (see Chapters 14 and 24) (Vara-Miguel et al. 2021). The payment concept has been widely adopted and became consolidated in 2022, allowing readers to access the news they are most interested in (among the top, *El País*, with more than 220,000 subscribers, and *El Mundo*, with over 100,000). On the other hand, the cost of printing has risen rapidly, resulting in higher

newspaper prices and energy costs for printing facilities. Some newspapers have switched to alternative types of paper and reduced their print sizes to save costs (PwC 2023).

The changing business models for subscriptions and memberships have driven new practices in newsrooms, moving toward a greater focus on innovation and a shift in the editorial mindset. This shift can be seen primarily in the predominance of digital products over print versions, in the effort to create better digital stories with greater depth and narrative quality, and in the launch of newsletters and podcasts to engage with digital subscribers. A significant part of this innovative impulse has come from news outlets created on the internet. Paradoxically, the crisis between 2008 and 2013 led to the emergence of a second generation of digital native media in Spain (Negredo et al. 2020). These projects were often carried out by experienced journalists who had been fired or had walked away from their jobs at media companies (De-Lara-González et al. 2015). However, one of the characteristics of native media is the economic fragility and difficulty in consolidating sustainable models in the medium and long term (Buschow 2020; Vara-Miguel et al. 2021).

Another key factor is the recognition and encouragement of innovation through awards and distinctions. New awards, like the Vicente Verdú of Innovation in Journalism (granted by the City Council of Elche, Asociación de Informadores de Elche and Miguel Hernández University), are also paving the way to incentivize new storytelling approaches in the workplace.

Professionals

It's difficult to know the exact number of journalists employed in Spain. The latest available data is provided by the APM (2021) report, which states that there are approximately 30,000 professionals employed by media companies. This data neither includes freelance professionals nor those who work in communication departments and in press roles for public administrations. The current media scenario for professionals in Spain is the outcome of the profound economic crisis that resulted in the elimination of more than 12,000 jobs between 2008 and 2015 but also incentivized media innovations and the creation of more than 500 news start-ups (Negredo et al. 2020). Digital media saw its most significant growth during the toughest economic times: the number of digital media sites rose faster than at any other time before or since, at least in absolute terms (Salaverría and Martínez-Costa 2023). The Great Recession, which had a destructive impact on large media companies, prompted not only a shift from traditional to emerging media but also a relocation of professionals within the industry. Consequently, many of today's leading digital native media outlets are helmed by former traditional media professionals (Salaverría and Martínez-Costa 2023).

The number of self-employed individuals jumped from 11.5% of the news workforce in 2005 to 31% in 2020 (APM 2005, 2021). However, the overall

working conditions for journalists in Spain deteriorated in the 2010s. Unemployment, job insecurity, and low salaries are viewed as the profession's main issues, all of which pose serious threats to journalists' freedom of expression and independence.

On a positive note, the media industry's digital transformation has given rise to new hybrid roles at the junctures of journalism, technology, and business. Professionals with skills in data analysis, audience development, multimedia storytelling, and other emerging fields have become increasingly valuable in newsrooms (Valero-Pastor and González-Alba 2018; Carvajal and Barinagarrementeria 2021; Valero-Pastor et al. 2021; Humanes et al. 2023). These individuals often serve as catalysts for innovation, driving the adoption of new technologies and practices to enhance journalism's quality and importance in Spain.

As the traditional media landscape has faced ongoing challenges, some journalists in Spain have developed an entrepreneurial mindset, seeking opportunities to create their own media ventures or freelance careers (Casero-Ripollés 2016; Barranquero Carretero and Sánchez Moncada 2018). This shift has fostered a spirit of innovation among professionals, who are now more willing to experiment with new storytelling formats, platforms, and revenue models. The rise of digital natives and independent media outlets has further fueled this entrepreneurial spirit, creating a more diverse and vibrant media ecosystem (Valero-Pastor et al. 2021).

The rapidly changing media environment has encouraged a trial-and-error mentality among Spanish journalists as they acknowledge that some innovations will not succeed and that learning from failures is an essential part of the innovation process. This mindset has led to a more dynamic and experimental approach to journalism, with professionals increasingly willing to test new ideas, iterate on them, and share their experiences with others in the industry (Valero-Pastor et al. 2019).

A growing number of Spanish media professionals are also embracing an open and collaborative innovation culture, recognizing that partnerships and knowledge sharing can help drive innovation in journalism (Valero-Pastor and González-Alba 2018; Rojas-Torrijos et al. 2020; Pallares and Serrano 2022). This collaborative approach has fostered the growth of cross-disciplinary teams, joint projects between media outlets, and the establishment of innovation labs and incubators that serve as hubs for experimentation and learning (García-Avilés 2018).

Despite these positive developments, Spanish media professionals still face several challenges that can hinder innovation in journalism. In general, Spanish journalists describe a "substantive deterioration in the working conditions of the profession, particularly due to an increase in the average [number of] working hours" (Berganza and Herrero Jiménez 2016). Other media professionals draw a similar picture. Spanish freelancers tend to have lower job satisfaction compared with their peers in other countries, likely due to low income and weak professionalization (Marín-Sanchiz et al. 2021).

As journalists are increasingly required to master multiple skills and manage various responsibilities, this can lead to burnout and hamper the development of innovative projects that require time and focus. Some describe symptoms that can be linked to mental health issues, such as stress, insomnia, and anxiety attacks (APM 2022).

Cultural resistance in legacy newsrooms, particularly among older journalists and managers, can slow down the adoption of new technologies and practices. Normative debates about the appropriate balance between innovation and traditional journalistic values can also stifle progress and create friction within news organizations. Most Spanish journalists described greater audience involvement in news production, pressure toward sensational news, and audience research (Berganza and Herrero Jiménez 2016).

Additionally, the Spanish media industry has struggled to retain talent and recruit skilled professionals. Beyond unemployment levels, salaries and working hours are not viewed positively in Spain. According to data from APM (2022), among journalism and communication professionals, this year has been marked by a slight worsening for the former and an improvement for the latter. The percentage of journalists with a monthly net income below 1,500 Euros per month has risen to 34%. The lowest salary levels for employees and freelancers have decreased. The monthly net income for 30% of freelancers in both specialties is less than 1,000 euros.

The precarious employment conditions and the low salaries that prevail in the sector can discourage talented individuals from pursuing careers in journalism, thereby limiting the pool of innovative thinkers available to drive change in the industry. Furthermore, it is important to consider that the journalism profession in Spain is defined by limited regulations and numerous shortcomings in self-regulation mechanisms (Marín-Sanchiz and González-Esteban 2021).

From the education perspective, amid great economic uncertainty, scholars claimed that it was necessary to “develop educational proposals that enhance competencies and mechanisms to promote the entrepreneurial spirit as a professional option among future journalists” (Casero-Ripollés and Cullell-March 2013). Initiatives such as the Master’s Program for Innovation in Journalism (Miguel Hernández University, Elche) and the Master’s in Communication and Digital Entrepreneurship (Universidad Europea de Madrid) are examples of this type of approach (Marín-Sanchiz and González-Esteban 2021).

Conclusion

This chapter analyzes the framework conditions for journalism innovation in Spain. On a macro and historical level, Spain’s media system has been shaped by a young democracy, a lack of institutional support for innovation, and a severe economic crisis. Direct subsidies have only been allocated to local and regional media outlets, with a lack of transparency. The country’s low press penetration and media literacy rates have also historically hurt media development in Spain.

Before the advancement of the internet and social media, Spain's booming media industry boasted high advertising expenditures and the resulting profitability ratios for print, TV, and radio. Many legacy media outlets have struggled since 2010 due to the 2008 financial crisis and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The financial pressures faced by Spain's media industry over the past 15 years have led to widespread job cuts and precarious employment conditions for journalists. This has had positive and negative consequences for journalism innovation in Spain. On the one hand, entrepreneurial journalism has led to the emergence of new media outlets, often focused on niche topics or innovative storytelling formats, with the potential to bring fresh perspectives to the industry. On the other hand, precarious employment conditions can hinder innovation by creating a risk-averse culture and work overload.

Several encouraging trends for supporting innovation in journalism have emerged during the last decade, despite precariousness and tensions inherited after several crises affecting newsrooms and freelancers. These include the rise of new hybrid roles at newsroom junctures, increased entrepreneurial thinking among journalists, and the development of an open, collaborative innovation culture that embraces a trial-and-error mentality. Occasionally, even these collaborative endeavors are more the result of economic constraints rather than a pure drive for innovation. Nevertheless, challenges continue to persist, including cultural resistance in legacy newsrooms, normative debates surrounding the adoption of innovation, and work overload following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future research could explore how policy measures such as subsidies, tax incentives, and public-private partnerships could impact the growth and sustainability of innovative journalism practices in the country. It would also be interesting to examine the effectiveness of other types of networks and innovation hubs (e.g., co-working spaces, incubators, and accelerators) in driving innovation in journalism and fostering a vibrant media ecosystem. Given the low levels of media literacy in Spain, future studies could investigate the potential of media literacy programs in schools and communities to enhance society's appreciation for, and engagement with, innovative journalism, as well as its ability to discern reliable news sources.

Note

- 1 In 2014, Spain implemented reforms to their copyright laws in an attempt to force *Google* and other digital providers to pay for using copyrighted content from newspaper publishers. In November 2021, *Google* confirmed that it would reinstate its service in Spain in 2022 following the new Royal Decree (24/2021) approved by the government, which adapts the European directive on copyright. This allows publishers and rights-holders to manage their rights individually through direct negotiations with content aggregators or via a voluntary collective management entity (European University Institute et al. 2022).

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6 Country report Switzerland

Caught between financial pressure, audience expectations, and political ideology

Guido Keel and Mirco Saner

Introduction: national circumstances of a multilingual, small-scaled media society

The Swiss political system is strongly influenced by the direct participation of the people. A large degree of power lies with the citizens and the regional entities (Cantons) in accordance with the principles of federalism. Due to scant centralized power and strong elements of consensus democracy, political processes in Switzerland move slowly and are decentralized. Economically, Switzerland belongs to the wealthiest and most competitive economies worldwide. The standards of living, including education and health care, as well as the costs of living, are among the highest in Europe. Due to its geographical location, its small size, the four language regions, and its relatively large economy, Switzerland is a rather globalized country. This stands in contrast to the political isolation, which stems from a strong tradition of political neutrality in global affairs, and which results, for example, in Switzerland, despite being geographically at the heart of Europe, never being part of the European Union.

The Swiss population is around 8.5 million, of which 25% are foreign residents. The largest share of the population is German-speaking (60%); linguistic minorities are in the French- (25%) and Italian-speaking areas (10%). The fourth national language, Rumansch, is only spoken by about 1% of the population (Bundesamt für Statistik 2023a, 2023b).

As a small but multilingual country with a strong political culture of direct democracy in a federally organized state, the Swiss media landscape has traditionally been characterized by the decentralized structure of small media. This structure is also reflected in the size of audiences and markets, which creates challenging conditions for the financing of media through commercial revenues (Studer et al. 2014, 7). This situation is further challenged by international media organizations in neighboring countries that can easily penetrate the Swiss market. This is especially true for TV, where market shares of foreign media are between 60% and 70% and thus higher than that of Swiss programs (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2023b).

Innovation in an environment of stagnant media policy

In 2014, the Swiss government published a report on the state of the media in Switzerland (BAKOM 2014). It was a reaction to a parliamentary inquiry from 2012 which asked how the government planned to guarantee the democratic functions of the media in society. In this report, the government stated that the (journalistic) media in Switzerland continued to undergo a structural change, with an unforeseeable further development. The economic basis of the paid daily press was found to be eroding, and the number of independent publishing houses was decreasing; newspapers had regional monopolies, and the audience, as well as the advertising industry, were found to be increasingly turning to online offerings. As for innovations in terms of new media titles, the report found that only in isolated cases had new, independent news sites been able to establish themselves in the market.

To strengthen the media industry, the government suggested short-term financial measures like a tax decrease for media companies. As for innovations, the government encouraged media professionals to apply for research grants from the Swiss Innovation Agency, a state finance agency that promotes science-based innovation in the interest of the economy and society in Switzerland. The long-term plan suggested supporting not only traditional media structures but also creating a system of state-funded media support independent of the media type, which would enable online media start-ups to profit from such a promotion as well. These plans resulted in a public referendum in February 2022, in which a majority of 55% of the votes were against such a new media law (admin.ch 2022). This last media policy decision against an increase in state support of journalistic media makes any kind of state support to finance innovation in journalism politically difficult for the next few years. Due to these structural framework conditions, the environment and prerequisites for journalism innovation in Swiss media organizations remain challenging.

As the economic situation had grown increasingly challenging, media start-ups, as well as established media organizations, had not only placed high hopes on the new law, but often did not have any alternative plans. Several online start-ups had to give up, as it became clear that after the referendum, any kind of state program to support the media, especially online media, would be politically impossible for the next few years. Examples of online start-ups that ceased to exist are the science journalism portal higgs.ch or kolt.ch, which offered solution-oriented local journalism.

Another blow to the financing of private media companies came with the revision of the Radio and Television Act. The media fee, which until then had to be paid only by owners of radio and/or TV devices, was to be converted into a compulsory household levy. While this may have been seen as a promising option to put media organizations on a stable financial base, it turned out to undermine any form of state subsidy for media even further. The change to a mandatory fee for each household was colloquially called the

“media tax” or a compulsory fee by opponents (Kessler 2016). Resistance arose against this planned system change, although the amount to be paid annually was reduced at the same time (2019: 465 Swiss francs; 2022: 335 Swiss francs), and private broadcasters received a higher share of the collected fees.

Furthermore, an increasing and still ongoing public discourse about the regulations of private and service public broadcasters has developed over the last 15 years or so. In 2008, the federal regulator OFCOM implemented the new Radio and Television Act (nRTVG), which linked the licensing and financing of commercial radio and TV stations by fee money to the introduction of an editorial quality management system (EQMS; Wyss and Keel 2009, 116). The requirements concerning quality assurance do not directly refer to the journalistic quality of individual news stories but to the organizational structures in editorial newsrooms and the processes that bring about news programs. With this measure, the regulator tried to ensure the quality of electronic broadcasting without interfering with the private broadcasters’ freedom of the press. At the same time, pressure to limit the activities of the mostly fee-financed public broadcasters increased, culminating in 2018 in the No Billag referendum, in which annual broadcasting fees should have been abolished altogether. While the referendum was turned down, the efforts to curtail the public broadcaster regarding its financing on the one hand and on the other its activities online, where it competes against private media organizations, continue. As of 2023, a political initiative is calling for the annual broadcasting fees to be cut roughly in half to 200 Swiss francs (“Halbierungsinitiative”).

Actors shaping media policy

The current analysis shows that efforts from the regulatory body to strengthen innovation in the media industry, as well as media laws that include financial support for online media, are an important building block for ensuring future quality-oriented journalism (Saner and Wyss 2023). However, the Federal Council and the Swiss Parliament show a pronounced lack of interest in ensuring national media diversity, combating media concentration, and further developing media promotion (Meier 2015, 172).

State-funded media support thus remains in the form of indirect media support in the print sector and direct support in the broadcasting sector (Saner and Wyss 2019). The Publishers Association (Verband Schweizer Medien VSM), an industry association dominated by big legacy media houses like Tamedia (TX Group), Ringier, the NZZ-Group, and CH Media, strongly lobbies for financial support from the state for their print and online activities, but only in indirect form, as any direct support would be seen as a threat to the freedom of the press.

Due to the federally organized, direct-democratic system, a particularly high number of media critical voices are involved in media policy discourses, which mainly revolve around the journalistic public service and the

performance of SRG, the public broadcaster. The SRG has been under constant parliamentary criticism from right-wing populists for years (Holtz-Bacha 2021, 229; Udris et al. 2021; Udris and Eisenegger 2022, 106), though studies do show that public service can be an important driver of journalism innovations (Puppis and Ali 2023).

Since the OFCOM is part of the Federal Office for the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (UVEK), the media sector often is a side issue in larger political debates, compared to other dominant issues such as energy or the construction of transportation infrastructure. Moreover, the media landscape is characterized by a multitude of actors from within and outside the media sphere. To accompany the change in media, the federal government established the Federal Media Commission (EMEK), a permanent expert advisory board for the executive branch with representatives from both media science and practice. The EMEK regularly publishes position papers on macroeconomic industry issues and pleads for the consistent promotion of new journalism innovations (EMEK 2023, 4).

There are various other organizational bodies, think tanks, lobbying associations, nongovernmental organizations on human rights, and the media, which shape the development and review of media policy. On the journalistic side, these discourses are accompanied and evaluated by institutionalized media journalism in mass media and specialized media sites. The impact of media science is rather limited in the political decision-making process. However, there is a wide range of state-sponsored program research on the quality of reporting. This research offers media practice the opportunity to initiate innovation based on results (Grossenbacher 2015; Kolb 2015).

The plethora of agents overall ensure stability and predictability in Swiss media policy but makes it difficult to enforce quick, broadly accepted, and innovative decisions.

Media markets

Up until recent years, three of the four national language regions represented fairly independent media systems, with a stronger orientation to the neighboring countries of the same language than to the other Swiss language regions (German-speaking Switzerland toward Germany and Austria, French-speaking Switzerland toward France, Italian-speaking Switzerland toward Italy). The media spaces and markets are thus quite small and reflect the population in the regions: 5 million in the German-speaking, less than 2 million in francophone Suisse, and just over 0.5 million in the Italian-speaking areas. Only in recent years have the linguistic boundaries within Switzerland been overcome by private media companies in attempts to address bigger media markets. The first and most comprehensive attempt in this direction was the establishment of 20 Minutes in 1999, a free daily newspaper in three languages and with editorial offices in all parts of the country. Other examples are the French language editions of both the tabloid newspaper *Blick* and

the online news site *Watson.ch*. However, despite these attempts to overcome language barriers, the audiences and the journalistic cultures remain fairly separated, and the national media market is rather fragmented.

Regulatory framework

Article 16 of the Swiss constitution guarantees the freedom of opinion and information. Every person has the right to form their own opinion and, more relevant to the media, has the right to publicize and spread their opinion. Furthermore, each person has the guaranteed right to receive information from “generally accessible sources.” The freedom of the media is separately made explicit in article 17, which states that the freedom of the press, radio, and TV, as well as other kinds of public distribution of information, is guaranteed. As the constitution was last revised in 1999, the potential of the internet could not yet fully be foreseen. However, this last part of article 17 is usually seen as applying to online media, as they are not otherwise mentioned.

Furthermore, the constitution contains article 93 that declares fundamental rights concerning radio and TV, and states those services are to contribute to the forming of opinions on political and societal issues, to foster cultural development, and, as another requirement, to be entertaining for the general public. Other than that, the independence of both radio and TV broadcasters is constitutionally guaranteed. Furthermore, in paragraph 4 of article 93, the constitution states that they are to consider and take into account the needs of other media types, especially the printed press.

Paragraph 4 is relevant in the context of the development of online activities or commercial activities in general based on the following argument. Since print media titles do not profit from audience fees, they are at an economic disadvantage when competing with fee-supported media, especially the public service provider SRG, which currently receives 1.2 billion Swiss francs per year in audience fees, a sum that is larger than the annual budget of any private Swiss media organization.

The regulatory framework in Switzerland thus mainly differentiates between traditional print media, which are privately organized, and electronic media (radio and TV), which include both private and public service organizations.

For private print and online media, there are no regulatory limits besides the general, not media-specific legal framework, which deals with the protection of the individual, including data protection, the organization of fair competition, and other general legal aspects.

For electronic media, there are two types of regulations. One for the public service programs of the national broadcasting company SRG SSR¹ and one for the private broadcasters. Both types of broadcasters profit from audience fees. It is thus sometimes referred to as a “media tax” (see p. 000), even though it is not collected by the state. Generally, there is a direct correlation

between the size of the audience fee a broadcaster receives and the quantity of applied regulatory rules. About 90% of the fees go toward the public service provider SRG SSR, which in return also has the least freedom concerning commercial activities and must meet the highest expectations toward the public value of its program, as stated already in article 93 of the constitution. At the other end of the spectrum, private stations, which choose to do without a share of the audience fee, enjoy the greatest freedom in the context of commercial activities, choice of program content, or geographical area in which a program is broadcast. This has consequences for both the liberty at which media organizations can innovate and the resources they have.

As SRG SSR is financed with mandatory fee money, there are limits to its online services defined by federal regulations and the broadcasting license. Online content must be linked to parts of the TV program; otherwise, the length of a news piece is limited. As this restricts the opportunities for innovations with online services, these constraints are under discussion. However, in order to avoid uneven competition between private and largely fee-financed SRG SSR, protection of the private media organizations has so far been upheld.

It is generally agreed that to continue to face the challenge of digitization, these restrictions must be reviewed, also because the younger generations turn away from linear radio and TV. For example, in 2022, SRF television reached 22% of people under the age of 29 years, but 85% were over 60 years old (Mediapulse TV-Data), so if SRG is not allowed to venture into online programs, it is doomed to lose its audience, which would mean the loss of a relevant media public service in the each of the linguistic regions.

The federal government, in an initial discussion about the new broadcasting license (due in 2025), described the SRG mandate as serving society and democracy, strengthening social cohesion, and focusing its activities on information, education, and culture. For entertainment and sports, SRG should focus on those areas not covered by private organizations. While the government reinforced the will to uphold a fee-based public service, which serves all parts of the country and society, it also sets boundaries for the directions in which SRG can develop and innovate.²

In the context of the content of electronic media, licensed stations are obliged to provide a certain quality of content. They are required to “present the totality of events and perspectives in an adequate way.” Only if a “sufficient” quantity of providers cover a geographical area are the broadcasters exempted from this requirement.

The radio and TV law further attempts to foster competition between private broadcasters by preventing the concentration of broadcasting stations with a clause that requires media companies to own no more than two radio and two TV stations. Furthermore, article 45 states that if there are several applications for a license within the same area, the application of the organization that “enriches the diversity of opinions and programs” is to be preferred. In practice, this means that when applications are comparable, the regulator gives the license to the organization that has no other media activities.

Due to numerous developments that have worsened the legal situation for journalistic media and media professionals in recent years (Cueni 2023), Switzerland currently lies in 12th place in the Reporters Without Borders country ranking of press freedom (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). There have also been positive achievements, such as the *Öffentlichkeitsgesetz*, which has existed since 2004. This law allows media professionals to gain access to official documents. However, because of article 293 in the Penal Code, media professionals can be punished if they publish “confidential information.” In 2017, parliament rejected the deletion of this law, even though it can be seen as a contradiction to the control function of the media. Moreover, parliament amended the Code of Criminal Procedure in March 2023. Whether this change will impact the legal situation in practice is unclear; in any case, it expresses a general skepticism in the national parliament toward too much media freedom. Furthermore, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) to delay or prevent unwanted journalistic publications are increasingly used strategically by organizations.

Swiss media industry: diversification over investments in journalism

The Swiss broadcasting media landscape is dominantly shaped on the one hand by the public broadcaster SRG SSR and on the other by a handful of private legacy media, which originated in the newspaper business but have expanded into online media in the last two decades. The private media landscape is dominated by four large media houses: TX Group, Ringier, and a joint venture of CH Media and NZZ-Group originated in the 19th century being developed from large print media titles, while SRG SSR was founded mid-20th century to establish national radio and TV programs as a public service. The private media organizations not only have their roots in print media; they are still primarily focused on print media but are developing into online media. In recent years, some of them have acquired private radio and TV stations (mostly CH Media and NZZ-Group), have developed a diverse and nationwide print portfolio (TX Group), or have expanded into Eastern European and non-European media markets (Ringier). SRG SSR, founded to provide radio and TV programs, has increasingly been developing online activities to keep up with the change in media use habits and routines by a newer generation of media users.

These private organizations are comparable in size, with media and non-media activities’ revenues of roughly 1 billion Swiss francs. They are not only substantially smaller than SRG SSR (revenue of 1.6 billion Swiss francs) but substantially smaller than media companies in neighboring countries, which also serve the Swiss media market, albeit with a limited range of activities.

In the print media sector, media concentration processes have been occurring since the mid-20th century, but in combination with a decrease in advertising revenues in print media and, at the same time, a drop in income due to the decline in subscriptions. Consequently, the financial situation has become

more challenging. Creating synergies by concentrating efforts has increasingly become the response to this challenge. Thus, the number of news titles, especially in print media, has been decreasing steadily over the last few years and decades. This applies even more to the number of independent newsrooms, as newsrooms have increasingly converged into centralized organizations that serve a large array of media outlets.

Media use has generally shifted from print to digital media channels (including social media). As of 2021, online media have taken over opinion power in the country for the first time, and social media is in the process of overtaking both print and radio, as *Media Monitor Switzerland 2021* shows (Medienmonitor Schweiz 2022). The opinion power share of online media was 30% in 2021, and any departure from this trend is not foreseeable. The strong importance of social media is also confirmed by the current James study (Külling et al. 2022). The most important opinion-forming, journalistic online media in German-speaking Switzerland include 20min.ch and srf.ch. However, despite a constant decline in the overall circulation of newspapers over the years, print products still find their buyers.

Additional to the main legacy organizations, which still use print distribution channels, there has been a wide variety of journalism start-ups, niche media, or para-journalistic initiatives that have tried to establish themselves in the editorial gaps that the media concentration has created or in thematic areas neglected by legacy media. These start-ups and niche media are typically local, digital-only news services financed by a combination of users, foundations, or donors. They all share the difficulty of finding a sustainable business model. As a consequence, many of the new agents that emerged over the last ten years have already disappeared.

Private legacy media companies have suffered greatly from declining revenues, which led to concentration, cost-cutting measures, and, consequently, a loss of diversity and quality in information journalism. However, legacy media houses like TX Group or Ringier still achieve significant net profits through activities in nonjournalistic fields. Thus, there are often few resources or little will to face the challenges posed by innovations in order to keep up with new ways of media use and a fragmented audience. While most media houses have initiated internal labs or other organizational units to create innovation, the business strategies of these organizations are prioritizing profitable nonjournalistic activities over investments in journalism.

Professional development in journalism

On a microlevel, individual attitudes of journalists toward journalism and change in their professional field can affect how innovation is fostered, accepted, and implemented. The international journalism survey “Worlds of Journalism” provides data on Swiss journalists on a wide range of aspects.

In the context of the role perception of journalists, survey data over the years show a lot of stability (Dingerkus et al. 2018, 124). The most relevant

roles reflect norms of journalistic objectivity: they think that journalists should foremost “report things as they are” and “be a detached observer.” More activist roles such as “provide information people need to make political decisions” or “promote tolerance and cultural diversity” are mentioned less often. The data from an ongoing survey in 2023 confirms this finding, with a slight shift toward more active roles.

When looking at sociodemographic aspects, the data over time show that the journalistic profession in Switzerland has become more diverse. The percentage of female journalists has increased over time, from 17% in 1980 to 39% in 2015, and this trend holds steady. As for ethnic diversity, journalists with a country of origin other than Switzerland are still vastly underrepresented compared to their share in society in general; nevertheless, misrepresentation is continuously decreasing (Dingerkus et al. 2018).

Furthermore, the data from journalism surveys over the years show that the journalistic profession has become ever more academic, meaning that the percentage of journalists with an academic degree has increased from 54% in 1998 to 70% in 2015 (Dingerkus et al. 2018, 121). It is noteworthy that in the French- and Italian-speaking areas, journalists are a lot more likely to have an academic degree than in the German-speaking area.

In the context of the perceived sources of influence, journalists list ethical considerations first. The following categories, however, all deal with resources, i.e., a lack thereof: time pressure, information access, and resources to do research.

In 2015, it was further asked how certain aspects had changed in relevance over the previous five years. The influence of social media on journalistic work was seen to have increased the most; the third-most increase was seen for user-generated content such as blogs. Besides these two technical aspects, which change the interaction with the audience, economic aspects were also seen to have increased in relevance: competition, profit-making pressure, and PR and advertising considerations.

Based on the data available from journalists’ surveys, journalists and the journalistic profession thus seem to change rather reluctantly. Ethical norms prevail and thus make journalists hesitant to question long-standing practices that are linked to journalistic norms. Factors or sources of influence that might bring about change to the journalistic profession are either technological, financial, or economic (see also Stöber 2005; Lauerer, Dingerkus, and Steindl 2019). However, these influences are often seen as a threat to professional norms rather than a chance to improve processes and products. A larger share of female journalists might topple long-standing hierarchies and bring new perspectives to newsrooms, just like the growing diversity in ethnic backgrounds of journalists. As for the academization of the journalistic profession, it remains to be seen what its impact on the power to innovate might be. University-trained journalists might be better prepared to reflect on journalism as a profession and a societal institution, as well as more familiar with findings from research that challenge journalistic routines and traditions.

At the same time, an orientation toward traditional norms and idealized views on journalism – e.g., in its relation to the audience – might make journalists less open to innovations, which they might view as unjournalistic because they have not been described as such in their rather normative journalism courses. To act as moderator of public discourses might, for example, be less in line with a traditional understanding of journalists as observers and neutral reporters of reality.

Conclusion

Swiss journalistic media are far from exploiting their innovation potential. On a macro- and mesolevel, the lack of resources due to a failing business model of relatively small media organizations in small-scaled, fragmented markets can be seen as the cause for a modest degree of innovation in the Swiss media system. Media policy that would foresee measures such as state subsidies to support initiatives or better protection of journalistic work could help to overcome this problem. However, the political culture of Switzerland, with slow, decentralized processes and a weak central state, does not allow for the timely development of such regulation. Therefore, the conditions for innovation in Swiss media are difficult. This overall assessment is consistent with evaluations from expert interviews and case study interviews conducted by the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) research consortium between 2021 and 2022. This finding complements results from surveys among journalists, which indicate that on the microlevel of individual actors, due to professional attitudes and working conditions, little innovation is to be expected. If individual journalists are to initiate innovative ideas, they are most likely to come from the fringes and not from the core of well-established media organizations.

Notes

- 1 The association's official name is *Schweizerische Radio- und Fernsehgesellschaft* (SRG), in German; *Société suisse de radiodiffusion et télévision* (SSR) in French, *Società svizzera di radiotelevisione* (SSR) in Italian, and *Societad svizra da radio e televisiun* (SSR) in Romansh.
- 2 <https://www.bakom.admin.ch/bakom/de/home/das-bakom/medieninformationen/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-90247.html>.

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7 Country report United Kingdom

Dead end street? The United Kingdom's framework conditions for innovations in journalism

Colin Porlezza and Petra Mazzoni

Introduction

This chapter, related to the research project “Innovations in Journalism in Democratic Societies: Index, Influence, and Prerequisites in International Comparison,” focuses on the impact of innovations on the quality of journalism and its role in a democratic society. The chapter explores the context for journalism innovation in the United Kingdom, looking at three different levels, ranging from the systemic macrolevel (historical and social preconditions) to the industry-related mesolevel and to the professional and cultural microlevel. Bruns (2014) argues that innovation in media and journalism is a phenomenon based on a wide variety of “interlinked, incremental, everyday processes of media and societal change.” We base our argument on Bruns (2014) and want to offer an overview of the current media structure in Britain and how it might impact the way journalism innovation emerges. The relevant actors in this “interlinked” framework of media and societal transformation processes are public institutions, such as the government, the public administration, or journalism and media scholars. There are also private actors, such as (journalistic) entrepreneurs or media professionals, since individual actors can be as important to innovation as institutions or even media policy (Schumpeter 1983).

The United Kingdom is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy and has approximately 68 million inhabitants, which makes it the fourth-largest nation in Europe by population. The United Kingdom is divided into four countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Overall, London and the Northwest of England are two of the largest economies in the European context. However, in the recent decade, the British economy has suffered significantly due to various developments, such as Brexit, the pandemic, and the resulting inflation that lasted longer and weighed more heavily compared to other European countries. After Brexit, the British economy needed to deal with a productivity crash of about £29 billion, or £1,000 per household (Klein 2023); a workforce shortage; and the overall sentiment that Brexit continues to provide friction in trade and commerce. The political uncertainty that emerged because of Brexit did not necessarily entail

dysfunctional effects on innovation. Indeed, research shows that uncertainty can sometimes trigger specific responses, especially in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, but the “nature of strategic responses of entrepreneurial actors varies significantly, depending on their firms’ characteristics (...)” (Sohns and Wójcik 2020, 1539).

The country is politically and economically dominated by England and London, although it has experienced, to some extent, a devolution of powers from the capital to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, as well as the establishment of the Northern Irish government. However, in the context of the news industry, London remains the undisputed media capital. Overall, the news media landscape is characterized by a “well-funded and regulated broadcasting sector and a lively and opinionated national press” (Newman et al. 2022). In terms of news sources, since 2016, online (including social media) has become the most important vector (73%), more than TV (53%), social media (38%), and print media (17%). In particular, the press has suffered heavily throughout the last decade, falling from almost 60% to below 20% and hitting an all-time low in 2021 (15%). However, the decreasing relevance of print media as news sources in the United Kingdom is not only due to the Web, the increasing digitalization, or the use of smartphones as the main devices for news consumption but began back in the 1960s, as Brock (2013) demonstrates.

Generally, trust in news is falling in the United Kingdom and is currently set at 34% (Newman et al. 2022). From 2015, when trust was still at 51%, the trust score trend was negative. However, during the pandemic, news media overall benefited from a significant boost in trust (and news consumption), but it seems that the positive trend was an exception. In addition, many users also specifically choose to limit their exposure to certain kinds of news, resulting in a selective news avoidance behavior that has doubled in the United Kingdom (46%) since 2017. Particularly in the United Kingdom, where continuous crises like Brexit, the pandemic, the high inflation, and the grim economic outlook may contribute to a depressing context, news avoidance is on the rise because users feel worn out; it brings down their mood, or they simply consider the news as repetitive. The tense political situation related to the war in Ukraine also contributes to users disconnecting completely from the news. In the United Kingdom, news-deprived users are almost reaching 10% of the population.

In the context of the news media industry, the most important outlets in terms of reach are the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), ITV, and Sky News. Despite striving for impartiality, the BBC continues to face a hostile political environment; headwinds have further intensified. Some of the corporation’s journalists have suffered not only from digital but also from physical attacks, “along with personal abuse on social media, while some BBC veterans have left for rival broadcasters that are able to offer more freedom, money, or both” (Newman et al. 2022). The government also threatened to close Channel 4, a publicly owned but commercially run channel, an idea

eventually abandoned (Waterson 2023). As a response, the BBC nevertheless focuses increasingly on its digital and streaming services. However, with TalkTV, a new opinion-led television channel launched by Rupert Murdoch's News UK, and GB News, another right-leaning TV channel, the broadcast sector was shaken up in 2022, although both new entries have already been found in breach of the broadcasting code by the regulator Ofcom.¹

In the context of the publishers, the traditionally more opinionated newspapers continue to lose ground as primary news sources, which is why many established news outlets have shifted their focus to online subscriptions and memberships (Newman 2023a). At the same time, the country saw the launch of mainly local- and regional-based new journalism start-ups such as Tortoise, co-founded by a former BBC News director; the Bristol Cable; or Scotland-based The Ferret. Many of these online-only players have a more engaged and interactive understanding of journalism; they try to build communities around their news products and harness their relationship with the local readers in terms of getting to know hot topics or issues to investigate further. At the same time, more traditional local and regional newspapers continue to suffer heavily due to shrinking advertising revenue and users unwilling to pay for (online) news, although local markets were once quite important (Firmstone, n.d.). This is also one of the main reasons why there is an ongoing consolidation and concentration process in the regional newspaper market, with the risk of editorial influence and more job losses. Overall, there is significant concern over the diminishing plurality; indeed, the Media Pluralism Monitor shows that both media concentration and commercial influence over editorial content are at high risk (Dzakula 2016).

Media system, policy, and innovation framework

The United Kingdom has a long history in terms of the press fighting for freedom and independence from the state, which can still be observed. Some of these developments go back as far as 1694, when the act of prepublication censorship was removed, or to the 19th century, when the stamp tax, or “Tax on Knowledge,” was finally abolished in 1855. However, the struggles have modern iterations, for instance, in relation to strong government pressure on news outlets such as the Guardian during the revelations about secret state surveillance leaked by the whistleblower Edward Snowden or the continuous pressures on the BBC with regard to the license fee. In terms of political developments in modern history, Britain has probably gone through the most dramatic period in the last ten years. While the liberal country's politics has enjoyed quite a stable situation, the last decade was wholly unpredictable and unstable. The European Union (EU) referendum in 2016, resulting in Brexit, started the slide into societal and economic instability. The 2020 pandemic worsened the extant recession, which led to exploding costs and a declining standard of living, the increasing deprivation of former manufacturing areas, and increasing polarization. Finally, the death of Queen

Elizabeth II in 2022 took yet another stabilizing factor away from a country already facing a downward spiral.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue the UK media structure is labeled as liberal, given that it is characterized “by a relative dominance of market mechanisms and of commercial media”. However, the United Kingdom represents an exception to this model that primarily describes the US media system and is also dubbed as a “mixed case between the Liberal and Democratic Corporatist Models.” The main reason for this exceptional condition can be found in the particularly important role that the public service media plays in Britain. In the context of UK journalism, Hallin and Mancini (2004) state that there were basically three distinct journalistic cultures: the tabloids, the quality press, and the broadcasting sector, although today, these cultures seem to be far less distinct (Hallin, Mellado, and Mancini 2023).

Media legislation and regulation in the United Kingdom relates to two specific areas: first, the oversight of the public service media (BBC), and second, commercial media (both press and broadcasting). The main ministerial department responsible for the media is the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS). Overall, since the 1990s, the United Kingdom saw a relaxation of media regulation, particularly in terms of cross-media ownership. One of the most important laws was introduced in 2003, The Communications Act, which not only allowed foreign ownership of UK media but also established a new regulator with the Office of Communication (Ofcom), which is responsible for setting and enforcing rules not only for television, radio, and video-on-demand sectors but also for other communication technologies, such as (mobile) phones and postal services.²

The government is a major funder of news media in the United Kingdom through two main measures: first, the BBC is mainly financed through the TV license fee. Second, the news production of print media is indirectly funded “through the zero VAT rating on newspapers, journals, periodicals and magazines, worth around £1.4 billion a year” (Center for Media, Data and Society 2021). This is a remarkable reduction given that the current standard rate of the value-added tax (VAT) stands at 20%. Additionally, some news organizations (for instance, Full Fact, The Conversation, or the Centre for Investigative Journalism) can benefit from charitable status, which grants specific tax reliefs, provided they are able to show that the journalism they carry out is a means to achieving charitable purposes.

Additionally, there are two other minor forms of public subsidy. The first concerns the public service media and its BBC Local News Partnership. This program was established as part of the BBC’s 2017–2027 Royal Charter and includes the commitment by the public broadcaster to partner with the local press to fund, out of its own pockets and up to £8 million, 150 local news reporters that should cover local authorities and public services.

The other government action is the direct outcome of the Cairncross Review, a study into the sustainability of high-quality journalism in the United Kingdom, commissioned by the government under the chairmanship

of Dame Frances Cairncross. The policy report, published in 2019, examined the overall state of the news media market, the threats to the financial sustainability of publishers, the impact of search engines and social media platforms, and the role of digital advertising (Cairncross 2019). One of its main recommendations focused explicitly on innovation funding:

Given the pressing need for news publishers to develop new approaches and tools, this Review recommends that the government launch a new fund, focused particularly on innovations aimed at improving the supply of public-interest news. Initially, the fund should be managed by Nesta, and in due course by the Institute for Public Interest News described below. It should focus on innovation that will not just benefit the recipient, but be sufficiently generous and well-managed to make an industry-wide difference.

(Cairncross 2019)

Following the report's recommendations, which are based on the analysis of the period our project was focusing on (2010–2020), the DCMS decided to provide a £2 million fund to the independent charity Nesta, formerly the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, in order to establish the Future News Pilot Fund to kickstart journalism innovation, providing grants in the range from £20,000 to £100,000. The newly created fund awarded grants to 20 projects, such as, for instance, the Bristol Cable. However, while the Cairncross Review recommended renewing the fund every year and for the next ten years with a minimum of £10 million, the Future News Pilot Fund seemed to be a one-off instead of becoming a regular or permanent journalism innovation fund.

However, the Cairncross Review was not the only investigation into the current state of journalism. The House of Lords' Communications and Digital Committee also led an inquiry into the future of journalism, publishing its report "Breaking News? The Future of UK Journalism" in November 2020. While the report tackled similar issues of how to secure a sustainable future for journalism, it had a wider scope than the previous Cairncross Review since the Committee also organized hearings with and called for written evidence from different witnesses ranging from journalism practice to journalism scholars. The Review also dealt with new challenges like "new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and engagement and collaboration with audiences, for example by audience involvement in the production of journalism" (Communications and Digital Committee 2020).

There may be a couple of reasons why the UK government is hesitant about further investments in journalism innovation: first, there is continuous direct funding of the BBC through the license fee. Public service media are often seen as drivers of journalism innovation in specific media systems (Direito-Rebollal and Donders 2023), and the BBC is particularly active in this regard with its BBC News Lab (Zaragoza-Fuster and García-Avilés

2020). This strong position of the public broadcaster is also reflected by some witnesses in the “Breaking News?” report, who describe how the BBC restrains the spaces to innovate for others. Overall, both the Cairncross report and the inquiry into the future of journalism demonstrate that there is an urgent need to adapt to the necessities of a digital news media ecosystem. It is thus not surprising that both reports welcome and call for journalism innovation, also in terms of public financial support. In the words of the “Breaking News?” report, “We welcome journalism organizations which are innovating to adapt to changes in the market, while continuing to hone traditional journalistic skills, producing high quality content and holding an understanding of their audiences at the heart of this innovation.”

Until a couple of years ago, the UK government still relied on specific media policies to promote innovation, including “publicly financed initiatives involving agencies at both the UK and nations levels” (Picard 2017, 225). These initiatives ranged from supporting innovation networks to skills training, from supporting access to private financing to incentives for research and development and regional development agencies. Currently, however, the government is hesitant to renew any direct subsidies for innovation purposes – for instance, in the form of publicly funded grants for journalism innovation projects. This results in an unclear media innovation policy that, for the large part, also ignores the policy recommendations that, for instance, the Cairncross report came up with.

Media industry: corporate performance

The United Kingdom can be considered an innovative country: it is currently in fourth place (out of 132 countries) in the Global Innovation Index 2022, third at the European level in terms of innovation economies (WPIO 2022), and as a strongly innovative nation in the “European Innovation Scoreboard 2022”, with an innovation index of close to 118% out of a maximum of 160% (European Commission 2022).

However, in the context of press freedom, the country’s record (it is currently ranked 26th in the Press Freedom Index) has been marred by “worrying legislative proposals, the approval of Julian Assange’s extradition to the United States, and the treatment of journalists covering protests” (Reporter Without Borders 2022). These concerning developments are confirmed by other rankings, such as the “Index on Censorship,” which evaluates the country as only “partially open,” for instance, due to the “chilling effects” of the Online Safety Bill or the National Security Bill. Indeed, the leaks by former computer intelligence consultant Edward Snowden show that the United Kingdom had implemented a massive surveillance system, intercepting communications of millions of private citizens, violating both rights to privacy and freedom of expression. Consequently, the United Kingdom suffered a landmark ruling by the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against the massive and continuous interception of private communications.

The media market in the United Kingdom is dominated by the public service broadcasting BBC, commercial broadcasters, and the national press (Firmstone, n.d.). However, the media market has radically changed over time, as there have been shifts regarding the importance of news sources. A decade ago, TV dominated as a news source, followed by online and print. In 2015, online took over from TV as the primary news source, while print media continued to lose ground. Over the last ten years, the digital realm has doubled in use for accessing information. The device for accessing online information has mainly been the computer, with the steady growth of the smartphone, which in 2017 took the place of the computer (Newman et al. 2022).

In the TV market, the BBC is still dominant, both with its linear and non-linear offerings, such as the BBC iPlayer. Indeed, in 2016, more than 50% of the broadcast television audience can be attributed to public service channels, such as “BBC One, BBC Two, ITV/STV/UTV, Channel 4 and Channel 5.” The BBC is founded on the Royal Charter and is mainly funded through license fees paid by UK inhabitants. However, a smaller portion of its revenues also stem from commercial services, which include, for instance, the BBC Studios or the BBC production company (BBC, n.d.). The BBC’s media innovation unit, the BBC News Labs, is focusing on a couple of strategic areas of innovation: finding alternative ways to reach audiences, providing consumers with the news they actually require, and rebuilding the audience’s trust in the news (Caswell 2020).

In the print market, there are basically three types of newspapers: broadsheet (also known as quality newspapers; examples are the Times, the Guardian, the Daily Telegraph), tabloids (such as the Sun or the Daily Mirror), and mid-market papers (such as the Daily Express; Firmstone, n.d.). The print market has been in decline for years, as 40% of circulation has been lost in less than a decade (2010–2018). At the same time, digital newspaper consumption has grown. The national newspaper market is in the hands of a few publishers like News Corp., the Daily Mail Group, or the Guardian News and Media Ltd. At the regional and local levels, concentration processes are occurring, and publishers have become fewer (Media Reform Coalition 2021).

The print industry currently focuses on a variety of business models, such as membership or online subscription. Almost all broadsheets have increased their digital subscriptions, with the Financial Times setting the benchmark with more than one million digital subscribers. All companies are trying to diversify and personalize their offerings to boost their online audience, often with the help of specific artificial intelligence (AI)–driven dissemination applications. The Guardian is instead the emblematic example of a newspaper that applies a membership strategy; indeed, the newspaper has gained more than one million subscriptions from people who are willing to pay for its content, although it is freely accessible. The Guardian thus combines differing types of digital revenue models, such as app subscriptions and donations

(Newman et al. 2022). In the context of digital advertising, the Guardian is characterized by attempts to use innovative formats, which involve, for example, interactivity with the public (Kasule 2023).

In terms of audience development, the United Kingdom is not an exception to recent transformations. During the pandemic, news users whom Kleis Nielsen et al. (2020, 6) define as “infodemically vulnerable” almost tripled. These users “consume little to no news and information about COVID-19, and say they would not trust it even if they did – grew from 6% early in the crisis to 15% in late August” (Kleis Nielsen et al. 2020). Especially among young users, a tendency to avoid news can be observed: in the United Kingdom, close to two-thirds of news avoiders under 35 years say the news brings down their mood. The pandemic thus further deteriorated the issue of information inequality, as differences in education, income, gender, and age became even more clear. In addition, the United Kingdom has a relatively high degree of news audience polarization.

Recently, in terms of innovation, the news media industry’s interests seem to be focusing on tools that harness data and metrics. The activities revolving around business models, user engagement, personalized content, and newsletters, as well as platforms such as TikTok, confirm that reaching (new) audience(s) has become a primary objective for many publishers, also because (digital) subscriptions and memberships will remain the most important source of revenue (Newman 2023b). To reach this goal, many publishers also implemented algorithms and machine learning throughout the last five years (Newman 2018).

Professionals

Journalism in the United Kingdom is characterized by strong academization. Overall, British newsrooms show diversity issues on several levels: first, in terms of ethnicity, with black journalists being underrepresented by a factor of more than ten. Second, in terms of academization, 98% of all professional journalists have a bachelor’s, and 36% have a master’s. While this contributes to journalism’s professionalization, it might well have dysfunctional consequences in terms of social divisions. Third, women comprise a high proportion of the overall profession, but unlike their male counterparts, they are paid less well and are also underrepresented in more senior positions within news organizations (Thurman, Cornia, and Kunert 2016). Fourth, in the context of their political alignment, half of all journalists take left-of-center positions, while the remaining half splits between center and right-of-center positions.

Overall, according to the Office for National Statistics, in 2019, 81,000 people in the United Kingdom worked as journalists. Thurman and Kunert (2016) suggest that UK journalists are mostly employed in newsrooms of magazines (43.7%), daily newspapers (25.9%), weekly newspapers (18.4%), TV (13.6%), and radio stations (12.0%). About 30,000 of all professional

journalists work wholly or partly online. Since 2012, the number of journalists working for newspapers has seen a constant decline from 56% to 44%. More than half of journalists (54%) work for one news media outlet, whether it is radio, TV, online, or print. And most journalists have full-time jobs (74%). Although most journalists declare that they enjoy a high degree of autonomy, the growing pressure on journalists is reflected in the perception of increasing profit pressure, with audience research becoming much more important (Thurman, Cornia, and Kunert 2016).

Most journalists understand their role as bearing witness and reporting things as they are (Thurman and Kunert 2016). Other dominant roles are educating the audience and being a detached observer. Professional journalists largely agree on these predominant roles. But agreement on these roles exceeds professional boundaries and can already be observed at universities that teach journalism. Most journalism students do not necessarily identify themselves with alternative role perceptions, in particular in the context of topics such as innovation and entrepreneurial journalism. Students do not see themselves as actors who will apply innovation to journalism, although they emphasize that there are transformation processes underway (Broersma and Singer 2020). Practical skills are still important for future journalists, although there is an awareness of the necessary competence to use digital tools.

Hence, journalists perceive not only an increasing use of technology but also a growing need for technical skills and data literacy (Thurman and Kunert 2016). At the same time, there is an increasingly broader range of noneditorial actors in the newsroom, from designers to developers, from data scientists to computer engineers. Most of these roles have a specific task of improving the digital presence of news outlets, for instance, through social media editors. Changes in newsroom structures were also forced by the pandemic: lockdowns and enforced remote working required news organizations to rethink work routines and production processes. Most news outlets have redesigned their office space to accommodate hybrid and flexible work, which shows that bringing people back into the office entails discussions revolving around the purpose of the office as a working space. However, this also comes with additional requirements in terms of leadership priorities and employees' expectations (Cherubini 2022).

Using data and embedding new technology in work routines to create a truly hybrid form of journalism (Diakopoulos 2019) between humans and machines is currently one of the main issues with which news organizations deal. Beckett (2019) demonstrates that most news outlets did not have a clear strategy in the context of the use of AI technology, notwithstanding that the implementation of algorithms and news automation can lead to a reconfiguration of journalistic roles (Schapals and Porlezza 2020). Today, most news organizations do have a clearer idea of where they are heading, although designing and implementing AI tools for newsrooms is still a challenging endeavor (Gutierrez et al. 2023). These issues call for further discussion

about editorial standards and how to regulate the responsible use of AI applications, taking into account that in most newsrooms, ethical concerns about AI are not perceived as being of primary concern (Porlezza and Ferri 2022).

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the framework conditions for journalism innovation in the United Kingdom. On the macrolevel, Britain is characterized by early democratization that resulted in an early affirmation of press freedom and the official abolishment of censorship. Since liberalism is the guiding political and moral philosophy, direct institutional support for innovation in the news industry has always been in short supply, leaving it mainly to individuals, as well as the marketplace of ideas, to come up with new and innovative ideas.

The news industry in the United Kingdom is undergoing a period of drastic transformation. Digitalization, as well as the appearance of new intermediaries, such as social media platforms, and shifting news consumption, required news organizations to rethink how to reach and engage with audiences, how to adapt news production, and how to finance journalism. Several media outlets have suffered due to the changing news media ecosystem and the financial crisis, as well as the pandemic, which has significantly contributed to an industry in continuous turmoil.

The ongoing (economic) crisis in the news industry resulted in governmental action in terms of two major inquiries into the issue of how to secure (a financially viable) journalism for the future: the Cairncross Review and the “Breaking News? The Future of UK Journalism” report. Both studies launched a public debate about the future of journalism, also looking into the issue of journalism innovation, and concluded that journalism did need specific innovation funding aimed at improving the supply of news. Following the report’s recommendations, a publicly funded Future News Pilot Fund was established with the task of financing innovative journalism projects. However, the funding scheme remained a one-off project. This reflects the current government’s unclear strategy in terms of supporting the news media industry through public funds, even if central reports on the future of journalism and news media, such as the Cairncross Review, suggested otherwise.

The public funds were useful for establishing new regional and local news outlets, such as the Bristol Cable. Although both reports called for continuous innovation funding, the government did not follow the recommendations. Especially on the regional and local levels, British news outlets are under enormous pressure, and further concentration processes are currently underway. At the same time, the UK media system is characterized by a vivid innovation drive, albeit mostly at the national level and among financially more powerful publishers.

In the context of innovation at an industry level, datafication processes have been further consolidated (Porlezza 2018). Most innovations rely heavily on (user) data, such as metrics, to improve user engagement, to ameliorate the

personalization of editorial content, and to advance the functioning of paywalls to increase subscription numbers. The last five years have also shown that AI has become more than a simple trend in UK newsrooms, involving information retrieval, fact-checking, and automated news production to news recommenders. AI has become a central field for journalism innovation.

Overall, the UK media system shows a constant thrive for journalism innovation in the face of transformations that are putting enormous pressure on news outlets in terms of shifting news consumption and keeping journalism sustainable. Hence, journalism innovation in the United Kingdom mostly equals datafication and eventually represents a means of making journalism not only more efficient but also economically viable, as the ultimate goal often seems to be the increase of subscriptions. Even if the range and scope of innovations are high in the United Kingdom, challenges continue to persist, as there is an increasing number of news-deprived people or those who actively avoid the news – a phenomenon that increased during the pandemic. Consequently, future research could and should not only look at potential policy frameworks and incentives – for instance, whether innovation funds can have a long-lasting impact on securing public interest journalism – but also at measures to improve media and data literacy, given that the “informationally vulnerable” users are on the rise.

Notes

- 1 See, for instance, “Ofcom finds GB News in breach of broadcasting rules for a second time” <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2023/ofcom-finds-gb-news-in-breach-of-broadcasting-rules-for-a-second-time>.
- 2 For more information on Ofcom’s activities, see its 2022 communications market report: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/240930/Communications-Market-Report-2022.pdf.

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Part IV

**The most relevant innovations
in journalism from a
comparative perspective**



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8 AI and automation

A key task for the present and future

*Jonas Schützeneder, Michael Graßl,
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Throughout the last years decade, algorithmic techniques have started to permeate journalism practice to the extent that they influence almost all aspects of journalism “from the initial stages of news production to the latter stages of news consumption” (Zamith 2019, 1). An area that has gained considerable attention is “robot journalism” (Lemelshtich Latar 2018) or automated journalism (Carlson 2015), a particular technology that concerns the automated generation of journalistic texts through algorithms, without any human intervention except for the initial programming (Graefe 2016). However, algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) are not only used for automating the writing of texts but are present in many more areas of the journalism practice, also resulting in broader definitions, such as algorithmic journalism (Kotenidis and Veglis 2021). Indeed, we can observe the implementation of automation and AI-driven tools in areas such as information gathering (Thurman et al. 2016), news production and editing (Carlson 2015; Dörr 2016; Diakopoulos 2019; Thurman 2019), news distribution (Ford and Hutchinson, 2019), and personalization (Thurman 2019).

The broad range of usage cases, combined with an often positively framed coverage from borderline to boosterism (Cools et al. 2022), makes it difficult to have a clear idea about what exactly AI means. Thus, AI is often used as an umbrella term that includes a variety of meanings ranging from algorithms to machine learning to automation; the complexity is exacerbated by the many imaginative AI narratives in science-fiction movies and TV shows (Cave et al. 2020). This chapter uses the definition of AI that Brennen et al. (2018, 1) describe: “A collection of ideas, technologies that involve a computer system to perform tasks that would normally require human intelligence.”

An important note is that AI and automation not only increasingly determine editorial decision-making, but they also influence the nature, role, and workflows of journalism (Thurman et al. 2017) as humans and machines need to work together in a “hybrid state” (Milosavljević and Vobič 2019). In general, AI and automation offer many opportunities to make journalism more efficient, but they also entail specific challenges, particularly in terms of newswork, journalism ethics, and professional identity (Helberger et al. 2020; Gutierrez Lopez et al. 2022; Graßl et al. 2022; Porlezza and Ferri

2022). In addition, algorithms are often opaque and present a lack of clarity and transparency, particularly in the context of the collection of personal data. These are precisely the reasons that it should be essential for journalists to understand what AI is and how it gets implemented in their line of work (Royal 2017).

In this chapter, we focus on five case studies that use AI and automation in journalism practice, one for each of the five countries in the study. The purpose of the five case studies is to analyze not only the various types of AI and automation in newswork but also the way that news organizations implement these innovations and the main goals that management wants to attain with AI and automation. Additionally, the chapter also wants to understand the contexts in which the innovations have been realized. Finally, the chapter examines the potential social impact of AI and automation, with a particular focus on the ways they affect democracy.

Case studies

The implementation of automation and AI was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations by the experts in all five countries (Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), following the research methodology of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project outlined in Chapter 2. These are the five case studies that are analyzed:

- Austria: The national *Austrian Press Agency's* (APA), whose roots go back to the 19th century, is considered the “godmother” of automation strategies in Austrian media houses. The interviewee was Verena Krawarik, who is head of *APA-medialab*.
- Germany: The *Rheinische Post*, a private publishing house, has realized some very successful and exemplary programming of AI applications (Beuting 2021). The interviewee was Clemens Boisserée, who, as head of editorial product development, has cultivated newspaper automation and AI activities.
- Spain: *Newtral* is a start-up founded in 2018 that can develop its own in-house technology and is, therefore, one of the few media outlets in Spain that have a team dedicated almost exclusively to working with AI. The interviewees were Rubén Míguez (head of technology and innovation) and Javier Beltrán (lead engineer in machine learning).
- Switzerland: *LENA* was named in the initial substudy (Meier et al. 2022) as particularly innovative in the field of automation and AI in Switzerland. *LENA* is a software that automatically generates political voting results for each Swiss municipality in three national languages (Keystone SDA 2018). The three interviewees in Switzerland were assured of anonymity prior to the interviews. Therefore, all the interviewees' quotes and statements are attributed to *LENA* and not specific individuals.

- United Kingdom: *Urbs Media* was named by experts in the United Kingdom in the initial substudy (Meier et al. 2022) as an innovative example in the field of AI in the United Kingdom. *Urbs Media* is a news start-up, which aims to uncover powerful local news by combining journalism with technology to deliver these stories on a sufficiently large scale that human effort alone could not achieve. The interviewee was Gary Rogers, one of the two co-founders.

Aims of the innovation

The interviewees from these five case studies tended to focus more on the subarea of automated text production. However, the answers concerning the aims of innovation tie in various levels of the topic:

In the context of the *production* level of journalism, the interviewees all mention three core ways that AI can help, of which the first is journalistic assistance and concur on its role. Automation and AI as assistance take responsibility for time-intensive activities and thus provide journalists with valuable time for important activities that should remain the responsibility of humans (research, opinionated forms of presentation).

The second level takes place at the interface of journalistic production and media *distribution*, at which point automated content production offers increased flexibility between production and distribution, providing the audience with individual compilations adapted to their respective interests (such as topics, places, and people).

The third level involves the new opportunities of audience analysis in the context of *marketing*. These insights, in turn, help to optimize production and distribution, creating a cycle of permanent evaluation, adaptation, and improvement. In other more concrete words, AI provides, in the context of recommendation and individualization, reliable information on the individual media usage of the audience and can be used to make targeted suggestions for the preparation and distribution of journalistic content. These systems of recommendations promise a targeted offer for the market, increase the quality of the offer, and thus increase the economic prospects of success, as Rubén Míguez (*Newtral*) and Verena Krawarik (*APA*) emphasize.

Supportive conditions

In the context of supportive conditions, the interviewees inferred a core aspect was the great interest shown by business executives. For example, Gary Rogers (*Urbs Media*) speaks of the noticeable attraction of innovation, in that the social discussion surrounding the future fields of AI and automation is creating an understanding in journalism that no one can close their minds to these developments. Innovation promises new business areas, potential savings, and, in macroeconomic terms, new business horizons. At the same time, the interviewees report that developments in the field of AI are

extremely volatile (very rapid further development in a short time, scant preparation time, and a high potential for surprises). In addition, the developments are strongly international, mainly due to the large US tech companies. Clemens Boisserée (*Rheinische Post*) speaks of permanent learning by doing, which ultimately helps innovation and the people involved in it in editorial departments, and argues the ceaseless examination of the topic promotes the overall interest in the media houses and also sensitizes the executive management level to the importance of the topic.

In addition, as with many other areas of innovation, the two aspects of time and budgets are also recognized as supportive conditions. In innovation, many ideas and projects come from the core of the workforce but must first be checked for feasibility and potential problems. According to the interviewees, this is where an open and innovative communication culture and the willingness to allow mistakes and failure can help, and as experience grows, this innovation becomes an asset for media companies. The interviewees also mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic as an aspect of a supportive condition. During this period, while the demand for data arriving quickly and automatically was particularly high, the situation differed by region and was solved by a variety of ways of generating and visualizing data. Consequently, the profile and fundamental orientation of the media houses in favor of automation increased significantly.

Obstructive conditions

Despite numerous advantages and positive perspectives, innovation struggles against a particular narrative that prevails in many newsrooms and minds: the doomsday scenario, the likes of which Gary Rogers (*UrbsMedia*) told, is a robot in the newsroom, daily composing thousands of texts, and in so doing rendering human journalists unemployable. Almost all interviewees mentioned this fear as a central obstacle to the implementation and further development of AI and automation in newsrooms. According to the interviewees' experiences, older journalists tend to be conservative and close-minded about digital developments, while their younger peers display curiosity and joy in experimenting.

In summary, the interviewees report internal and external skepticism about AI and automation in journalism. Internal concerns relate primarily to direct competition between journalists and AI tools, as well as job security issues. External skepticism primarily emphasizes the issue of limits and objectivity in the publication of texts and research.

A core problem that the interviewees cited is the immense amount of time required in the research and preparation of datasets, which are then used to make AI and automation work in the first place, and they are not always crowned with success. The reality is that a poor or incomplete data set cannot be used meaningfully, even by the best tools. On the other hand, the interviewees also experienced a strong increase in the wishes and needs of

both the general public and the management levels in that AI and automation were viewed as glorified miracle cures, but the implementation and work with them was not completely understood. In this context, the interviewees and the editorial departments saw a need for further clarification. Clemens Boisserée, for example, saw a lot of catching up was required in that the current workflows and structures of most media houses were nowhere near mature enough for this innovation and thus became a potential disruptive factor. The obstructive conditions mentioned ultimately also showed how resource intensive the topic of AI and automation ultimately was. The three interviewees of the *LENA* project concluded that the intensive use and prior provision of AI and automation systems might not be beneficial for some smaller media providers at either the economic or organizational level.

The third issue is the bias factor. Biases exist in many layers of the AI process, said Javier Beltrán (*Newtral*) and received support for this statement from Rubén Míguez (*Newtral*), who saw a central problem that has received scant address to date. Datasets that are generated, by default, will have biases. The issue of how journalism and media companies should deal with this problem has not yet been discussed.

Societal impact

The interviewees consistently attributed a high degree of societal impact to AI and automation innovations. The arguments and examples often complemented the findings from the aforementioned aims of innovation. However, the social impact could be recognized on a journalistic and a sociological level.

On the journalistic level, the impact takes place primarily through the increased variety of texts and information that can be prepared even more individually and regionally for the audience through AI and automation. In addition, the interviewees saw opportunities for increased output quality (Gary Rogers) and, in general, coverage of events and topics that might not have been noticed in the past due to various news or decision factors (Clemens Boisserée). The *LENA* project's interviewees concurred that, despite all the technical barriers, innovation overall created more diversity of topics and opinions, while at the same time increasing the proximity between journalism and the audience.

Furthermore, the importance of the issue and the impact on present and future society could be seen on a sociological level, which goes beyond the pure media-audience relationship. By addressing AI and automation, journalism creates knowledge and understanding about the opportunities and risks of this development. Several interviewees emphasized that innovation radiates into all areas of society and must, therefore, be understood and discussed in a correspondingly broad way. AI is a tool that can improve any field, not only in the pure sciences, said Javier Beltrán. This is precisely where journalism and the media are called upon to understand the social impact of

innovation not only as an entrepreneurial and strategic task but also to always accompany the broad impact on everyday life. This universal approach illustrated, once again, the central importance of this innovation for the present and the future in the media industry and far beyond.

Conclusion

The interviews conducted by the JoIn-DemoS project indicated that AI has emerged as a major innovation in journalism. An important note was that all the interviews in the studied cases were conducted prior to the exponential surge of AI-based tools toward the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023. If these conversations were repeated now, it's likely that the relevance of this trend would be even more pronounced, and interviewees would contend that incorporating these advancements in newsrooms and accelerating the use of this technology would position AI as the primary driver of innovation in the coming years.

The examples demonstrated that AI is being developed in various contexts, including start-ups, projects that combine technology and communication, and legacy media. The integration of AI in the tech industry is becoming increasingly widespread, with companies seeking to automate processes and improve efficiency. Furthermore, the incorporation of AI in communication has the potential to transform how we interact with technology and with one another.

The case studies indicated the main advances of AI and automation have been in the production of journalism, both in the initial phases, such as alerts or assistance in finding stories, and in the final stages, such as automated generation with geographic variants. This result aligns with the perspective of Kotenidis and Veglis (2021), who argue that algorithms are not solely utilized for automating text writing. Additionally, there are mentions of other areas of innovation, mainly personalized distribution (Thurman 2019) to different audience niches, as well as analysis of this data for commercial purposes.

AI is perceived as a breakthrough that cannot be ignored, but many of its developments are still based on trial and error. This reveals the importance of promoting an open culture in the media that favors a more rigorous analysis of its costs and benefits.

The main challenges facing the growth of AI are often grounded in an irrational fear of change, as well as the significant resources (particularly time) that are required. The interviewees also concurred with Porlezza and Ferri (2022), who argue that society must be careful about risks such as biases and consider the challenges of ethical issues. However, this study mainly highlighted the positive consequences for journalism, such as personalization, diversity, and quality.

Finally, the studied initiatives demonstrated the high impact of combining AI and journalism on society. The interviewees also emphasized the breadth and depth of the disruptive innovation that AI represents, which extends even beyond the media.

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9 Collaborative-investigative journalism

From the “lonely wolf” to the
“power of the pack”

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From the perspective of normative democratic theory, one of the core tasks of journalism is to critique and control powerful actors, particularly from the arenas of politics and the economy (Meier 2019). However, exposing grievances in society and initiating a social debate about them is not a new assignment but has been considered constitutive of journalism since the dawn of modern democracy at the beginning of the 20th century. The role was institutionalized as “a strong alternative to event focused journalism” in the form of investigative teams since the 1960s (Aucoin 2007, 18).

In the past decade, however, investigative journalism has experienced a quantum leap. The digital transformation has improved the possibilities of global networking via a digital communication infrastructure, as well as data exchange and data evaluation. Journalists are in contact across media houses in national as well as international contexts; exchange information; do research together; and take on their role as guardians of democracy as a global unit (Alfter 2016). Whereas this networking offers manifold possibilities on the product level, the journalistic offering also has an impact at the organizational level (Buschow and Suhr 2022).

The revelations in the context of the Panama Papers, which were published in 2016, are one of the best-known examples of this kind of collaboration between journalistic entities. About 400 journalists from 80 countries were involved in the disclosures about corruption, money laundering, and tax evasion and received several awards, including the prestigious Pulitzer Prize (Gamperl 2017). The research was initiated by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) coordinated the international data and document analysis.

Case studies

In the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project, “collaborative-investigative journalism” was identified as one of the 20 most relevant innovations in all five countries (see Chapter 2 on methodology).

The following media were selected as case studies because of either their importance or pioneering role in the respective country for this innovation or both. The interesting aspect in this context is the range of investigative media, which involves start-ups, investigative platforms, and legacy media.

- Austria: The investigative platform *Dossier* was founded in 2012 by journalist Florian Skrabal to do research and stories for which traditional newsrooms lacked the time and resources. From the outset, this advertisement-free medium considered collaboration with national and international media an indispensable requirement and thus a key element in all projects. The team members (11 in total, as of 2023) work extensively on national and international topics related to corruption and crime, which are then published as “Dossiers” online and in print. The medium is financed by the audience through various subscription models and by journalism training programs. In 2018, a crowdfunding campaign was carried out successfully (see Chapter 21). In its form, *Dossier* is unique in Austria to this day and, along with a few other media such as *Der Falter* or *Der Standard*, has contributed significantly to the development of collaborative-investigative journalism in the country. The interview was conducted with the founder and editor in chief of *Dossier*, Florian Skrabal.
- Germany: The investigative research department of the legacy media *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) was selected as one of the first and, to date, most important departments for collaborative-investigative journalism in Germany. Since 2012, a SZ team (7 members in 2022) has been working in international research alliances. Back in 2012, SZ approached the ICIJ with vast amounts of leaked data on shell companies, and two SZ journalists, Frederik Obermaier and Bastian Obermayer, were allowed to try their hand at international cooperation. The two had to learn on the job how to analyze such large volumes of data. In 2016, they had a breakthrough with the journalistic processing and reporting of the Panama Papers for Germany. The JoIn-DemoS project interviewed Frederik Obermaier, then deputy head of the investigative research department, and Elisabeth Gamperl, managing editor visual desk.
- Spain: The selected case study *Civio* is a digital native medium committed to monitoring government and public authorities and was founded in 2012. Three years later, *Civio* began forming short-term partnerships for its projects with international media outlets with a similar philosophy, such as *Correctiv* in Germany. Since then, international collaboration has become a foundation of the work of the *Civio* team (10 members in 2022). In 2019, *Civio* was one of very few news outlets in Spain to join the European Data Journalism Network (EDJNet). The interview was conducted with Olalla Tuñas, community and participation officer.
- Switzerland: The research desk of *Tamedia/TX Group* was chosen as one of the most representative examples of collaborative-investigative journalism in Switzerland. The research desk is a collaboration with a bicultural

and bilingual approach. The editorial department was founded to create capacity for stories that otherwise no one would investigate. The desk edits and publishes major investigative leaked stories in German and French, initially for the two Sunday newspapers *SonntagsZeitung* and *Le Matin Dimanche*, and then later for other media in the *Tamedia* group. Since 2014, the team of 9–12 journalists has repeatedly participated in international cooperation on major leak investigations. In part, the data journalism department is integrated into the research desk. The interviews were conducted with two managing editors of the *Tamedia* research desk.¹

- United Kingdom: *Bellingcat* is the most important and best-known investigative medium. The company, which today has about 40 employees and is active worldwide, started from a personal blog by Eliot Higgins. From this individual initiative, a research network of various journalists with various expertise emerged. Higgins achieved international attention for the first time with an important investigation on weapon trafficking in Syria and consequently created *Bellingcat* in 2014. Since then, *Bellingcat* has earned a worldwide reputation as an international research collective consisting of researchers and investigative and citizen journalists who conduct open-source intelligence investigations on a wide range of human rights issues. The interview was conducted with Eliot Higgins, founder of *Bellingcat*.

Aims of the innovation

In all five projects, the claim to monitor and critique powerful actors from politics and economy through network research is clearly formulated in their respective objectives. In addition, there is the aim to stand out from other media through this comprehensive investigative work.

Dossier wants to offer something that conventional media cannot provide: to focus exclusively on investigative journalism. The necessity for publishers in the digital era to cut costs, reduce staff, and make available ever fewer resources for research was, according to Skrabal, the reason he established *Dossier*. Skrabal sees the investigative platform's fact-based journalism as acting as a counterweight to the traditional strongly opinion-oriented journalism in Austria. Data journalism has always played a major role in the ability to counter fake news with facts. The truly innovative aspect of *Dossier's* work, Skrabal said, is returning to investigative journalism's roots: "Classic research is a classic craft." Today, international cooperation is an indispensable part of this kind of research because as Skrabal said, "crime does not stop at the national border."

International cooperation should make it possible to "keep up with crime," as Frederik Obermaier, deputy head of *SZ's* investigative team in Germany, puts it in similar terms. From the beginning, the visual presentation of investigative journalism in the digital world also played an important role at *SZ*. The aim of these considerations was to make it easier for the audience to understand and to build a brand. "One should know pretty

quickly that this is an investigative project by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*,” says visual desk editor Elisabeth Gamperl. Thus, individuality is also retained in global cooperation. The collaboration serves pragmatic purposes, such as distributing the workload when dealing with huge amounts of data, and substantive goals, such as improving journalism by drawing on the expertise of journalists across countries. A new role model has emerged from this, in that the investigative journalist used to be a “lonely wolf,” Obermaier observed, “now we talk about the power of the pack mentality.”

The objectives of the Swiss *Tamedia* research desk have social and commercial components. The interviewees explained that part of the founding role of the research desk is to offer social added value, to draw attention to grievances, and to get the process of bottom-up change moving. By producing such socially relevant stories through international cooperation, the research desk will contribute to the reputation of the medium and create a unique selling point compared to other Sunday newspapers on the market. From both an economic and social perspective, it was also innovative to address two Swiss language groups and to publish in French and German. The department is independent, which means it can remain removed from the day-to-day business but has the resources to do major research working closely with the data journalism team. However, this journalistic freedom has pragmatic limits: “As long as we deliver such lighthouse stories, we will be funded,” one of the interviewed managing editors said.

Civio’s main goal in collaborating with other media companies has been to achieve a wider reach in terms of both research and audience. From 2015 on, the agreements ranged from the publication of their entire research or of data in other Spanish media, such as *El Confidencial* and *El Mundo*, to ad hoc cooperations with international news outlets. *Civio* joined the EDJNet in 2019; the agreements for media collaborations should be put on a more solid basis, which should extend the reach even more but save costs. Media from 14 nations (as of 2022) work together at EDJNet, especially in translations and finding opportunities for republishing: “It’s not a super organization, but it obviously helps you to reach places that would otherwise be more expensive,” says Olalla Tuñas. Moreover, only the collaboration allows a comprehensive view of research topics.

Bellingcat’s mission is to publish transparent and accountable information on human rights issues. They work as an open-source investigative network “because we want to show to everyone our work,” said Eliot Higgins. The company was founded to provide a place for people who were already doing open-source investigation, which means gathering information from freely available sources for their investigative work, as well as for those who still wanted to learn how to do it. Cooperation is crucial, not only with other media but particularly with citizens who are experts on a specific issue. *Bellingcat* does not necessarily correspond to the role of the journalistic gatekeeper but sees itself rather as a loudspeaker, as Eliot Higgins explained: “We’re amplifying out to a huge audience of journalists, policymakers and people working on human rights issues.”

Supportive conditions

In terms of supportive conditions, the projects belonging to large media companies pointed to internal factors such as management support. Those organizations that were founded as independent investigative media saw external factors as supportive conditions. Moreover, as the evaluation of the data showed, the need for such a service became evident.

Apart from a lack of, but a growing demand for, investigative journalism in Austria, Skrabal did not see any supportive conditions at the level of the Austrian media system when founding *Dossier*. The few funding programs, such as the Vienna Media Initiative, did not even exist in *Dossier's* early years. At the corporate level, Skrabal identified advantages compared to large, traditional media houses. Many things would be easier because the company is an innovative project that does not have any historically grown structures and, therefore, “does not need to carry any ballast.”

The SZ investigative journalists consider the good atmosphere in the company to be decisive, particularly in the context of the importance of having the support and backing from the management, along with an open-minded editorial team. The whole SZ editorial team has “always [been] very free-spirited,” says Obermaier, “so that people were always willing to try out new things.” In addition, the personal level played a key role in setting up SZ's investigative research department. The contact person in the chief editorial office was Wolfgang Krach, who had been an investigative journalist and knew the job holistically. The owners also appreciated the investigative team and stood behind it journalistically, as well as seeing the economic advantages of investigative journalism as a unique selling point.

The editors of the *Tamedia* research desk see the fundamental willingness of the management and the start of the project at the right time as the most important supportive framework conditions. The publisher TX Group supports the investigative project, enabling the team to do research free from the daily routine and over long periods. The need to research such in-depth stories arose quickly and timely, “some leaks came at just the right time for us,” one interviewee explained. The international cooperation and networks, such as with the ICIJ, which became necessary with the major databased leak research, have in turn improved their own image and facilitated the work.

For the digital native *Civio*, joining EDJNet was an important step in consolidating collaboration and, thus, the company both journalistically and economically. *Civio* found in the EDJNet an infrastructure and an organization in which they could participate. In the network, they were no longer “a small media that goes knocking on doors all over the world,” Tuñas explained. While Spain does not have subsidies for innovations in journalism, the EDJNet does receive European Union funding. In addition to these pragmatic economic benefits, there is the exchange with journalists from other countries and even from their own. “These European meetings are very good even to meet people from Spanish media, because here [in Spain] you don't have

those formats,” Tuñas pointed out. Only through comparison with others was *Civio* able to have an overview of a problem and of the possibilities to change things in their own territory.

The investigative platform *Bellingcat*, which built up an international network from the United Kingdom, was able to take advantage of technical progress, in particular smartphone technology. Global smartphone growth and the development of (social media) apps for mobile platforms made it easy to share videos and photographs and connect everyone together. “That then gave us an access to a huge amount of information coming from the ground,” *Bellingcat* founder Higgins explained. This became really significant in the Arab Spring in the early 2010s. Furthermore, the digital measurement of the planet and programs like Google Earth and Google Maps, enabling satellite imagery available to reach people, and Google reverse image search were “very useful for open-source investigation, even though they weren’t intended for that [purpose].”

Obstructive conditions

The lack of resources is a common complaint. As with the supporting conditions, projects in legacy media houses tend to see internal factors such as shortages of money and time as obstacles to the development of the innovation. By contrast, independent media organizations attribute their resource constraints to external factors.

In Austria, the high level of dependence of news companies on politics “distorts the media market,” said Skrabal. Thus, the allocation of advertisements from public institutions and the government to mainly traditional media and the lack of transparency in doing so was a negative framework condition. On the other hand, this grievance with the media system made the advertisement-free *Dossier* project both necessary and possible.

Within the structures of a large legacy media house, the SZ investigative research team sometimes struggles with the allocation of resources within the company. Although the team is “complaining at a very high level,” staff resources had been tight from time to time due to financial restrictions, explained Obermaier. From Gamperl’s perspective, the tight time frame inhibits an innovative approach to the visual presentation of any revelations.

For the *Tamedia* research desk, the great support and preference on the part of the management proved to be the precise reason for the pressure on the young team within the editorial office and triggered internal animosities. However, after the first major leaks, when colleagues saw the results of the months of hard work, their standing improved. However, the research desk was experiencing a new obstacle from outside. Since about 2017, organized and professionalized resistance by both lawyers of companies and individuals that appear in data leaks made it much more difficult to publish such stories. That resistance increased the workload, and additionally, there was more financial pressure from the company, as *Tamedia* also had to cut jobs.

In general, the media in Spain suffer from a “brutal lack of resources,” Tuñas complained. As a young, small, medium enterprise, not only is funding not secured in the long term, but this also brings disadvantages to the still youthful journalistic practice of cooperation. “Collaboration has a counterpart, which is very difficult, and that is having to cede your own work,” Tuñas pointed out. The traditional media would find it much more difficult to share, to give in, and to listen. Some of the media with which *Civio* sometimes collaborated did not automatically provide the data, but the exchange had to be agreed anew in each case. Often, it was only personal acquaintance that facilitated cooperation.

For *Bellingcat* founder Higgins, “the main limitation is people’s trust” because funding depends on it. However, from the outside it is difficult to understand the work of *Bellingcat*. The platform is funded by foundations, among others, that know common media types, but “it is very hard to categorize what we do,” Higgins says. *Bellingcat* is not an ordinary news organization. Thus, fundraising had often been very difficult despite the open-source investigation and the associated requirement for transparency.

Societal impact

All the interviewees see societal impact as an integral part of collaborative-investigative journalism. The focus is on informing people so comprehensively that they can make their own decisions.

In accordance with the formulated objective of the monitoring and critique, *Dossier* selects only topics of public interest. Through comprehensive research and fact-based, balanced presentation, the team seeks to contribute to diversity of opinion and strengthen media competence in Austria. To serve the public, as *Dossier* claims, journalistic networks are indispensable for researching corrupt or criminal networks. The results of the research should make it easier for people to make decisions in the democratic process. As a small news organization, *Dossier* understands itself as a complement to traditional media and a contribution to media diversity in Austria.

With its investigative work, the *SZ* investigative research department wants to contribute to social change. Providing information from a critical view in a comprehensible form is intended to make the public “capable of taking action,” as Gamperl put it. Collaboration plays an increasingly important role in investigative journalism and in society. By joining networks and working in cooperation, the *SZ* investigative team was able to do better research and thus better journalism with a bigger impact. International reporting increases the pressure on the powerful and is more likely to lead to investigations and subsequently to legislative changes, as scandals can no longer be ignored so easily on the national level, Obermaier explained. Furthermore, such global stories like the Panama Papers reach not only the usual *SZ* audience, but broader segments of the population.

Tamedia's research desk wants to “bring light into the darkness” and do so with the necessary tenacity. The interviewees were convinced that the investigative work of recent years from *Tamedia*, achieved through both international cooperation and with other Swiss media on global and national topics, based on massive data, has left its mark on the Swiss population. They have had to realize that even they do not live in a paradise where public institutions function perfectly.

Tuñas succinctly formulated the essence of *Civio's* journalistic mission: “Give the right information to the people who need it.” Making information available, however, does not simply mean providing the raw data, but processing and translating it to make it understandable is the essential aspect. Collaboration improves *Civio's* journalistic work because it captures many perspectives and expertise. In this way, *Civio's* research contributes to the improvement of the quality of democracy, as the organization's guidelines state. *Civio's* work enables people to make their own informed decisions about their lives and, beyond that, about society and democracy.

Bellingcat's key claims of accuracy and transparency represent a benefit both to the industry and to the democratic function of journalism. Assessing the work of the network, Higgins claimed, “Bellingcat has certainly improved the trust, both inside and outside journalism.” Citizens, journalists, and experts who work together at *Bellingcat* learn from each other how to identify, verify, interpret, and share information. This collaborative model is about building a community of people who want to work with each other on equal terms. The more people, the better because the Bellingcat perspective is that diversity of sources and people is the strong point of their editorial work.

Conclusion

As the case studies in the JoIn-DemoS project show, investigative journalism is not a journalistic novelty. Rather, the innovation lies in the establishment of supporting structures for permanent activity in the investigative field, especially through the cooperation of various media houses across national borders. The democratic political role of journalism is in the foreground. Though the case studies vary widely in terms of media type, from legacy media and start-ups to open-source platforms with a strong civil journalistic element, they share similar goals: the claim to the best possible, transparent research by networking to comply with the basic journalistic tasks critique and monitoring to enable people to make informed decisions.

This cultural change is precisely the point that the societal impact of the innovation becomes clear. In an increasingly fragmented media market, within which journalistic and nonjournalistic content fight for the limited attention of the audience, several major international investigative research projects have gained renown in the recent decade. They have, through great risk of detection, made the machinations of criminal networks more difficult. Despite enormous successes and global recognition, these investigative

collaborations are anything but permanently secure. All the interviewees saw limited (financial) resources as a hindering factor. While for large legacy media, the implementation of investigative projects is linked to the (economic) strengthening of the media brand, for small investigative media, the link is pragmatically about the survival of the brand. Hope for sustainability, nevertheless, does seem justified. Collaborative-investigative research is a unique selling point of journalism in the fragmented media market, which publishers and their management teams recognize according to our case studies. As such, collaborative-investigative research contributes significantly to sharpening the unique selling proposition of journalism in the digital media world and strengthening journalism's role as a pillar of democracy.

Note

- 1 Anonymity was agreed with the Swiss interviewees.

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10 Data journalism

From a niche competence to a key feature

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Several years have passed since data journalism ceased to be “a very niche activity, conducted in just a handful of newsrooms” (Bell 2012, 48). Driven by the context of the rise of big data (Hammond 2017, 1), the specialty of a few experts became a socialized and institutionalized phenomenon in newsrooms and in other initiatives on the fringes of the industry (Gray and Bounegru 2021). Additionally, data journalism’s expansion and evolution have made it possible for smaller newsrooms (Arias Robles and López López 2020, 14) and projects at the periphery of journalism to create content by processing vast amounts of data (Cheruiyot et al. 2019).

Although society views data journalism as disruptive, its global growth is undeniable. Many journalists and news organizations used data to make journalism more “systematic, accurate, and trustworthy...[making it]...a rare growth area in an industry battered by economic challenges” (Zamith 2019, 470). This growth in the profession soon attracted the interest of academia. Since 2014, some research projects abandoned the description of isolated cases and newsrooms (Fink and Anderson 2015, 467), typical of the “first wave” of data journalism research, to focus on more consistent methods and published in peer-reviewed journals (Ausserhofer et al. 2017, 17–18). Increasingly, the research focus included data journalism as an innovation area of journalism and focused on the implications for the profession.

Engebretsen et al. (2019, 3) highlight, for example, the connection between the development of phenomena such as data visualization and the rise of technological innovation. Loosen et al. (2017) conclude that the question now is if and to what extent data journalism is actually a new reporting style and that the skills of technical journalists, such as those involved in programming and data journalism, are currently upgrading journalism. Other types of innovative skills, including social media management, web development, content and audience analytics, and programming languages, such as Python, are also frequently demanded of these specialists (Guo & Volz 2019, 1311). This emphasis on technology is also linked to the emergence of native media outlets and, above all, news projects at the periphery of journalism (Appelgren and Lindén 2020, 61). However, a research gap remains in the process of building and establishing data journalism in media organizations, and these

are the factors that help or hinder the successful implementation of this area of innovation.

Case studies

The implementation of data journalism was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations by the experts in all five countries (Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), following the research methodology of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) research project outlined in Chapter 2. These are the five case studies that were analyzed:

- Austria: The *Zeit im Bild* is Austria's primary TV news show at the *Österreichische Rundfunk (ORF)*, the Austrian public broadcaster. The data journalism team of *Zeit im Bild* was among the first in Austria to explain and visualize the news using data analysis and visualization techniques. The first data visualization elements were launched in 2007, which later, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, became a central, daily program element. The number of employees working for this innovation is four. The interview was conducted with Jakob Weichenberger (head of data journalism).
- Germany: The *Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR)* is part of the ARD and thus a public media institution. The *BR* established one of the first data journalism editorial teams in Germany. The team started in 2010 with two people, which has grown to six people who are working in this innovation field. In addition, the data journalism team now cooperates with a lot of other editorial offices at *BR*, such as fact-checking (Klinge 2018). Steffen Kühne (tech lead *BR Data*) and Robert Schöffel (team lead *BR Data*) were interviewed.
- Spain: In recent years, Spain has experienced a rise in data journalism. *Datadista*, established in the first quarter of 2016 and despite being formed by only two people, was one of the pioneering projects in this field. According to the two founders, data should be the primary source for all publications of *Datadista*. Following the lead of *Datadista*, other media have given more importance to this discipline. The interview was conducted with the two co-founders, Antonio Delgado and Ana Tudela.
- Switzerland: The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ)* visuals team is a mobile-online specific team of journalists, designers, and programmers who take care of data-driven journalism, data visualizations, and interactive applications on *nzz.ch*. The building of the team began in 2015. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, four journalists worked for this team; now, the team lineup is volatile and constantly changing. The interviewees in Switzerland were assured of anonymity prior to the interviews. Henceforth, the quotes and statements are only attributed to the *NZZ* and not to specific individuals.

- United Kingdom: *Our World in Data* is a primary mover in data journalism in the United Kingdom, whose aim is, as the founder, Max Roser, explained, “to publish the research and data to make progress against the world’s largest problems” (Roser 2023). It all started in 2011 as a blog by Roser, who was working as an economist. Now, there are 22 staff at *Our World in Data*. The interview was carried out with Edouard Mathieu (head of data).

Aims of the innovation

Based on their experience, the interviewees unanimously emphasized the significantly increased importance of data journalism in media houses. In brief, almost all the interviewees mentioned the great opportunities in the interplay between journalism and data. New forms and formats exist in the context of investigative and multimedia stories, as well as opportunities for good and detailed explanatory texts, and even the possibility of reassurance and fact-checking in the case of unclear source situations were addressed on several occasions.

There exist a few differences in the development of data journalism, or the respective teams, that can be observed in the case studies. The *ORF* team had more experience compared to the other media houses. *ORF* describes the origin of its work as “arising from dramaturgical-optical considerations,” thus emphasizing storytelling with data rather than motivation to make their initial attempts. Robert Schöffel of the *BR* team in Germany saw the basis of data journalism in the “constant confrontation with statistics.” Data experts then drove the innovation, which resulted in the competence of data work becoming increasingly relevant for more in-house journalists and was gradually strengthened through training. The British perspective on data journalism’s origins placed more emphasis on audience engagement, as Eduard Mathieu explained, because he and his team wanted to enable a better understanding of political decisions, especially through “evidence and data.”

At the same time, the interviewees also saw the goal of permanently searching for new data (sources) and thus maintaining the most important task of journalism: the active search for sources and permanent research, which distinguishes journalism from other actors in public communication. “Our aim is to do data journalism as a primary source of investigative journalism, which means to look for patterns in a large database and to see where there may be something to tell,” explained Antonio Delgado and Ana Tudela (*Datadista*). Their objective was “to tell stories, because data journalism can’t be a hollow thing that doesn’t reach people.” Steffen Kühne argued in a similar way when he formulated the aim of data journalism at *BR* to “expose abuses.”

The interviewee of *NZZ* adds another aspect from their own experience. They saw a central goal of innovation not only in the research, examination, and explanation of large data sets but also in visualization. In their view, the intensive examination of data journalism also promotes efforts to create an

attractive visual presentation of the findings. The limitless possibilities of multimedia stories form a key bridge between data research and the publication of findings. In many publishing houses, new teams have been created in recent years for the visual implementation of research. These teams represented an important interface between the newsrooms, graphics desk, and IT department. As Steffen Kühne (*BR*) explained, “We tried out working practices such as agile working very early on and formed interdisciplinary teams.” The separation between individual departments, for example, IT and design, was removed, and the employees were regrouped in project-based teams. “So, the struggle between the needs of individual departments was avoided and faster and more focused cooperation was achieved,” explained Kühne.

The interviewees agreed that the true potential of data journalism has yet to be discovered and understood. Eduard Mathieu (*Our World in Data*) went one step further regarding the development and stated that “data journalism can reframe people’s mindset in terms of what is important in the world.”

Supportive conditions

As in other journalistic innovation areas, the interviewees cited various forms of cooperation as important supporting elements. These collaborations came from both internal and external sources. Internal is mainly about cooperation with other departments and editorial offices in the organization. “We worked together with colleagues from other areas, for example from design, who were given the opportunity by their superiors to work with us on projects,” Robert Schöffel (*BR*) said and highlighted the “commitment from several sides. That was necessary, otherwise it wouldn’t have worked.” There was consensus that cooperation needed the support of executive management. Data journalism is expensive and needs staff and software. At the same time, the interviewees praised the management levels for both finally understanding the relevance of innovation and establishing a culture of support for data journalism. Regarding external collaborations, the founders of *Datadista* explained that other media organizations were increasingly interested in cooperating: “There are issues that are not getting any kind of attention and the moment we bring it up, the mainstream media goes after it. And they ask us to collaborate.”

Data journalism integrates classic journalistic activities in the context of research with technical skills from the fields of statistics and computer science. In this context, the interviewees described the importance of heterogeneous teams in that good data journalism needs teams with diverse expertise to effectively push the interplay. The case study teams often still saw themselves at the beginning of the development process despite personnel and software being the most important building blocks for this innovation.

In addition, the many award-winning initiatives of well-known international media brands (e.g., The New York Times) were cited as a blueprint for their own efforts and projects. The interviewees saw a growing interest in

data journalism throughout the media industry but also an increased need for networking and exchange beyond the boundaries of their own companies. “Since we were the first and the largest team around data journalism at *BR* in *ARD*,” Steffen Kühne pointed out, “we are constantly asked by colleagues in-house who want to build similar teams how we did it, what lessons did we learn. But also increasingly from other media organizations.” The exchange among each other and the permanent reflection of previous work was therefore seen as having great supportive potential for the present and the future.

Additional support for data journalism came during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased need to explain and classify daily statistics about the pandemic turned a niche topic of data editing into the centerpiece of daily journalism. In turn, the increased demand from the audience was simultaneously valuable support for internal decision-making processes and arrangements with executives. More specifically, the two data projects of *BR* and *ORF* in the context of the pandemic can be cited as paradigms. The interviewees explained, almost identically, how the initial curiosity and ignorance surrounding COVID-19 turned into a data project that ran for more than two years. At *BR*, the format was still called “Corona: Current figures for Bavaria and Germany,” and at *ORF*, the figures were still online on a daily basis under the title “Infopoint Coronavirus” (as of June 2023). Both formats worked with chronological line charts dating back to 2020, as well as curves for those who had recovered, been vaccinated, and deaths. Both formats were visually similar (dark colors and clear labeling) and described the background of the survey (data sources) similarly in terms of content. Interviewees from both brands also agreed on the reasoning: the data on the pandemic had to be clear, easily understandable, and self-explanatory with as little descriptive text as possible. Edouard Mathieu (*Our World in Data*) explained the pandemic was also a driver to rethink where and how data was sourced and handled: “We realized, thanks to COVID-19, the importance of collecting the data, putting it together, reshaping it and cleaning it up so that we can publish it”, which resulted in “a new role as a data publisher, more than a team of researchers commenting on data.”

Robert Schöffel (*BR*) also saw further support for innovation from the advancing possibilities of data processing through AI systems and anticipated a further boost for innovation. Jakob Weichenberger (*ORF*) described the enormous increase in the importance of data journalism as a journalistic innovation “from initial scepticism to great acceptance.” All the interviewees assumed that data journalism’s importance would continue to rise.

Obstructive conditions

When looking at the obstructive conditions of the innovation, similar aspects were mentioned across all countries and interviews. On an internal level, the interviewees observed that the topic of data journalism did not just generate enthusiasm in editorial departments. Several interviewees recounted from

their own experience concerning a lack of reputation that some colleagues refuse to actively collaborate with data or visual teams or avoid working together as much as possible. “It took a long time for people in the other units and editorial teams in the organization to see us as valuable cooperation partners and not as competitors,” explained Steffen Kühne (*BR*).

The issue of workflows and the general standing of data journalism and its teams in media houses was also seen as potentially being obstructive. Our study suggested that this was especially true in media houses that were strongly influenced by print, where many digital innovations and their new conception were often perceived skeptically. Especially at the key point between journalism and programming, there was a lack of either or both personnel and sufficient budgets. This was often the reason why long-term projects failed.

On an external level, the interviewees mentioned the issue of monetization. Data journalism needs more lead time, cannot always be evaluated directly based on reach, and was thus a frequent point of criticism from an economic point of view. An important note, however, was that the public broadcasters have fewer problems with financing than the small new private media outlets. Antonio Delgado (*Datadista*) argued that data journalism is time-consuming and often does not pay off financially. Eduard Mathieu (*Our World in Data*) confirmed this view and saw no suitable advertising market or exploitation models for the elaborately produced data stories. Funding, for example, was not a durable solution for data journalism, as he explained: “Even if you receive funding, it's not like huge amounts of money. It usually works for one year or maybe two years, but then this problem starts [again] from the beginning.”

Another aspect of the external hurdles was the research of datasets. The interviewees reported increasing problems in obtaining suitable and meaningful data sets. Especially in the context of political or institutional information, access was often limited or impossible. The interviewees also saw a need for improvement in cooperation with universities and research institutions, where forms of cooperation would make sense for both sides. Furthermore, universities are also largely responsible for training future journalists who can provide new impetus in the field of data journalism.

The interviewees saw great challenges for data journalism to further improve content. This was especially underscored by the time factor, which almost all interviews emphasized in that data journalism has demonstrated its enormous explanatory potential not only through the COVID-19 pandemic but the high time intensity and associated costs posed major challenges for this innovation.

Societal impact

The importance and potential of data journalism were emphasized several times in the context of societal impact. The interviewees highlighted the political dimension that data journalism could have. Through good data

research and its visualization, the audience gained a well-founded insight into the problems, positions, and possible solutions to various societal issues. Visualization made the often-complex description of the situation understandable, thus helping journalism to address all levels of society; created a broad understanding; and, ultimately, provided knowledge. Knowledge, in turn, is the central resource of participation in modern societies and is the basis for daily and future decisions – for example, in the context of political elections or even consumer decisions, as Ana Tudela (*Datadista*) argued.

The enormous importance of data as a raw material for digital societies was also pointed out by the interviewee from Switzerland, who saw the world as being in the midst of a gigantic open-ended digitization process. Data journalism, however, is a guide that supports and informs societies along the way. This social dimension is often left out of the discussion of data journalism as an innovation. However, therein lies the challenge of the greatest possible transparency and methodological competence, as good data journalism must not only explain the topics but also make it clear to the audience where the data comes from and in what way it has been processed, analyzed, and visualized. Robert Schöffel (*BR*) also attributes a kind of integrative power to this innovation. Eduard Mathieu (*Our World in Data*) argued in the same way and emphasized the great opportunity that data journalism transports evidence and testimony to parliamentary committees and thus organizes and moderates social progress.

Conclusion

The case studies from the five countries have shown that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, data journalism has made the transition to being a central reporting pattern in journalism. Though dealing with data was not a completely new dimension of journalism but had always been part of journalistic research and presentation of facts, the interviewees emphasized the innovative dimension and relevance of data journalism. This was particularly evident in the context of new forms (formats) of storytelling and organization. Thus, the immense increase in demand for statistics, measurement methods, and data because of the COVID-19 pandemic has improved the position of data experts enormously.

Driven by social relevance and easily accessible data sources, data formats for daily reporting emerged across media outlets. At the same time, teams continued to experiment and used the freedom, knowledge, and increased demand for other topics to develop data journalism. The case studies show that data journalism has gone from a cosmetic to an essential for any media brand of at least medium size. The increased attention also led to professionalization and institutionalization, as the interviewees reported about new teams, software tools, and workflows. Nevertheless, there were still obstructive aspects in reservations, and that skepticism must be slowly broken down with persuasion. In addition, the interviewees deemed data journalism was

expensive (software, personnel, training) and could not yet demonstrate sufficient monetization potential on its own. Nevertheless, the analysis of the case studies suggested that its importance will continue to grow. Data journalism has evolved from a niche competence to a key feature of digital journalism.

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11 Diversity and inclusion

“Difference matters”

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Journalism has long reported on diversity before it understood it as a mandate. In the 1990s, the concept came to Europe from the United States and was only increasingly discussed in relation to journalism from the second half of the 2000s. Now it is a key issue in the debate about the democratic responsibility of journalism and its sustainability (Kaltenbrunner et al. 2021). In the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project, the pairing of “diversity and inclusion” was identified as one of the 20 most relevant innovations in journalism in all five countries between 2010 and 2020 (Meier et al. 2022). At the same time, promoting innovations in journalism in general can positively influence various aspects of diversity and inclusion and thus a democratic society’s audience (Saner and Wyss 2023), and promoting diversity is essential, as stereotypes still dominate the communications industry (Gislerprotokoll 2023). International, digital native media start-ups and entrepreneurial journalism initiatives, and increasingly legacy media, help disseminate and establish diversity and inclusion aspects and thus make an important contribution to democratic media societies.

There are many dimensions to the diversity discussion, which makes it difficult to give a universal definition. The *Inclusive Journalism Handbook* (Rupar and Zhang 2022) refers to religion, ethnicity, race, geography, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, disability, and social status as the main diversity dimensions. Important theoretical inputs in the discussion came early on from the concepts of intercultural media integration (Geißler and Pöttker 2009) or critical whiteness research (Bayer 2013; Wischermann and Thomas 2008). Summarizing, diversity and inclusion in journalism mean that in line with the normative task, the heterogeneity of a society should be represented in an appreciative way on the levels of newsrooms and media management, as well as in reporting. This is based on the “strong belief that difference matters and should be celebrated as a social good” (Rupar and Zhang 2022, 5). The two terms belong together but have disparate meanings. Whereas diversity refers to the acknowledgment of the existence of a wide range of human differences, inclusion concerns the corresponding commitment to change exclusive policies and structures (Breimer 2020). The concept increasingly influences journalism production routines. The awareness of the

need for editorial diversity and inclusion has grown in recent years (Lugschitz and Kaltenbrunner 2022). However, there is still a lack of implementation of diversity strategies, as shown, for example, in the international study on race and leadership by Nielsen et al. (2020). Other sectors are trying to establish corresponding strategies with “Charters of Diversity,” which are committed to diversity management in business (Charta der Vielfalt e. V. 2023).

In our JoIn-DemoS case study sample, the question of who produces journalism content, especially the degree of diversity on a mesolevel within editorial teams concerning gender, ethnicity,¹ and sexual orientation, moved to the center. The consulted experts in the initial project phase (see Chapter 2 on methodology) who mentioned diversity and inclusion as one of the most important innovation areas in journalism mainly referred to this focus and considered diverse newsrooms as a prerequisite for a more balanced and realistic representation of society. To a lesser extent, the experts panel also considered the question of diversity at the management level to be relevant.

In the data evaluation, the innovation was given special weight due to its socio-political claim to represent the entire population. The results of our cross-country online survey with about 200 participants from all innovation case studies ($n = 100$) supported the assumption of the relevance of diversity and inclusion in the daily newsroom routine. Respondents considered diversity to be an important quality criterion in the design and implementation of their respective innovations (score 3.34 on a 1–5 Likert scale). Female respondents did assign a higher importance to the quality feature diversity than their male counterparts. This was not surprising given that equal rights for women are still being demanded in journalism. Dietrich-Gsenger and Seethaler (2019) show that in the DACH region comprising Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH), on average, only four out of ten journalists were female and were overrepresented in departments that tend to be lower ranked in the editorial hierarchy. On the other hand, women are underrepresented in management. In Austria, for example, two-thirds of journalists in leading positions are men (Kaltenbrunner et al. 2021).

Case studies

Due to the diversity focus of the expert panel mentioned earlier, our selected case studies mainly focused on editorial diversity aspects on a mesolevel. In the five countries, the following innovative initiatives were examined in detail:

- Austria: The *Biber Academy* has been part of the Viennese magazine *Biber* since 2012. The magazine employs, almost exclusively, journalists with a migration history. Every year, the academy offers 12 scholarships, especially for young journalists with a migration background, which include mentoring, workshops, and practice for entering journalism in

order to subsequently make newsrooms in traditional media more diverse. The interviewed experts are Amar Rajkovic, director of the *Biber Academy* and deputy editor in chief, and Simon Kravagna, founder and publisher.

- Germany: *Auf Klo* is a digital native founded in 2016 in cooperation with *Funk*, the online content network of the public broadcasters ARD and ZDF, to raise awareness of feminist issues and cover a variety of topics for teenage girls. Queer feminist and diverse topics are depicted, and the program was designed to be inclusive. *Auf Klo* is the first successful example of an editorial with queer feminist topics. Interviews were conducted with Anna Neifer, team lead story, as well as with Annika Prigge, editorial manager.
- Spain: *Pikara Magazine* is an entrepreneurial project with an intersectional feminist perspective. Established in November 2010 by the Basque network of journalists, *Pikara Magazine* is committed to covering multiple dimensions of diversity, as well as economic issues like care work. Even though, in recent years, media in Spain have taken steps in favor of feminism and LGBTQI+ equality, no other media has such a clear proposal as *Pikara Magazine*. The interview was conducted with Andrea Momoitio, coordinator of the magazine.
- Switzerland: *Chance 50:50*, a project originally launched by the BBC (*British Broadcasting Corporation*), primarily revolves around ensuring that women are better represented in reporting. The idea is that editorial teams participate voluntarily in the project. Since 2019, the Swiss German Public Broadcast station SRF has been part of this international initiative. Around three dozen editorial teams at SRF are currently involved. The interview was conducted with the project manager of *Chance 50:50*.²
- United Kingdom: *Black Ballad*, a digital native which began as a free blog site in 2014, fights against how poorly black women writers, their stories, and experiences are represented across women's media. They give black women space and support their journalistic talent while also delivering content and articles addressed to black women. *Black Ballad* was frequently mentioned by experts during the innovation inventory, and it owns a newsroom that can serve as a beacon for diversity. The interviewed expert is Jeni Benson, head of editorial.

Our sample shows that diversity became an issue for both established media houses and new journalistic players during the last decade. The content focus of the examined diversity and inclusion initiatives lies on gender aspects in various forms, like addressing a (queer-)feminist or female teenage audience, and ethnicity, such as inclusion in the newsroom and reporting of (black) women and young people with migration histories. Other diversity aspects, such as sexual identity and orientation or disabilities, are considered but are mostly not at the core of interest.

Aims of the innovation

To understand the strategic goals of the five editorial boards, one must recognize the needs giving rise to the projects in the individual countries. In all these case studies, even though their organizational backgrounds differ, the interviewees stated that the projects came about because they observed a lack of representation across groups of people within newsrooms and wanted to fill this gap. Therefore, these innovations are mostly a reaction to the deficient reporting by legacy media as, for example, in the German case:

[T]here was little to no education for a younger target group at the time on topics such as sexuality, orientation, changes in the body, but also gender orientation and everything that took place in these areas. That just wasn't mapped out at the time. These were things that you might still (not even) talk to your best friend about.

(Prigge, *Auf Klo*, Germany)

In comparing these cases across countries, two types of goals can be identified. First, there are those that aim at users, and second, those that focus more on the development of the production side.

Targets in terms of users were given by all the case studies of the DACH region. *Biber* (AT), for example, emphasized that a more diverse editorial team enabled the magazine to publish stories that no one would. By offering journalists with a migration history a springboard into journalism, *Biber* aims to help make the Austrian media landscape more diverse. Kravagna pointed out that “it makes a difference: who does journalism and what skills do I bring to it? Or even what experience?” *Biber* viewed migration history as an expertise that allows research of topics where others have limited access and knowledge. For *Auf Klo* (DE), Neifer confirmed that the goal was initially to depict various taboo topics, whereas a few years later, “it’s more a matter of looking at how these taboos are lived out, so to say of going beyond this expression and rather showing what realities of life they have become.” Likewise, in the context of *Auf Klo*’s editorial team, the goal is not only to be diverse but also to represent marginalized groups within the content and thus create a safe space for young users. *Chance 50:50* confirmed they wanted to specify their target group and address women.

The second type of goals are those aiming at the development of the media company. Here, the idea in all countries was to adjust the lineup and staffing of the editorial offices so that they were diverse. After establishing more diversity in both the editorial team and publication output, there is a third component of making the editorial structure varied – i.e., processes and schedules must be compatible for a diverse team.

The basic objective behind diversifying newsrooms is the same in all cases: the hope for a greater plurality of opinions, backgrounds, and prior knowledge in order to generate new perspectives on a wide range of topics.

Supportive conditions

There are various circumstances that promoted the development of innovative initiatives. One of the most important aspects that helped the projects in the DACH region was clearly the social *zeitgeist*. The Austrian expert Rajkovic stressed that the social relevance led to the project being implemented in this way and that everyone was convinced that it was the right thing to do. Neifer from Germany emphasized that awareness in society has become stronger in recent years, and it was to *Auf Klo*'s benefit that they already represented this sensitization in their program: "That's exactly the core of our format and therefore a reason for *Funk* to keep us in the portfolio." They would represent the modern thinking of editorial work and work with protagonists, the notion of "creating space and visibility for different people." The Swiss expert also stated that the demand for more representation of women did not come "from the moon" but was also part of social change and movement in Switzerland that also influenced the media market.

Likewise, the Spanish expert states that the emergence of feminist journalism was a facilitating moment for her company: "At a time when journalistic reporting performance is increasingly criticized in public, it is essential to remember that balance is a characteristic of quality journalism. You cannot institutionalize diversity in a sustainable way without actually institutionalizing a diverse team", stated Momoitio. One approach to implement this was the regular exchange of volunteers or interns, which gave *Pikara* the impetus to diversify. The aspect researchers have observed in Germany in election years is that a socially important issue such as diversity is more prominent in influencing voter favorability. Moreover, the feminist movement is seen as a cyclical phenomenon in that only once every few years is there a significant step forward socially.

Another facilitating factor in several countries was the availability of money and a suitable infrastructure. Momoitio (SP) argued that geographical location played a role in funding, such as in the Basque Country, where initiatives are promoted more than in other parts of Spain.

In Austria, both interviewees pointed out that funding was intrinsically important for *Biber*, and in the United Kingdom, the argument for *Black Ballad* was quite similar, as money enabled *Black Ballad* to recruit new staff or increase part-time positions to full time.

However, in *Chance 50:50* (CH), the management granted strong moral support to the editorial team, but did not, to date, offer any financial support. Some interviewees mentioned supportive circumstances that were related to the given goals of the company or the editorial office – for example, *Auf Klo*. Both interviewees stated independently of each other that the goal of specific target group topics could be easily achieved because the *Auf Klo* team was, at the time of being established, already diverse. An important note is that small, independent media viewed funding as a beneficial tool, whereas those that had patronage in large media companies did not.

Obstructive conditions

Our case studies can be considered pioneers in the development of diverse newsrooms, although there have also been factors that have held back and hindered their initiatives. Though funding was not a problem for some case studies, they did experience financial bottlenecks. Due to the funding of public broadcasting in Germany, *Auf Klo* has received official public funding, but according to one expert, it could have achieved more and fulfilled its educational mission to a greater extent if there had been a sufficient budget. In Spain, for *Pikara*, Momoitio was critical that although the project was not very costly, in the long run, money would always be a problem. Momoitio said, “[I]f each one of us had time to think about innovating and not paying the bills we would be competing with *El País*. But we don’t have the money.” The Swiss expert from *Chance 50:50* confirms that a lack of monetary resources also played a role in the development. Cost-cutting measures and the resulting increased time pressure meant that the project did not run completely free of obstacles at *SFR*. The *Chance 50:50* team points out that

there were a few editorial departments that are male-led and with big concerns [who argue that] the balance between men and women could be achieved at the expense of quality, or that only women would be sought because they are women, the old arguments.

(Chance 50:50, Switzerland)

The *Black Ballad* (UK) case also shows parallels: Benson states that although the project was ultimately driven by funding, the digital native had a lot of problems accessing the funding in the first place.

Another topic that mainly concerned the project members in Germany and Austria was the reactions from society. In Austria, Rajkovic names the wave of refugees in 2015 as a break for the project. *Biber* recognized that society was no longer positively disposed toward migrant issues and that this created a kind of caesura in the immigrant discourse. In Germany, one expert states that a big problem was hate speech on the internet as it is an emotionally charged issue. For Neifer, it was clear that “some parts of society are already very far advanced in our opinion,” while “other parts have expressed a very clear interest in not wanting such a development and the opening [up] of society to tolerance.”

Societal impact

Since the commitment to diversity and inclusion is understood as a claim to better representation of society in the public sphere, it could be assumed that the interviewees would also attribute a strong social impact to their projects. Although the projects’ goals are similar, the interviewees assessed them very differently.

The Austrian interviewees saw the greatest social impact in the awareness that journalists with a migration history who receive basic professional training at the *Biber Academy* are employed in other established media houses and thus strengthen diverse reporting there. The same applies to the *Chance 50:50* (CH) project, which wants to ensure that women are more strongly represented in the media and, above all, more visible in society. Both *Biber* and *Chance 50:50* pointed out that their projects help ensure that underrepresented groups regularly appear in the media and in public debates and that their point of view is included.

Prigge from *Auf Klo* (DE) also indicated a change in perspective. She said that it was important to let a variety of voices have their say to reflect multiple points of view. This also led to stimulating debates and discussions across groups of people and normalizes assorted models of life. This could lead to users being empowered and thus standing up for themselves. In Spain, *Pikara* professed to allow people to know and claim that not only did feminism matter but focused as well “on a more complex look that understands that there are places of privilege and that in reality most of us are elsewhere.” In the United Kingdom, *Black Ballad* stated that through this culture of debate, matching the goals of the project, black population experiences would be affirmed. This also led to various groups of people coming into contact with each other and thus helped to suggest methods of further engagement where appropriate.

The three initiatives, which do not belong to big media houses, *Biber Academy*, *Pikara Magazine*, and the *Black Ballad*, see themselves as ice-breakers that exert social pressure in the sense that larger media houses become aware of new topics and pay them more attention. The existence of *Pikara* has opened the doors to the reflection of much larger media with greater visibility. Today, there are more contact points or other formats that deal with diversity. According to our case studies, the topic of diversity and inclusion was also gaining a higher status within public broadcasting. Taboos that existed some years ago, where there was no public discussion about it, were broken and had already reached other parts of society. Now it is more a matter of looking at how these taboos are lived out – i.e., to go beyond this, showing what realities of life have become.

Conclusion

Diversity is a social development that finally made its way into journalism. The awareness that neglecting large segments of the population contradicts the fundamental journalistic task of representation is now present in large parts of international quality journalism.

The JoIn-DemoS project pointed to diversity in several respects: first, the notion of diversity and inclusion was considered one of the 20 most relevant innovations in journalism, particularly because of their social-political relevance. Overarchingly, it could be seen that the three case studies, Austria,

Spain, and the United Kingdom, which are independent of large media companies, received funding for their projects, which was a social necessity. Moreover, in the online survey, diversity and inclusion were also mentioned transnationally as important quality features of journalism.

In the analysis of our case studies, differences can be found between the sample countries in terms of prevailing diversity dimensions. In Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the discussion has broadened from the inclusion of women in reporting and newsrooms to aspects of ethnicity, criticizing white, middle-class, heterosexual, and male-dominated journalism. In Spain and Switzerland, the debate is still mainly concerned with the proportion of women on editorial boards.

Unlike other innovations, such as fact-checking or media labs, which were also analyzed in the JoIn-DemoS project (see Chapters 22 and 23), diversity and inclusion are not departments or delimitable initiatives. To be successful, this innovation area must involve all levels of the company as shared commitments. To implement editorial diversity and inclusion, three components are necessary, according to the interviewees: (i) building an editorial team of individuals with various experiences and ages from a multitude of backgrounds, ethnicities, and disciplines; (ii) establish varied reporting by the team; and (iii) adapt the editorial structures and (application) processes, to the demands of the diverse editorial team. For a sustainable implementation, editorial boards can anchor diversity and inclusion in a written editorial quality management system, which regulates these three aspects in a binding manner and outlines their realization, drawing on existing Charters of Diversity in other sectors (Charta der Vielfalt e. V., 2023). In the media's quest for sustainability, diversity and inclusion also have a pragmatic economic side – for example, on the topic of expanded target group marketing or for better presentation of the external image.

Thus, diversity and inclusion will continue to occupy media companies and journalistic newsrooms in all five countries in the coming years and will both require and influence further development at the organizational and product levels. Early diversity efforts in the form of established editorial structures in legacy media or news start-ups are having an effect in that some societal taboos have diminished or vanished, and others have become the norm. Diversity engagement will continue to help break with old dynamics and traditional perspectives of journalism.

Notes

- 1 Drawing on Graf (2011, 121), the term “ethnicity” refers to an ethnic identity formation as the demarcation of a group that defines itself through shared cultural traditions that are perceived as different from those of other groups. The assumption, not the existence, of a difference is crucial here. As such, the concept includes people with a migration history, the dimension of race, and ethnic minorities.
- 2 The Swiss experts were assured of anonymity.

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12 Engagement on the basis of data

Tracing users' behaviors to optimize journalistic offers

Maike Körner and José M. Valero-Pastor

At the beginning of the early 2010s, newsrooms viewed more critically various journalistic approaches of attention-grabbing, such as click-baiting, which were still intended to frequently bring the audience to their own pages. In the meantime, journalists have recognized the necessity for their editorial survival and have developed strategies that are no longer based solely on “popularization and sensationalism” (Costera Meijer 2020, 1). Nevertheless, news outlets still struggle to attract and retain users while competing not only with other news companies but also with video-on-demand (VoD) platforms, social networks, and countless digital and analogue services. Even the number of news outlets has increased markedly due to a lowering of the entry barriers to the publishing business (Küng 2017). Thus, these companies must often draw on a range of strategies to provide their audiences with nonsubstitutable content that makes the organization gain a competitive advantage. In other words, newshouses are making efforts to anticipate what kinds of content users prefer, how much value they put on it, and even in what contexts they are willing to pay for content in organizations with reader revenue strategies (Green and Jenkins 2011, 121).

User data analysis is, therefore, a paramount task within media houses, as it aims to increase audience engagement by adapting the media offer to the public's demands in terms of content and the establishment of a media community (Broersma 2019). Digital technologies allow companies to access and analyze large amounts of user data via participation, interaction, and monitored navigation (Steensen et al. 2020). While third-party cookies have been employed for years to segment advertisements, first-party data is gaining importance now for news media organizations. According to a study conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, first-party data can help news organizations adapt their content, gain deeper insights into their audience's preferences, and thus increase their engagement rates (Newman and Fletcher 2017).

Despite the recognition of data-driven evaluations as an innovative and valuable approach to adapting journalistic content, there are still reservations about fully embracing data-driven processes in news organizations. For instance, Ekström et al. (2022) argue that the embracement of metrics

radicalizes the focus on presentation, packaging, and timing in the valuing of professional practices, while efforts in research and truth seeking are seldom explicitly valued. In addition, the thoughtless employment of data to guide journalistic decisions can devolve into inequity, misrecognition, and misrepresentation of minorities (Schaez 2023). Thus, the development of data-informed processes also incorporates human knowledge to enrich navigation and user data.

Case studies

During the investigation done by the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project, engagement on the basis of data was identified as one of the most important innovations in journalism from 2010 to 2020 in all of the five countries studied (see Chapter 2 on methodology). To obtain more information about the innovation area “engagement on the basis of data,” the following media companies were selected as case studies for the study.

- Austria: The case study *Ländlepunkte* was launched in 2018 by *Vorarlberger Nachrichten (Russmedia)*, funded by the *Google News Initiative*. Since then, it has undergone a series of further expansions. It aims at increasing interaction with users on *vol.at*, the website of the *Vorarlberger Nachrichten*, and thus being able to collect more data and adjust the offer, via gamification. The company rewards users’ loyalty by awarding points when they log in and surf *vol.at*, read articles, comment, share, or solve various quizzes. These can be converted into benefits and gifts in real life, like participation in sporting events and concerts, fundraising activities, and other noncash prizes. When the interview was conducted, six people were working for *Ländlepunkte*. The interviewee was Dominic Depaoli, CTO and CEO for the management of the website at *Russmedia*.
- Germany: The editorial house *Ippen. Media* was selected due to its general approach to data analysis and content adaptation. Their online editors tended to be more analytically oriented to collect measurable figures on user behavior. In recent years, *Ippen. Media* has introduced a central portal where it is easier to gather all usage data for its many newspapers all over Germany, with between 50 and 60 individuals working on data collection. We interviewed Christoph Seidl, who is head of format development at *Ippen.Media*.
- Spain: *El Español* was created in 2015 as the result of a crowdfunding campaign with unprecedented success in the Spanish market (3.6 million euros). *El Español* enrolled in personalized content initiatives back in 2020 when it decided to update its so-called *Zona Ñ*, which is a space where paying subscribers can configure and arrange content according to their preferences. Since the beginning, all the changes related to

personalization have aimed at registered users and subscribers being a medium to increase reader revenue and retention. The selected expert for this case was the chief innovation manager at *El Español*, Mario Vidal.

- Switzerland: *Star*, which was created in 2015, is the biggest innovation currently underway at *Ringier*. It is a self-developed digital platform that aggregates various components and techniques that interact with each other, such as tracking and natural language processing. The main products in *Star* aim for monetization, optimizing the match between products and user profiles; recommendation, delivering content or ads to specific users or user segments; and semantic, analyzing article content in a granular way. At the time of the interview, six persons were working full-time on the project, such as product owners, data scientists, or engineers. The interviewed practitioner was the chief product officer and head of data platforms at *Ringier*.¹
- United Kingdom: The *Financial Times* has a big data department, which is separate from the editorial one. This team has data analysts in the newsroom who maintain contact with editors to discover new opportunities and work on data democratization by making sure that the audience data is as accessible as possible for journalists. In this respect, an in-house analytical tool, *Lantern*, was created to transmit data to journalists without requiring them to have any special data analysis knowledge. Over the years, the instrument has been redesigned to include ever more analysis filters. The head of audience engagement and executive editor at the *Financial Times*, Hannah Sarney, was interviewed.

Aims of the innovation

Clear similarities between individual projects can be identified in terms of their aims when implementing these types of initiatives and philosophies. In brief, the projects that comprise the sample exploit audience data to attract users' attention mostly by adapting content according to the results of data evaluations. This devolves into a more fluent and boundless user-journalist relationship, the development of a consumption habit, and better brand awareness. Thus, the basic goal is to collect the proper data they need to reach more ambitious objectives, such as an increase in loyalty and engagement.

In the Austrian case, the initiative was focused on the essential goal of gathering users' data and monitoring how they behaved. Depaoli stressed that the project *Ländlepunkte* would make it feasible to "log every interaction of every user, so it's anonymized but we actually know that certain activities are taking place and can evaluate them on a data basis." This data orientation helped "extremely with the entire project design and that is a major driver for us to develop the project further." In addition, Depaoli pointed out that this project also pursues loyalty through gamification.

The German interviewee Seidl explained that using traffic and navigation monitoring tools helps *Ippen. Media* to "understand a user coming to the

website much better.” Seidl said this strategy allowed them to cluster various types of users and to tailor news offers to their needs and the features of each distinct entry source (e.g., direct traffic, organic traffic, and social traffic).

In Spain, too, the data collection intended to respond more precisely to the audience’s needs. In the case of *Zona Ñ*, content was delivered in a personalized manner, although the displayed content selections depended more on the explicit choices made by the user than on pure data analysis. As Vidal explained, the target group was clearly the registered users and subscribers, as the idea was to offer them a special experience on the site and subscriber benefits. The aim was to bind the users to the brand.

In Switzerland, *Star* states that its main aim is to have “as much data as possible about the content we distribute and, on the other hand, having as much data as possible about our user segments.” That would have helped them to understand the users’ behavior.

Finally, in the same line, the *Financial Times* uses data to “join the dots to see where the opportunities are, rather than being reactive,” as Sarney explained. Nevertheless, as data culture was quite extended among product profiles in the organization, the main goal of the company was to make it sufficiently widespread within the editorial team to democratize it.

Supportive conditions

The underlying objectives were similar across all five projects. However, external conditions, such as technical assistance from other companies, for example, as well as funding from private and corporate donors, which promoted or hindered innovation, remain diverse and strongly depend on the respective media house. Internal factors within the media houses also drove the development of the innovation.

In Austria, Depaoli mentioned that a “test and learn” strategy was what supported the development of the innovation. The idea of repeatedly testing the project in practice and thus developing a kind of trial-and-error mentality has strengthened the development of the *Ländlepunkte*. Another important supporting factor was the involvement of experts, their input, and the scientific knowledge that they would not have had within the editorial team. This helped to equip them with additional knowledge and to make good decisions in developing the project further. For example, one of those decisions was to use a gamification approach. Although the *Vorarlberger Nachrichten* was already a well-known brand before the launch of *Ländlepunkte*, the employees knew too little about the users, which the editorial team wanted to change. As Depaoli explained, “Of course, one eye-opener for us was then looking at the PlayStore or the iTunes Store. There we looked at the apps: what are the top downloads? And that’s just all games.” Moreover, Depaoli stated that an important point was additional monetary support. For *Ländlepunkte*, the *Vorarlberger Nachrichten* had cooperated with the *Google News Initiative*.

In Germany, a few internal factors pushed the development of the collection and utilization of user data. Seidl said an editorial concept was created that would unite online and print. In his opinion, however, it was a good thing that this concept failed “because the online editorial team has remained independent and self-sufficient.” In Seidl’s opinion, that was the reason that *Ippen. Media* “has been able to grow as a brand and, to a certain extent, has also broken away from the print titles.” Consequently, the online editorial team simply had significantly more power and remained an independent store. Another milestone was the establishment of various central editorial offices, which were rolled out throughout Germany. This was an important step for the publishing house. Here, sites were merged and, as a result of this and the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, networking was intensified – for example, regular weekly meetings were held and editorial managers from all local websites around Germany participated: “You kind of get the feeling I’m working with people I’ve never seen in person before in my life, who I’ve never shared a desk with, and with whom I’ve already set up some really great stuff.”

For Spain, Vidal pointed out that the main supportive condition within their project was an innovative culture in the company, which encouraged the development of the initiatives. The work teams subordinated a lot to the project: “Even if the objective of a section is to reach an audience, it is willing to do other things for the sake of having a good product.” He also emphasizes that the teams do not necessarily have to be young. All that is needed is an open mentality to accept and try out new ideas. He adds that the cooperation of the people from all sorts of areas, who were all involved in the project, worked together wonderfully and that this was also a positive moment for the development of the section *Zona Ñ*.

In the case of *Star* (CH), the interviewee mentions that they had used experts in technology who were significantly involved in the development of the projects. They hired a global data and technology unit, which dealt with technology issues to move the development forward.

In the United Kingdom, however, this kind of technological support was not yet available. Nevertheless, the executive management of the *Financial Times* was most interested in implementing an audience or data department. This support from within the media house and the high-level executives, with a strong desire to promote both user interaction and understanding, helped the project to develop quickly and to have the high status it has today within the company.

Obstructive conditions

In contrast to other categories, such as the aims or the supporting factors, hardly any parallels could be found between the cases regarding the obstructive framework conditions. Here, the answers were project-specific, which made it difficult to find a common thread.

In Austria, for example, Depaoli states that the funding and the possibility to really take the time and to assign a team to launch this project were unusual in the industry in that they had not only been positive but also became obstructive. The initial mistakes after a quicker launch, which was by industry standards overly long, would have provided more information about possible obstacles. Depaoli said that it helped but also decelerated the process, as it hindered initial experiences “that would have helped us in accelerating the project, and might have allowed certain marketing needs to be identified earlier.”

In Spain, on the other hand, money and time were exactly the aspects that were missing. The *Zona Ñ* project had many small subprojects with their own teams, but time was short, and the workload was excessive. It was difficult to bring consistency into the projects if you worked on individual projects, and the teams’ personnel changed frequently. Even though *Zona Ñ* was a medium-sized newspaper, Vidal explained that “resources are limited in many things and it is difficult to keep up the pace in the innovation part and the direction in the same project because we can move to another one.”

At *Star* in Switzerland, the employees had to deal with other obstructive conditions. The expert confirms in their interview that there was not much acceptance for data collection tools in Switzerland, which was why the project hardly developed noticeably in the first few years. The narrative in Switzerland was that personalized advertising was negative because the user was constantly being tracked. Almost no one, including the Swiss legal system, saw a positive side. Jurisprudence regarding the idea of collecting data from users was obstructive for the project. Special Swiss data protection laws made it difficult to get creative when it came to merging data.

Societal impact

Fostering engagement based on user data was understood by the interviewees more as a technical innovation from which it was difficult to derive a social function for journalism. Nevertheless, some social and professional outcomes of gathering users’ data, relying on it, and personalizing content did arise, which had both positive and negative connotations.

In Austria, Depaoli from the *Vorarlberger Nachrichten* said that *Ländlepunkte* had contributed to increasing the quality of social debate in public forums, but this was more related to other features of the project, such as only allowing comments by registered users rather than data collection.

Seidl said that *Ippen. Media*, with their personalized content, could provide users with knowledge, and this contributed to improving the social discourse. Nevertheless, he was equally critical of the data-driven approach, as many media companies that analyzed data in order to adapt their content relied too much on it, which could devalue their journalistic offers. For example, they changed headlines so that they received more clicks and

generated greater reach. Thus, in those cases, this kind of optimization did not improve the social value of journalism, but it pursued other, rather economic goals that could have been prejudicial for the quality.

In Spain, Vidal explained that from his point of view, media consumption had a positive impact in the majority of the cases, as more people were informed and had knowledge about the issues that were important to them. However, in line with Seidl from Germany, Vidal believed that personalization could also have had a bad counterpart if it went too far. From a business point of view, he argued that the content selection made by editors was also an added value for audiences:

If we allow a user to erase all that hierarchy that our team of writers, editors and directors have decided, why read *El Español* and not enter a content feed? That is why I believe that the final product has to be controlled by the editorial staff and have an editorial criterion, even if we allow that flexibility to exist.

(Vidal, *El Español*, Spain)

The interviewee from *Ringier* saw the innovation as being positive overall but also noted a point worthy of criticism. In part, there may have been a fear that people who were only shown personalized content would not see a variety of opinions or topics in their time lines, and thus one part of the social discourse would be missing.

In the *Financial Times*, as Sarney said, there were more positive aspects, such as content personalization was seen as a good way to improve its reach and thus “push the information out so that people are getting reliable, trustworthy information.”

Conclusion

Journalism needs to become increasingly adapted to reach the audience. Whereas a few years ago, it was assumed that the medium was the transmitter – i.e., the exclusive provider of information – today, there are strong feedback mechanisms and interactions between news organizations and users. To play out optimal content for their own users, editorial organizations collect user data, which helps journalists understand what the audience does and how they behave to offer a better user experience. In conclusion, this means that the editorial houses should use synergies between themselves and the users and recognize the new possibilities in terms of content.

This chapter compared the use of data to promote engagement in five international cases with great differences between them. While the British and the German cases allude to the implementation of various strategies to promote data-informed decisions in a legacy company and a national editorial house, respectively, the other examples point to concrete initiatives. The Spanish case refers to a personalized section implemented within a digital

news outlet; the Austrian case is a gamification program adopted by a regional newspaper; the Swiss case is an innovative platform created by a legacy media conglomerate.

Nevertheless, despite these contrasts, common patterns can be identified between the aims of the publishers and editors in each case when implementing a combined user data analysis and content adaptation system. The main aims of this innovation are to attract and retain users' attention in an ecosystem that features fragmentation and overexposure to various media stimuli. To do so, it is crucial to increase brand recognition and position the organization as a source of relevant, interesting, and timesaving content – i.e., content that provides news to the point. In this process, the crucial step, which is common to all the case studies, is to collect data to reach better knowledge about what users demand. Then, data is analyzed differently in each country to offer a more personalized news consumption experience, ranging from wholly automatized to more hands-on processes.

In terms of the factors that affect their success, some similarities could be found related to the conditions that support the innovations, while the obstructive factors are usually more case-specific. For the former, the availability of teams and professional profiles with highly developed technical expertise was crucial, especially in Austria and Switzerland. The commitment of editors and publishers and the support from a widespread innovative organizational culture were key in the United Kingdom, Spain, Austria, and Germany. The obstructive conditions were mostly related to an overabundance or a shortage of resources, such as time and funding. While in Austria funds from *Google* discouraged the quick launch of test products, in Spain, the high workload hindered the development of the initiative. Legal concerns also arose, especially in Switzerland, where data gathering is not well viewed and thus limited by law.

Finally, from a societal point of view, these sorts of initiatives remain ambivalent. Editors have difficulty identifying the societal benefits of increasing engagement beyond the awareness that news consumption also grows. This redounds in a more informed citizenship. But, on the other hand, they are also conscious that selective exposure to an individualized type of content can create echo chambers (Nguyen 2020) and that the collection and evaluation of data can overly influence the way media does its journalism, conceding too much importance at the expense of quality. This leads to a more general conclusion on innovation that, despite all the benefits these opportunities bring, media houses need to be sensitive to the newfound technology and evaluate carefully to what extent and in what specific forms it may help to pursue their business and social goals.

Note

- 1 The Swiss interviewee was guaranteed anonymity.

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13 New organizational forms and teams

Changing minds to modify the newsroom

*José M. Valero-Pastor, Jonas Schützeneder,
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Journalism needs a significant transformation to maintain a connection with its audience and leverage all the possibilities that arise in a changing world (Palau-Sampio and López-García 2022). This transformation involves continuous reconfiguration, renegotiation, and reinvention of its practices, roles, and values (Usher 2014; Karlsson et al. 2023). However, the industry has traditionally been slow and incremental in adopting innovative approaches, and the process has been uneven due to various geographical, economic, and business factors (Storsul and Krumsvik 2013). Moreover, innovation is frequently equated to technology due to the brightness of new artifacts (Küng 2017), which limits the scope of research.

Nevertheless, recent literature highlights the importance of focusing on process and organization innovation to create agile companies, not only among small start-ups (Valero-Pastor and González-Alba 2018) but also among native digital media and legacy media (Kaliakos 2023; Southern 2023). In this sense, innovative media promote a corporate culture in which interdisciplinary collaboration is a key factor, and transformational leadership takes an essential role in the transmission of organizational principles to news workers (Valero-Pastor et al. 2021; Sangil et al. 2022).

Case studies

This chapter analyzes five experiences by international media houses that have consciously broken these assumptions and have transformed their settings, practices, and workflows to better respond to their own organizational needs, as well as to deliver more journalistic value to their audiences. These news outlets pursue a more flexible and collaborative organization, in which teamwork gains importance over the traditional individualistic workflows in journalism (Valero-Pastor 2021). The creation of multidisciplinary work groups, which bring together professionals with diverse expertise profiles (Kosterich 2020), permits that innovation and knowledge do not stagnate in silos so that more complete products can be created that place the user at the center. This is especially the case in the digital ecosystem, in which data can be measured, and media can create a better user experience (see Chapter 12,

“Engagement on the Basis of Data”). Most of the analyzed cases represented legacy companies that have undergone digital transformation processes during the last decade and keep adapting constantly to changes in the market. The selection of the case studies concerning the innovation “new organizational forms and teams” was based on the methodology presented in Chapter 2.

- Austria: The *Kleine Zeitung* is a legacy organization within the *Styria Media Group*, which has managed to implement data-inspired innovation workflows and organize these processes around interdisciplinary teams. *Kleine Zeitung* has been among the pioneers in new organizational forms and tries to involve the whole company in the transformation. The interviewees were Sanda Lončar, head of product and data, and Sebastian Krause, head of strategy and development and a member of the editorial board.
- Germany: The *Main-Post* underwent a profound digital transformation with the *Aladin* project, which took place from 2016 to 2019. This transformational program was structured in eight subprojects and three main phases: changing the workflows to increase efficiency, improving synergies between the different channels and media (newspaper, online, video, etc.), and introducing key performance indicators (KPI) to make data-informed decisions. Once the project was completed, *Main-Post* kept making efforts to reach a more agile configuration. The deputy editor in chief, Ivo Knahn, and the project editor and training officer, Julia Haug, were the two interviewees.
- Spain: We chose the news outlet *El País* as a best practice example due to the great transformations it has undergone in recent years. *El País* is the country’s leading newspaper in terms of distribution, and from 2016 on, it has focused on changing its internal arrangement (interdisciplinary teams, new professional profiles, and more collaborative workflows) to concede more importance to the digital business to the detriment of print. Indeed, the newspaper created an editorial unit with this purpose when it launched its digital subscription plan in 2019. The practitioner interviewed was the digital strategist Mari Luz Peinado.
- Switzerland: *Südschweiz* is a regional daily newspaper published by *Somedia* in Chur (Canton of Grisons). *Somedia* is one of the few media companies to traditionally offer all four news formats: radio, TV, print, and online. The newspaper renovated its newsroom concept ten years ago, and it keeps producing iterations to adapt to new needs. The latest redesign in the central newsroom in Chur took place in 2015 and features a high degree of autonomy in each channel (audio, print, and online), without a central management who decides on all of them. The editor in chief for online and print was interviewed.¹
- United Kingdom: We chose the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism* as the paradigmatic case of study. This project is interesting from an

organizational point of view because it maintains collaborative workflows not only within the organization but also with external initiatives and publishing houses as a response to the financial downturn that caused dramatic cuts to investigative journalism. The interviewee was the managing editor.²

Aims of the innovation

As a starting point for any innovation effort in the context of organizational forms and newsroom models, the interviewees describe two major impulses due to increasing economic pressure and numerous cost-cutting measures and the new challenges in the publication of news content. Both have an enormous impact on the composition of the newsrooms and teams. The digital media ecosystem is featured by a wide variety of playout channels, social media platforms and alternative devices, and the demand for both cross- and multimedia products. The adaption to these factors is the common guiding principle for the adoption of these initiatives and configurations.

In Austria, *Kleine Zeitung* intends to blur the boundaries between departments so that all the professional sensitivities and expertise fields, such as programming, design, marketing, advertising, reader market analysis, and even editorial knowledge, are represented in the product development process. Krause said *Kleine Zeitung* was moving toward “a quasi-project based organization where it is not important which department someone comes from.” In addition, this sort of arrangement also pursues a certain “start-up mentality” or “lab atmosphere” where major products are not developed immediately as finished packets, but the personnel rather use prototypes, interviews, and data insights to orient their efforts and find their final form, as Lončar explained.

The aim of renewing the product development processes is also present in Germany. Haug of *Main-Post* mentioned three explicit objectives that underpinned *Aladin* and the rest of the digitalization efforts. The first and major goal was to “create and deliver more non-substitutable content” instead of less valuable pieces such as press releases, which would be a competitive advantage for the company. The second was to ensure an online-first model, where the newspaper would no longer be the main channel and content would specifically fit the environment in which it was shared. The third involved economic reasons that *Main-Post*'s management was willing to reduce editorial staff costs by 20% within nine years (2015–2024) by not replacing retiring personnel.

The first and second goals were also mentioned by the Spanish expert when asked about the aim of their internal transformation. *El País* created a sort of print team that is fully in charge of the print edition so that the rest of the sections can prioritize the digital workflows and focus on generating better digital journalism by collaborating with other departments. In addition, Peinado highlighted the importance of having new professional profiles with

diverse skills (especially in digital technologies) and the ability to incorporate visions that were outside their day-to-day business.

The Swiss interviewee analyzes the negative and positive aims of these innovations. On the one hand, they stress that these changes allow the saving of resources and even the cutting of staff, although they mention that did not happen in the case of *Südosstschweiz*. On the other hand, “the goal was to strengthen the breadth of reporting or to make better use of resources in order to report in a more diverse way,” the interviewee said.

The interviewee from the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism* in the United Kingdom, argued similarly and saw these adjustments as primarily aimed at bringing even more diversity into their own range of topics and gradually addressing topics and social strata that have long been below the journalistic radar.

Supportive conditions

In relation to the conditions that support the implementation of new organizational forms that allow the digitalization of newsrooms, the interviewees unanimously emphasized the importance of good working culture, internal communication, and clear processes.

In Austria, Krause saw a great opportunity in the demographic change within the editorial offices in that due to the retirements of elderly journalists, more young people came into the organization, which in turn supported the change and transformation of the company. He qualified this as a “huge strategic advantage.” Lončar also mentioned that young people were more creative, but they should have the space to develop their ideas. Therefore, Lončar considered that it was essential to grant them autonomy to try new projects and accept mistakes as long as they were useful to learn something.

Similarly, for the German case, Knahn underlined that it was crucial that managers show their commitment to the project. “If there is solidarity between those responsible and there is really no one there who is just paying lip service to it, then it will succeed,” he stated. Moreover, he mentioned that it was also important to make the process transparent and based this change on unambiguous communication and mutual trust. Haug stressed that having a good development budget was also important, as they developed the mobile editor *Living Dogs* (one of the projects within *Aladin*) in collaboration with a Zurich start-up and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

In line with Knahn’s opinions, Mari Luz Peinado explained that for *El País*, it was also paramount that the company showed a clear commitment to mix profiles in the editorial staff. The interviewee also underlined the importance of having international referents in order to find suitable solutions for organizational problems: “In the end, all the challenges I face every day have been faced by other media before.”

For the Swiss case, the interviewee explains that there were many conditions that supported the transformation of *Südosstschweiz*. The practitioner

mentions that it was positive for the newspaper to hire young people who not only did not know how things were done before but also had benefited from good convergent journalism training at educational institutions. The presence of a young CEO helped the newspaper to try out new ideas and install a trial-and-error philosophy, enabling mistakes to be used for learning, which was also promoted by not setting deadlines and forcing journalists to work for every channel. In the context of better use of resources, *Südoschweiz* also hired an experienced external consultant and developed an internal innovation platform.

The managing editor of the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism* saw a central paradigm shift in the understanding of internal editorial collaboration, which was “no longer competitive but based on a collaborative vision.” Finally, they highlighted that counting on young journalists who wanted to make a difference with their jobs was essential for the success of this sort of initiative.

Obstructive conditions

In the context of obstructive conditions, the interviewees mainly mentioned examples and problems that came from individuals and the cultural values associated with journalism. They reported skepticism toward innovation and resistance to changes in long-standing processes. The challenge here was to find communicative and convincing solutions. Besides that, there were also some obstructive factors that derived from processes and resources allocation.

This was the case in Austria, where both interviewees admitted that agile product development also left room for procrastination. Krause said it was frequent that the launch of products was delayed, while Lončar reckoned there might be a need for “more discipline.” There would be too much reluctance to put a quick end to things if they were not working or were no longer working.

For *Main-Post*, Julia Haug also reported delays, but they were mainly caused by poor coordination with external companies. Knahn added at this point, they often rushed pace in the adjustments of processes and assignments at the newsroom, which could ultimately jeopardize the understanding and trust of employees.

In Spain, the most important obstructive factor mentioned for *El País* was its print newspaper tradition. As Peinado states, “It is more complicated for large newspapers with paper editions because of their history and expertise. This expertise increases the quality of journalism, but breaking inertia gets more difficult.” This print-oriented mindset could also derive from a lack of sufficient time to think about the transformation of processes.

The interviewee of the *Südoschweiz* alluded to the journalistic culture and its conservative values as impeding factors for innovation. They stated that journalists sometimes were “vain or special people” who stuck to the traditional way of doing things, which caused “uncertainty and criticism at the beginning of the process” of changing the company’s configuration.

The situation for the case study from the United Kingdom was similar, as the interviewee identified the lack of a fundamental understanding of change and innovation among journalists. They said these barriers need to be overtaken by effective and meaningful knowledge management.

Societal impact

Most of the experiences and explanations about organizations and newsrooms took place at an internal editorial level. Nevertheless, the interviewees also saw effects that went beyond their own media houses and the media industry itself and thus established a link to the societal impact of innovation. Through good and constantly evolving organizational forms and processes, journalism ultimately ensured qualitative products and the integration of new playout channels.

In Germany, Julia Haug and Ivo Knahn agree that these changes in the processes not only affect how news workflows are organized but also improve the way citizens receive information. The ever-increasing time spent on online sites and platforms required journalism to offer its own content there as well, which in return required adjustments in its own processes. The high level of time spent on the internet presents the outlet with another problem because the audience was permanently caught between journalism and offers that were often prepared in a journalism-like manner but pursued completely disparate goals, such as corporate communications and influencing. This made it more important to focus on good orientation across many online (and offline) channels, which was the main aim of *Aladin's* second phase.

In Spain, Peinado stated for *El País* that good organization ensured the information did not remain just a printed report but flowed through all channels and reached the population. The combination of editorial and technical profiles in a smooth process increased information reach and adaption to consumption patterns. This helped to defend democratic values like information accessibility and citizenship empowerment.

In Switzerland, *Südostschweiz* saw diversity as a result of new organizational forms within newsrooms. When people with diverse professional backgrounds and opinions met in the multidisciplinary teams, these differences helped make a story broader and to shed light on multiple angles.

In the United Kingdom, in general terms, the interviewee from the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism* explained that initiatives such as collaborative workflows within the organization and with external initiatives helped to foster the role of journalism. They increased resources committed to investigation, which allowed “making the press more independent through facts, truth and transparency, to make society stronger.”

Conclusion

The five cases concerning the innovation “new organizational forms and teams” that were studied in the JoIn-DemoS project have obvious similarities.

The UK's *Bureau of Investigative Journalism* was a new organization that gave collaborative workflows special prominence. The other four were legacy news media companies that have undergone remarkable efforts in recent years to digitize not only their product but also their internal processes to produce journalistic content. The initiatives implemented by these companies according to their main purposes can be classified on three levels: micro, meso, and macro.

At the microlevel, the adjustments were intended to give individual journalists more freedom and more specific tasks. The goal was to allow individual strengths to play an even greater role. New journalistic skills (especially in the digital arena) were the central currency for this, so skills were to be actively promoted and improved through internal coaching. From the interviews, it was clear that the concept of newsrooms and new forms of organization always began in the practical implementation of strategies and initiatives with the ability and consent of the individuals concerned. At the mesolevel, the adjustments to the media brand should have helped it respond more effectively and accurately to the challenges in the digital media market. The interviewees reported on the goal of savings but also on the desire to introduce modern product development and more project-based ways of working. Multidisciplinary work teams and agile workflows were established by innovative media as opposition to rigid structures that eliminated autonomy, trial-and-error, and thus creativity. Although an extant argument suggests there was not a macrolevel in this field due to the internal nature of these processes, they also pursued commercial and social goals that transcended the organizations and the industry. The interviewees primarily saw a stronger connection to the wishes of the audience as a result of the adjustments. Here, data and analytics played decisive roles.

The macrolevel aims were linked to the social value of these initiatives. Although these innovations were more related to internal processes, the interviewees considered that adapting the newsroom to create products that better fit the needs of the audience could be beneficial for citizens. By launching interesting services and optimizing the use of information channels, media houses increased the availability and reach of news. The combination of professionals from a range of working backgrounds in work groups also strengthened diversity (see Chapter 11).

In relation to the supportive conditions for these transformations, individual factors were frequently highlighted by the interviewees. The Austrian and Swiss experts mentioned the hiring of young people as levers for creativity when they are given autonomy and enough space to try ideas and even more if they had received convergent training in educational centers. Having a wide professional and personal variety among the staff also fostered this innovation. German, Spanish, and Swiss interviewees agreed that it was also necessary to count on committed managers who truly believed in their transformation potential and were able to transmit this vision to employees in an unambiguous manner, as the theory of transformational leadership states

(Valero-Pastor et al. 2021). Less related to the individual and cultural perspective, it was also important to have a sufficient budget, which could be useful for hiring partners and consultancy agencies.

In the context of obstructive factors, there were some related to the processes. The coordination with external collaborators and the prototyping culture may have caused delays in the launch of products, as the Austrian and German experts explained. Nevertheless, it was noteworthy that most of the obstructive conditions could be qualified as cultural. While Peinado stressed that legacy organizations with a print past and present might find difficulties when trying to break inertia, the interviewees of *Südostschweiz* and in the United Kingdom paid more attention to the individual attitudes toward change. Journalists were traditionally reactive to change, but they were not prone to follow new opportunities to transform the way they do their jobs. In summary, this excerpt shows very clearly the most important challenge in the context of the organization: changing minds to modify the newsroom.

Notes

- 1 Anonymity was guaranteed upon in the interviews with the Swiss practitioner.
- 2 The interviewee from the UK case study was anonymized.

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14 Paywalls and paid content

No entry for free: the introduction of paywall models to monetize online journalism

Korbinian Klinghardt and Sonja Luef

Over the decades, users have become accustomed to receiving all kinds of online content, including journalistic offerings, free of charge. Thus, the *Economist* declared 2010 “[t]he year of the paywall” (The Economist 2010). Paywall models, of which there are many today, have disruptively ended this free era on the internet. “Essentially, a paywall acts as a barrier between an internet user and a news organization’s online content” (Pickard and Williams 2014, 195). In practice, a variety of paywall models have been developed. Señor and Sriram (2022, 42–55) mention, for example, in the context of paywalls, the hard, the metered, the freemium, the timewall, the dynamic, the hybrid, and the donations model. Their unifying element is that the user removes the barrier in exchange for payment. The introduction of paywalls is also associated with a rethink in the industry because the number of subscribers became more important than the number of clicks (Puijk et al. 2021, 1123).

Innovation, as Pavlik (2013, 190) puts it, “is the key to the viability of news media in the digital age.” Paywall models can be seen as an innovation in this sense, as they play an important role in the financing of media companies today. But experts see not only paywalls but also donation models and crowdfunding (see Chapter 21), and membership models (see Chapter 24) as innovative financing models across countries.

From an economic perspective, the introduction of paywall models is logical and consistent. Media companies distribute journalistic offerings, sell them in the market, and thus finance the production of their news operation. The revenues, in turn, could ensure the financing of quality content. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that this model has been perceived “as [the] newspapers’ savior” (Pickard and Williams 2014, 195).

From a normative democratic theoretical perspective, however, the introduction of paywalls can also be seen critically because many people who cannot afford a digital subscription are structurally excluded from journalistic offerings. However, this access to journalistic offerings is existential for the functioning of democratic societies.

Journalism is about democracy; there are things that citizens must know, and are entitled to know, in order for a democracy to function, and there are powerful elites, both within and beyond government, that do not want them to know. It is up to journalists to find those things and publicize them.

(Scheuer 2008, 97)

The Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project selected five case studies to find out three aspects of paywalls. First, the objectives for their introduction by media platforms; second, the aspects that were either supportive or obstructive to their implementation; and third, what influence paywalls have on society. Specific information on the methodology of the case studies can be found in Chapter 2.

Case studies

- Austria: *Kleine Zeitung*, a local daily paper for southern Austria, part of the *Styria Media Group*, is considered a first mover in the introduction of paywalls on the Austrian media market. This conversion of the business mode occurred in four phases, beginning in 2016. A team of approximately five people works in the paywall area of innovation. The interviewees were Walter Hauser, CEO of reader and user market; Thomas Spann, CEO of *Kleine Zeitung*; and Sebastian Krause, head of strategy and development and a member of the editorial board.
- Germany: *Bild-Zeitung* is a pioneer in the transformation to payment models in the media market and is a supra-regional tabloid newspaper, which belongs to *Axel Springer SE*. In June 2013, the *Bild-Zeitung* introduced a paywall concept called BILDplus six months after the newspaper *WELT* launched its plus model. *WELT* also belongs to *Axel Springer SE*. Since then, *Bild-Zeitung* has had a freemium model involving free and paid-for content. There were between 25 and 30 employees working in the paywall area of innovation (including Tech, Data, Marketing, Product, etc.). The interviewees were Daniel Mussinghoff, who was the current director responsible for *Bild-Zeitung's* digital paid content business, and Leonie von Elverfeldt, who had worked for five years at *Bild-Zeitung* and helped to launch BILDplus before becoming founder and managing director for Ringier East-African brand Pulse and is today a freelance consultant.
- Spain: The Madrid-based newspaper *El Mundo* was the first major national media to launch a subscription model in 2019 after a failed attempt at the turn of the century. The implementation occurred after several months of preparation, during which the team harvested audience registration data. The interviewees were Vicente Ruiz, deputy director (responsible for digital products), and Gabriela Bolognese, digital strategy director.

- Switzerland: *Tamedia* (TX Group) was considered a pioneer after launching its paywall in 2014. *Tamedia* also relies on a metered paywall, which offers some metered content for free, but once the user reaches the limit, they must pay for more. A team of no more than 25 people was involved in the paywall work area. The interviewee was the chief revenue officer and a member of the executive board.¹
- United Kingdom: The daily newspaper the *Financial Times* (FT) introduced a paywall back in 2002, which has steadily evolved ever since. This paywall strategy was probably the most important and best-known in the United Kingdom. One of the main reasons why the FT introduced a paywall so early on was to adapt to the new dynamics driven by digital transformation in news and media, according to Aled John, director at the FT's consulting arm, FT Strategies, who was interviewed.

Aims of the innovation

At the *Kleine Zeitung* in Austria, the board recognized the need to focus more on the digital business. On the one hand, this meant increasing the number of users, which had become necessary due to the decline in print circulation, and, on the other hand, strengthening the weak loyalty of digital customers. The monetization of access was intended to open new revenue streams. But the stated aim of the management in introducing the paywall was also to combat the “freebie mentality” on the internet. “Quality journalism only has to be paid for when it’s printed on paper, but not when it’s published digitally?,” Walter Hauser, CEO reader and user market at *Kleine Zeitung*, pointed out critically.

In the case of the German tabloid *Bild*, the introduction of the paywall was also based on the hope of opening new sources of revenue to become less dependent on the advertising market and declining print usage. According to consultant Leonie von Elverfeldt, *Bild* and its publisher *Axel Springer SE*, as a large and financially strong media company, wanted a pioneering role in Germany. They chose the freemium model, which combines both free articles to generate reach and exclusive content behind a paywall. The requirement for users to register strengthened customer loyalty, interaction, and communication, and enabled offers like the Bundesliga highlight clips.

El Mundo established a paid content model in 2019. Vicente Ruiz explained this innovation arose because, until that time, payment models were not yet common in Spain. Similar markets and tools for dynamic pricing models have been studied before, and in the end, *El Mundo* opted for the freemium model. “We started working on finding the ideal model for us, making a good business plan and in the end, we launched this freemium model, which was the one that suited us best in principle, because it did less damage to the advertising inventory,” said Ruiz. Advertising remains *El Mundo*'s main revenue source, but paid content was identified to generate new revenues.

At Switzerland's *Tamedia*, declining annual print sales and the need to generate revenue elsewhere were also at the root of the paywall development process. "We are a revenue-driven company," explained the chief revenue officer. Therefore, *Tamedia* set a very clear numerical target against which the success of the paywall was to be measured: 200,000 subscriptions in 2023, whereas, in 2022, only 140,000 subscribers had been recorded.

The United Kingdom's *FT* has a lot of experience with paid content, having developed the strategy for over two decades. However, the paywall has changed considerably over the years, adapting to needs and technical possibilities. For example, free content has been increasingly reduced in favor of paid articles. The basic idea at the *FT* has always been that readers should pay for online content the same way as they pay for the print edition. Aled John, director of *FT* Strategies, described the paywall as a good way of getting to know their audience, understanding their needs, and improving engagement. The goal is a lifetime strategy, maximizing the value of each customer relationship.

Supportive conditions

Summarizing the statements of the Austrian interviewees, various factors were conducive to the introduction of paywalls. The expansion of strategy development and the strengthening of cross-media cooperation, both of which were achieved with the help of an external consulting firm, were supportive aspects. They also benefited from the insights of media companies in other countries that had already introduced paywalls. Transparency and communication with all participants of the media company were also useful.

Daniel Mussinghoff, *Bild-Zeitung*, emphasized that the support of the board of directors and the editors in chief was an important driver in the introduction of the paywall. Leonie von Elverfeldt emphasized that the implementation at *Bild-Zeitung* was significantly promoted by the individual commitment of the employees, the team leaders, the board of directors, and the entire management. The moment at which every staff member could finally see how many subscriptions an article generated in one day, the team investigated it more intensively, explained Mussinghoff. Setting subscription targets was also beneficial, von Elverfeldt said, because they encouraged employees to work toward a goal. Mussinghoff also saw other German media companies introducing paywalls as being helpful. This way users were more exposed to the issue, and there were fewer options of free content. Mussinghoff believed that the relevance of paying for journalistic offerings was promoted overall. Von Elverfeldt pointed out that the "International Paid Content Summit," an international industry meeting organized by *Axel Springer SE*, was also helpful. Media professionals could share their experiences with the introduction of paywalls.

In Spain, payment models are drivers of innovation:

Paid models can help innovation. You try it out and when you see that the format is successful, you put much more value on it to get new resources to do more of that style. A model like this allows you to knock on your publisher's door and ask for new resources to move forward.

(Vicente Ruiz, *El Mundo*, Spain)

Gabriela Bolognese said that it was helpful that there were already successfully implemented payment models. "If you pay for several things, one more is not so far away from what you can do. That helped."

Orientation toward successful paywall models and open communication were also important conducive aspects from the point of view of the Swiss interviewee. According to them, e-commerce companies, *Spotify* and *Netflix*, but also the *New York Times* and Scandinavian media, served as a source of inspiration. Regarding communication, they emphasized that it was important to permanently explain such a significant change. The commitment of top management to the introduction of the paywall was also beneficial. They also pointed out that new employees were hired who had acquired competences from several sectors – for example, the tourism or music industry, digital agencies, or e-commerce. They said a certain amount of freedom to carry out tests was also helpful. At *Tamedia*, for example, tests were conducted in the usability lab to see what did and did not work. Hypotheses were derived from the outcomes, which were tested again.

Aled John, director of *FT Strategies*, viewed the introduction of the paywall as vital for the viability of the media company. The users received concrete value from the *FT's* content in their professional or personal lives and were, therefore, more willing to pay for it.

Obstructive conditions

To summarize the statements of the Austrian interviewees, the traditional corporate culture was an obstacle to the implementation of the paywall. This was characterized by scant cooperation between *Kleine Zeitung's* editorial, reader market, and advertising departments, which scarcely knew about each other's working methods and needs, and because a competitive mindset prevailed. Thomas Spann said the traditional way of developing strategy internally, as a top-down process, proved to be a barrier to transformation.

Leonie von Elverfeldt saw the lack of knowledge of digital publishing in general as obstructive. Another obstacle, in her view, was the fact that the print division still generated a lot of revenue, which meant that expanding the online revenue structure was, at the beginning, seen as less important. In this time of experimenting and testing, the pressure on staff not to lose

subscribers was also counterproductive, according to von Elverfeldt. From Mussinghoff's point of view, the lack of transparency in subscription numbers was obstructive. After the introduction of the paywall, not all editors knew how many subscriptions their articles generated. Gradually, interest in this aspect grew, but so did the editors' workload, as they were now expected to spend their working hours not only writing and editing articles but also keeping track of subscriptions. Finally, the German interviewees considered the unwillingness of users to pay for journalistic services, as it was the very beginning, as a factor that has complicated the introduction of paywalls.

Vicente Ruiz at *El Mundo* also pointed out that there were cultural difficulties in terms of a lack of economic vision in the media company. This reluctance may be related to the fear that audiences would not be willing to pay for journalistic offerings. Ruiz explained, "In general, there was a lot of fear in Spain of disappearing by closing down, and the theory was that people here would never pay for news. There was a bestial fear." He also cites a lack of resources and the need for highly specialized staff as obstructive factors. His colleague, digital strategy director Gabriela Bolognese, believed there was still too much dependence on advertising, which was an obstacle to establishing the paywall model.

Tamedia's chief revenue officer and member of the executive board lamented a certain cultural inertia. In their opinion, management had to work hard to ensure that the paywall was finally implemented because not all employees understood that it takes testing to find the right paywall strategy. Indeed, some criticized this as fickleness. A complete change in the business model from free access to paid content was difficult for the audience, the chief revenue officer admitted. To be successful, a media organization would need a lot of good stories because no one would subscribe based on one good article.

Aled John from the *FT* said, relative to its peers in the news market, there were fewer problems with the introduction of the paywall at the *FT* because the organization had always been very strong on its paid offering and market strategy.

Societal impact

Thomas Spann said, the *Kleine Zeitung* tried to create a counterbalance to digitalization and data-drivenness. Parallel to the development of paid content, the six local editorial offices in Carinthia had been expanded in terms of space and staff and relocated to the local centers. Spann explained, "We are becoming more digital [...] and more technological. We consciously want to counterbalance this by being locally present and offering a personal place to meet." The value of democracy was thus less argued by the innovation than by the accompanying phenomenon of payment barriers in the digital space, but openness for discourse and encounters between journalists and users in the real world.

For the representatives of *Bild*, paid content raised awareness that the audience was the customer and that its interests had to be at the center instead of those of the marketers. For example, it was possible to earn money with reports on topics that were interesting for the users but in which no company wanted to advertise. As a result, audiences were increasingly being courted online and confronted with subscription offers.

The interviewees from *El Mundo* emphasized that, in their opinion, paywalls would not exclude people from information and would not have a negative impact on the democratic process. Today, there are many ways to get information on a wide range of topics. Vicente Ruiz was even convinced that society would benefit from paid content, as it would improve the quality of content. The feedback from the audience would be more immediate thanks to the data generated, and it would be possible to see daily whether or not the journalistic content on offer was being appreciated. Gabriela Bolognese, digital strategy director of *El Mundo*, stressed the importance of successful business models, especially for media companies, to provide the public with independent journalism. She said, “A world without a strong press is a worse world.”

The Swiss interviewee points to the beam power of paid models. The example of *Tamedia* would show that journalistic content can be successfully monetized digitally. In their view, this even had a significant impact on society because it strengthened journalistic independence: “Our job is to finance the journalism of the future. We all believe that you can earn money with quality journalism and that we contribute to that with our work.”

Indeed, most of the content of the *FT* was now locked up behind a paywall. But although, over the years, the newspaper had become almost entirely paid for, it also tried to create a more inclusive space, with days when particular journalism and content were completely free and available to anyone interested, Aled John explained. In addition, there were also services that offered quality *FT* content regularly for free, such as newsletters, video, and audio. In general, according to John, paywalls require organizations to focus more on the individual user than other digital or print financing models simply because the organization has to know more about the user – their needs, their levels of engagement – in order to succeed.

Conclusion

Some of the innovations studied in the JoIn-DemoS project had the goal of making journalism more interesting, clearer, easier, or more enjoyable to consume (e.g., data journalism, podcasts, live journalism, social media). In contrast, paywalls did not start at the production level of journalism but at the commercialization level, in which the economy was clearly the driving force. For the cases studied in five countries, all of them legacy media companies, the challenge was to compensate for declining print revenues and to prepare for the future in such a way that the companies had a future at all.

Accordingly, media houses faced a lot of pressure to make the introduction of paid content a success. Failure would have had huge repercussions and, in the worst case, could even have threatened the existence of the business. Interview partners from Austria and Spain addressed the great fear that prevailed in their companies when the paywall was introduced. The greatest difficulty for management was “not to lose one’s nerve” (CEO Thomas Spann, *Kleine Zeitung*) in the face of the initially collapsing access figures, to reassure employees, and to communicate openly and extensively within the teams in the newsroom and commercial department.

In addition to the economic aspect, the media companies studied had a second major objective in introducing a paywall to collect data to get to know the users and their needs better. Users’ loyalty to the medium should also have been strengthened.

A look at positive examples in other countries proved helpful in implementing this innovation. In this context, the North of Europe was cited as a model for Germany, Austria, and Switzerland to follow. The interviewees concurred that good networking with media companies at the national, European, or international level and the associated exchange of experience provided concrete, positive input.

Obstructive factors were mainly found in the traditional, inflexible, and print-oriented corporate culture of the pertinent news outlets. The difficult starting point in almost all the cases was the low level of cooperation and communication between the individual departments and, consequently, a low level of understanding for each other. Only the UK example reported that it had not experienced any problems with this, probably because the transformation process there had started much longer ago and was, therefore, at the time of the study, already much more advanced compared to the other countries surveyed.

Putting an end to the prevailing freebie culture on the internet and being paid for quality digital journalism, as is commonplace in print journalism, was a strong motive for paywalls in the cases studied in the five countries. The interviewees do not see putting news behind a paywall and thus preventing or at least obstructing access as a threat to democracy. Indeed, in the internet age, they referred to countless freely available sources, which does not mean, however, that these sources are equivalent to journalism and are selected and prepared according to similar quality criteria. In any case, paywalls and paid content models increase the pressure on media companies to differentiate themselves from free sources on the internet and to provide good and relevant content to their audiences. After all, it is the audience that provides the funding or forgoes it if it sees no value.

Note

- 1 The respondents from Switzerland were assured of anonymity.

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15 News on social media

An innovation dilemma in the race of uncertainty

Jonas Schützeneder and Michael Graßl

Journalism's relationship with social media platforms is often reduced to the benefit of reaching a young target group. However, if we look more closely at the relationship between journalism and social media, the integration of platforms such as *Instagram* as distribution channels for journalistic content has been the driver of a far-reaching transformation process. This transformation process can be understood on the three levels of organization, content, and interaction (Graßl et al. 2023). Social media has led to the formation of new departments (organization), established format development as an important area of practice (content), and made audience involvement a key task (interaction). However, it has also become clear in recent years that the way news is communicated through social media is changing. First, journalistic providers select specific topics for social media channels and orient themselves to the logic and algorithms of the platforms (Hendrickx 2021). Second, these same algorithms then further pre-sort for the audience, which means that not every piece of journalistic content from a particular brand will reach the audience at all.

However, around innovation and the associated processes, interactions occur, which are often subsumed under the term “innovation dilemma” (Rammert 1988). This means that those involved must permanently weigh up various conditions and consequences: innovation processes and their costs or prerequisites versus profitability and the efficiency of existing structures (“reflexive innovations”) (Blutner 2015, 155).

In the context of journalism, the possibilities for interaction with social media can also be understood as a dilemma. For example, the platforms provide new forms and formats for journalistic reporting (innovation impulse). On the other hand, there are clearly predefined forms and channels from which it is difficult to break out (innovation condition). The developments in the audience area can be contrasted in a similar way. A new and young target group is reached (innovation impulse), but it is fragmented and difficult to address. Furthermore, the target moves daily on various platforms between journalistic and nonjournalistic formats, and prefers short and concise information units instead of detailed backgrounds and research focus. The target group's consumption of journalism is also based on the logic of the platforms (innovation condition).

In all this complexity, social media have become a central innovation dimension of journalism. The results of our first substudy of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) research project (Meier et al. 2022), in which “news on social media” was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations in all five countries (Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) confirms this assumption. Thus, it is not surprising that research on journalism and social media is popular and diversified, ranging, for example, from the understanding of the role of individual journalists on social media, to organizational change processes in newsrooms, and to content selection processes for social media posts in news outlets (Hase, Boczek, and Scharnow 2022; Schützeneder, Graßl, and Klinghardt 2022; Mellado and Hermida 2023).

However, only a little is known so far about the specific innovation process of developing and implementing journalistic content on social media accounts or about the factors that support or obstruct the integration of social media into the media organization’s own structures. There is also a lack of findings about the specific aims pursued by media organizations and editorial offices in this process and how they evaluate the social impact of journalistic activities on social media as a result. This is the context of this chapter, which aims to contribute to closing this gap with the help of five case studies in Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, following the research methodology outlined in Chapter 2.

Case studies

These were the five analyzed case studies:

- Austria: *Zeit im Bild (ZIB)* is the main news program on ORF, the public service broadcaster. With early attempts on WhatsApp information services and its format *ZIB100* on *Instagram*, the *ZIB* social media team was a pioneer in Austria in providing and adapting a legacy media house news format in a genuine, alternative format. In 2023, six people worked on the social media team of *ZIB*. The interviewee was Patrick Swanson, head of social media.
- Germany: The *tagesschau* is part of the ARD and thus a public media institution. Initial experiments on social media were intensified in 2012. In the early 2020s, the *tagesschau* was the most successful player with a journalistic background on social media in Germany. At that time, as many as 22 shifts worked daily for the various accounts on numerous social media platforms. However, the team included correspondents who did not work full time in a social media editorial team but who produced content for social media from events on the spot, for example, and sent it to the editorial teams. The interviewees were Patrick Weinhold, head of social media, and Timo Spieß, head of innovation lab at *ARD-aktuell*.

- Spain: *Sphera Sports*, established in 2012, can be considered a representative case of this innovation in Spain. Unlike other media, *Sphera Sports* did not view social media as a mere distribution channel but as its core operation. *Sphera Sports* uses almost the entire portfolio of well-known current platforms and is active on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, and *TikTok*. Via *TikTok*, the editorial team quickly built up a large community (120,000 followers) through entertaining and opinionated contributions. There were 12 employees at *Sphera Sports*. The interviewees were Borja Pardo, director, and Adriá Campmany, social media manager.
- Switzerland: The *tagesschau* can be seen as the news flagship of the German-speaking Swiss broadcaster *SRF* and was one of the first, in Switzerland, to experiment professionally and long term with formats on *TikTok*. Initially, one young in-house journalist worked on the development of the formats. In the early 2020s, the *TikTok* account was linked to the newsroom, in which the norm was for two news hosts, two editors, and one producer to work on them. The interviewees in Switzerland were assured of anonymity prior to the interviews. Therefore, here and in the following, the quotes and statements are only attributed to the *SRF tagesschau* format and not to specific individuals.
- United Kingdom: The *BBC* was chosen as the case study because the social media developer at that time was Sophia Smith Galer, whom the expert interviews of the first substudy mentioned as the key person in building the *BBC*'s social media channels. She has also been awarded several prizes concerning innovation and social media – for example, the British Journalism Awards for Innovation of the Year 2021 (Showreel 2023). The interview was conducted with Sophia Smith Galer, who had worked as a visual journalist in faith and ethics at the *BBC*.

Aims of the innovation

The interviewees described the aims of the innovation very similarly across all countries. All cited connecting with the young target group as centrally important. Social media were both a bridge to initial contact and a binding element for long-term interaction between media organizations and young people. Journalism and the media were looking for direct contact and were actively on the lookout for trends, formats, and forms of interaction with the young target group.

A second line of argument in the context of goals was the digital transformation. Several interviewees described the lack of alternatives in that media brands and journalism had no choice but to offer their own content on social media because the reach and the market power of the large platforms were constantly increasing. This enabled the journalistic power of the large tech corporations to continue to grow. Nevertheless, opportunities for news organizations were also visible because the interviewees mentioned various examples from their own everyday lives of responsible and successful use of social media platforms. Patrick Swanson from the Austrian *ORF* pointed to the general importance of

open discourse for democratic societies as a further aspect. Here, media brands could set new impulses and bring people into the debate who had previously shown no interest in the brand via other publication channels.

Borja Pardo (director of the Spanish *Sphera Sports*) offered another objective from the perspective of a rather young media organization was “closing the gap with traditional and mainstream media.” Pardo referred to the strong growth opportunities in the context of social media reach for many media organizations and also for start-ups. From the perspective of an established and traditional news service, Timo Spieß, head of innovation lab at *ARD-aktuell*, highlighted the aim of “providing the whole of society with news” as the first and foremost aim. Pardo also saw immense advantages in reaching new target groups because the company’s own media brand did not have to first direct the audience to specific time slots but was present at all times on the platforms that were used heavily anyway.

Sophia Smith Galer (*BBC*) added the aspect of permanent further development, such as “work on the existing profile and creation of new profiles,” as a further dimension. Thus, the innovation area of news on social media became an ongoing task with no time limit. The interviewees emphasized that the developments on and the establishment of new platforms must be constantly monitored and that the company’s own portfolio of social media channels has grown constantly in recent years. This was accompanied by new challenges in terms of responsibility, coordination, and workflow.

Supportive conditions

The experiences with supportive conditions can be divided into three central blocks: the hierarchical, the technical, and, particularly, the organizational dimension.

First, in the context of hierarchy, the interviewees highlighted that support from superiors is an indispensable premise when working on this innovation area. They agreed that good leaders encouraged further independent development and efforts in social media and were characterized by active listening and reliable agreements. The assessments also showed that the awareness of the general importance of social media had reached the executives and did have an impact on the general strategy of media organizations in the long term. Patrick Weinhold (*tagesschau*) reported that in 2015, the management level of the *ARD* had identified the need for a holistic strategy for news on social media and had implemented it as part of a structural reform:

The launch of the strategy was accompanied by the creation of another milestone in our structure, which was the birth of our innovation lab. We formed a place for further developments, new formats, for product updates and to explore new platforms. It was the beginning of a professionalization driven by the management level.

(Patrick Weinhold, *tagesschau*, Germany)

Second, the continuous search for and further development of technical tools was seen as essential for working with social media (technical dimension). In this context, the interviewee from *SRF tagesschau* spoke about the “four forces” of audience, distribution, content, and technology. They would all be indispensable as individual building blocks but only develop their full effect through their consistent interaction (in planning and implementation).

Third, the interviewees described the increased professionalization in the production and organization of social media content. Almost all media organizations would have established their own teams. There was a great willingness to experiment within them; format development and design sprints were actively pushed and helped greatly with the efforts. The principle of “trial & error” was assigned special importance, and one interviewee also mentioned the comparison of “start-up mentality” in that teams dominated by younger age groups value creative freedom and adopt project management forms and formats.

Sophia Smith Galer, *BBC*, also cited the COVID-19 pandemic as a further and decisive driver of innovation because it gave rise to completely new possibilities both at the organizational level (hybrid teams) and in the area of formats, which ultimately supported the innovation of social media. Patrick Swanson (head of social media at *ORF*) added, in this context, another fundamental task to strengthen public service units in the context of increasing criticism and the need for reform. He saw a “role model function for other parts of the *ORF* that public service online can also be successful.” In his view, awareness, reach, and presence on the platforms could, therefore, have been helpful in the long term, and this awareness could also have secured further support inside and outside the editorial offices.

Obstructive conditions

In the interviews, it became clear that the greatest challenge lay in the reorganization of the editorial offices and processes. Referring to the entire industry, Adriá Campmany from *Sphera Sports* saw the problem in the long-established structures of former production processes (e.g., in print), which would still have made it difficult to adapt to workflows in digital media houses. Linked to this were further obstacles, which the interviewees highlighted, such as the personnel responsible for news on social media on a day-to-day basis within editorial departments, but also above them in the hierarchy, i.e., the executives, could have slowed down or even prevented developments due to various motives. However, the issue of personnel also provided problems in the context of acquisition in that the search for young, social media-savvy people with good training proved problematic. This was because publishers often (could) only offer poorly paid, temporary, or part-time positions for this group of staff. This situation also reinforced the trend toward high staff turnover in these teams. Thus, processes, knowledge, and creativity were enormously hampered.

In the context of technical possibilities, the experts also observed clearly growing skepticism about the market power and data protection guidelines of large platforms. In some cases, this skepticism led to blockades, as not all formats or content could be implemented as the editorial team envisioned them. In addition, the security concerns and in-house needs meant that production cycles (e.g., from the initial idea to publication via social media) were sometimes enormously prolonged. Timo Spieß from *tagesschau*, for example, mentioned that due to the size of *ARD*, social media editorial teams sometimes had to wait a long time “for someone to authorize,” especially when technical solutions such as software were to be adapted to the individual needs of the editorial teams.

In addition, there was the permanent insecurity that arose from the power imbalance vis-à-vis the social media platforms. Journalists and content managers could never be sure that their own structures and channels would remain in the long term or that the platforms would not make major changes overnight (e.g., adapting important algorithms). As a German interviewee explained,

All of this makes work in the field of social media a permanent race of uncertainty and leads to the fact that the small-scale nature and abundance of tasks of many activities, e.g., as a social media manager, increases enormously.

(Timo Spieß, *tagesschau*, Germany)

The experience of Patrick Swanson from the Austrian *ORF* also fitted in with this argument. Swanson said target groups with various ideas of quality and preferred content were mixing more than ever. The attempt to reach all these fragmented groups and desires could never have succeeded completely, yet the permanent attempt was inevitable: “news on social media is necessary!” Swanson’s statement also referred to the problem of permanent dilemmas introduced earlier, particularly because content-related decisions were catch-22 predicaments in the fragmented media market. In the context of producing news for social media, journalistic offerings competed not only with other journalistic media brands but also directly with the accounts of celebrities, politicians, private people, or companies. The central problem was, therefore, probably the immediate environment in the social media cosmos because journalistic content became blurred along with its normative attributions when pressed between public relations (PR), entertainment, comedy, and private accounts.

Funding needs to be mentioned here because social media content is becoming increasingly specific and, therefore, more expensive. Although direct revenue sources from these publications were manageable, they had not been a significant factor in the annual reports to date. Thus, skepticism from a media economics perspective became another (potentially) obstructive element of this innovation.

Societal impact

To a certain extent, the societal impact dimension combines the findings of the previous sections. The interviewees saw an enormous impact, especially due to the easy access to social media because they enabled all social classes, regardless of social, economic, or educational background, to be addressed. At the same time, numerous content providers have competed on social media platforms for limited attention, in which competition included deliberate manipulation and aggression by various providers. The interviewee from *SRF tagesschau*, for example, saw a central task of important significance for journalism acting as a fact-based and reliable “antipole” in a world full of half-truths and emotional debates. Sophia Smith Galer also referred to this aspect and confirmed another effect. By consciously seeking access and communication at eye level with the young target group, media organizations were able to strengthen their ties, which should have led to increased trust in journalism in the long term. Patrick Swanson derived from the same argument the possibility of improving media literacy in society.

The interviewees also recognized a further dimension of impact in the content. Due to the platforms setting certain production rules or rewarding them through reach (e.g., in the *Instagram* story function), the habits of the audience were changing. The young target group, in particular, was accustomed to short bursts of knowledge and quick edits. Journalism was reacting to this and was also gradually adapting its own format in response. All of this had an enormous impact on society, how it consumed knowledge, and what it specifically expects from such formats. Adriá Campmany summarized this development conclusively. In his estimation, social media channels were the key(s) between media and society.

In addition, all interviewees also mentioned the general impact on user engagement and participation. They agreed that the pure presence of their own brand and the news offering on social media led to greater loyalty and especially to more interaction with the younger target group. The audience appreciated the use of social media (the approach and focus on social media platforms that are now the basis of information for citizens). Sophia Smith Galer, looking back on the developments of recent years, said: “The audience appreciated the use of social media” and, thanks to our own formats, “they feel understood and therefore trusted us more and more by our offerings.”

Conclusion

The analysis of the case studies has shown that the responsible experts (must) weigh up numerous opportunities and risks in the innovation area of news on social media. On the one hand, they saw the opportunity to interact with the audience in eye-to-eye contact and reach a target group that would otherwise not come in touch with their media brands. On the other hand, they entered

an uncertain dependency on platforms that set the rules and often did not allow for a sustainable financing concept for journalism. The results also illustrated the innovation dilemma that exists in this social media area. Media organizations used journalistic content to reach people through social media, but in order to compete with the other players on those platforms, the media had to conduct an adaptation process that blurred the boundaries of journalism. The interviewees were aware of the problem and emphasized that in a fragmented media market, the audience's expectations were not wholly fulfilled. Despite all the concerns and dilemmas, however, the interviewees agreed that journalism cannot ignore social media.

A noteworthy aspect is that, within the JoIn-DemoS project, public, fee-financed media organizations are primarily considered pioneers in the field of social media journalism. Spain alone named a private organization as being particularly innovative. This suggests that innovative news formats around social media find a fertile environment for their development, especially in places where they do not have to earn money with their products right away. This also correlates with the aims and the societal impact cited by the interviewees. In our cases, economic goals play only a minor role in the implementation of news on social media. The decision in favor of social media is based more on the societal impact that is made by contributing through their content, for example, to the efforts to counter fake news and increase diversity of opinion.

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16 Podcasts

Provider of in-depth journalistic information

Maike Körner and Michael Graßl

Although the podcast is not a completely new concept and already known since the early 2000s (Bottomley 2015), it has since then become a central and successful format for the distribution of both information and entertainment. The podcast is an expression of a new audio age made possible by digitization. In this context, however, the podcast is only one innovative element of this Audio 3.0 age (Schützeneder and Graßl 2021). Audio 3.0 is characterized by a change across many dimensions, from which the podcast, as a format, benefits considerably (technically simple production, location- and time-independent, and fast distribution). Apps like Anchor allow the production and distribution of audio content (including podcasts) within just a few clicks, and platforms like *Spotify* are becoming central hubs with attention as the new currency. The boundaries between producers and listeners are blurring. This also offers opportunities for journalism, which has discovered the podcast as an important format for distributing audio content (Legorburu et al. 2021; Klinghardt et al. 2022). Media houses take advantage of the potential of audio as a new distribution channel for news in the digital ecosystem (Asier and Pedrero-Esteban 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic was a boost for journalistic podcast formats, helping science and educational formats to achieve high audiences (Nee and Santana 2022).

Research points out podcasts as being (innovative) drivers of audio development in journalism. In our research project, the development of “audio and podcast” in recent years was also identified as one of the 20 most important innovation areas by the experts in four countries (Austria, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland), following the research methodology outlined in Chapter 2. It must be mentioned that the development of podcasts as a format in journalism, in comparison to other formats, occurred over various stages. In the United Kingdom, one of the countries that participated in the JoIn-DemoS project, media used the journalistic podcast in the early 2000s, much earlier than continental Europe. For this reason, UK experts interviewed in the project’s initial substudy (Meier et al. 2022) no longer view the podcast as an area of innovation. This view stands in contrast to the other four countries. However, there is a lack of research on, among other things, the specific aims media companies have pursued with the introduction of

podcasts and which factors have supported and obstructed implementation. To fill this research gap, the following case studies of a successful best-practice podcast example from each of the four countries should contribute.

Case studies

- Austria: The podcast *Erklär mir die Welt* was started in 2018 and can be seen as one of the first to be created with a fully independent journalistic approach (Erklär mir die Welt 2021). With more than 15,000 listeners per episode, the journalistic podcast is one of Austria's most successful and independently produced examples. Moreover, the podcast is an award-winning podcast in Austria (e.g., Ö3 Podcast Award). The interviewee was the founder, Andreas Sator.
- Germany: Podcasts at *Die Zeit* are considered pioneers in the German audio landscape because, in comparison with other media houses, the podcasts not only have a broad and high-quality podcast portfolio (Zeit Online 2023), but they are also very popular. True crime podcasts, such as *Zeit Verbrechen*, have large audiences among young people. The first podcast was *Zeit Wissen* in 2009, after which a steady buildup was followed by a major expansion of the portfolio from 2017 onwards. The interviewees were Ole Pflüger (head of podcasts) and Sabine Rückert (deputy chief editor and host of *Zeit Verbrechen*).
- Spain: *Podium Podcast* was founded in 2016 (Podium Podcast 2023) as an initiative of the largest Spanish-speaking radio group *PRISA*. Podium Podcast was the first major project in Spain dedicated professionally to podcasting. The quality of its programs, documentaries, and sound fiction has made it one of the most award-winning media in the audio sector in Spain. The interviewees were María Jesús Espinosa de los Monteros (manager) and Lourdes Moreno (executive producer).
- Switzerland: The podcast *Durchblick* is a science podcast that was established in 2019 and is part of the portfolio of the *Blick* group (Blick 2023). There were hardly any science podcasts in Switzerland before *Durchblick*, and thus the innovation filled a previously unoccupied niche. In the beginning, the production was the responsibility of an external organization ("Podcastschieme" Winterthur) but is now in-house at *Blick*. The interviewees in Switzerland were assured of anonymity prior to the interviews. Therefore, here and in the following, the quotes and statements are only attributed to the podcast *Durchblick* and not to specific staff.

Aims of the innovation

The case studies in the four countries showed great overall heterogeneity in their initial media situation and the development of podcasts in the specific countries. Even though the starting positions of all the case studies were

different from one another, similar goals can be recognized internationally. In Germany, Spain, and Switzerland, the main aim was to broaden the target groups, of which the sole differentiation was how they would define these networks. The German experts, for example, “wanted to reach a young readership, listeners or interested parties. And that’s why we launched these forms of journalism that are popular among young people, online and also podcasts. That was the intention,” said Rückert.

In Austria, Andreas Sator said, specifically, that *Erklär mir die Welt* was created to offer guidance to people who wanted to think about the world a little more slowly and take more time to understand certain topics. The podcast format was ideal for conveying content in precisely this way. In addition, the podcast episodes should have fulfilled an advocacy function for the listeners.

The experts from Germany and Spain were clear about what kind of people they wanted to reach with the implementation of podcasts. The German expert Sabine Rückert emphasized that the aim for *Die Zeit* was to tap into reader groups that were new, young, and different from the usual *Die Zeit* reader. Her colleague and chief of podcast Ole Pflüger, however, insisted on other goals, which all podcasts had in common. At the beginning of *Die Zeit*’s development, the goal was definitely to create good journalistic content that contributed strongly to community building. Ole Pflüger confirmed that each individual podcast at *Die Zeit* was to handle this differently but that the goal throughout was to strengthen the listener-brand relations: “You can see that in how appreciative criticism is formulated and the trusting emails we sometimes get” (Pflüger, Germany, *Die Zeit*). Every podcast would vary the degree of the involvement of the listeners.

Sabine Rückert agreed with this, at least for *Zeit Verbrechen* podcast, which she produced. The aim, in this case, was not only to bind the listeners to *Die Zeit* but also to be able to better advertise the *Zeit Verbrechen* magazine to the podcast.

The Spanish podcast producer Lourdes Moreno pointed out that their aim was to rejuvenate their audience through the production of podcasts. The younger target group could be reached by moving away from the classic, linear media structures and toward on-demand offers. The possibility of consuming media wherever and whenever you want, mostly via smartphone, helped to kick-start the innovation. Also, Espinosa de los Monteros pointed out that hyperspecialization on topics in a podcast helped the innovation develop.

In Switzerland, the expert mentioned that the idea was only to reach new target groups without specifying the new target group in more detail. They emphasized that the implementation of podcasts had been a strategic decision for the department to comply with further company goals: reputation and relevance. In the context of using podcasts, “of course, we say we can deliver in-depth journalism and really address new target groups with a kind of scientific service journalism,” said a Swiss interviewee.

Supportive conditions

Various factors also ensured the successful development of podcasts. In all four countries, the experts named specific supporting circumstances they believed had had a positive influence on the work. International comparisons showed parallels between Spain and the other countries, whereas the countries of the D-A-CH¹ association tended to differ from each other. For Austria, Sator emphasized that a major advantage was that he was an already well-known journalist who had previously worked for quality media and was, therefore, trustworthy:

I think that was the advantage that I could also say at the interview [...], “Hello, I’m at the STANDARD and I’m now doing a podcast. It’s private, but I’d like to invite you.”

(Sator, *Erklär mir die Welt*, Austria)

Moreover, Sator noted that being a pioneer in the field had clearly helped *Erklär mir die Welt*. The interplay of trust and leadership had driven reception and thus the success of the podcast.

In Germany at *Die Zeit*, the interviewees positively noted that the interaction between the internal editors and external production companies strongly supported the podcast development. These group dynamics among committed and creative teams were viewed as being conducive to further podcast development in Germany and in Spain.

In Spain, both Moreno and Espinosa de los Monteros confirmed that it was probably *PRISA*’s particular structure that contributed to the successful development of the *Podium Podcast*. They stressed that *Podium Podcast* was like a start-up within *PRISA*, which supported the project with the advantages of both worlds:

A startup, which [can] move with a certain agility to be able to compete well with other digital, technological, etc. adversaries. [...] [and] the best of a media company like *PRISA*, which is the enormous amplification in the structure.

(Espinosa de los Monteros, *Podium Podcast*, Spain)

Podium was like a small start-up under the auspices of *PRISA* and therefore benefited from the standing of the media company, which, for example, lowered the risk of investing in a podcast. As for the investment in podcasting, *PRISA* did not have much at stake in the profit and loss account, and, therefore, the impact of failures was less painful. This was the reason *PRISA* supported the podcast financially.

Similar structures also existed in Switzerland. The podcast *Durchblick* allowed *Blick* to professionalize the production, operations, equipment, and distribution of podcasts in a cost-effective manner. Moreover, the Swiss

experts mainly saw an advantage in their personal case: the host of the podcast *Durchblick* had a special position as a well-trained journalist and scientist.

Obstructive conditions

Besides all the supportive conditions, there were still some obstacles that obstructed the development and implementation of podcasts, which, when comparing the four countries, did and still exist.

In Germany, for instance, the main problem was the lack of resources, which differed from the situation in Spain. Espinosa de los Monteros explained that the main obstacles were friction with advertisers that kept the project from developing, the constant fear the ecosystem would become saturated and that the podcast was simply not needed. Even though Espinosa de los Monteros would not say that the markets, for example, for either books or movies would ever be saturated; he felt a podcast would be another kind of medium, and the market would differ: “[I]t is true that it is very important to know very well how to distribute content in podcasts, because it is nothing like the distribution of other own content that we have had,” he explained. Moreno was also critical that, in general, the media company structures were outdated in that working methods, hierarchies, and organizations were still in the 20th century.

To some extent the media company also stood in the way of *Durchblick*, the case in Switzerland. Here, however, the expert said the *Blick* was brand “contaminated,” that there were people who were afraid to use the medium:

So it’s more relevant for us to show that we really do in-depth journalism that doesn’t come at all with a cudgel and is very all-encompassing and takes its time.

(Expert interviewee, *Durchblick*, Switzerland)

By this they meant that too many people were afraid to encounter the brand, no matter how many new formats it developed. *Blick* also had the problem of a lack of in-house expertise in podcasts, which slowed the development process.

Societal impact

Concerning the societal impact, the experts in the four countries named influencing variables that differed for each country. The provision of orientation played a decisive role for Sator in Austria. He thought that podcasting could also have a societal impact in the sense that it explained complexities in a simpler way and could thus pass on citizen participation and knowledge to a broader (but possibly not highly educated) audience.

In Germany, Rückert and Pflüger, independently of each other, focused on the educational mission. Rückert confirmed that her idea of a societal impact was to provide society with knowledge about the state and the role of people in the state.

Similarly, Moreno argued in the Spanish case study that the audience was educated, “seduced,” and entertained by podcasts, and thus relevant topics would have been better communicated. Espinosa de los Monteros also mentioned that the podcast’s goal in terms of social influence would have been to accompany citizens in all situations of life, and this would have been, according to the team’s ethics: “[W]e work with excellence, always stating that quality is non-negotiable and that our commitment to democracy, our listeners, readers and citizens is absolute.”

Conclusion

During the analysis of the interviews in the four countries, it became clear that the needs and goals of the podcasts went in a similar direction. It needed emphasizing that these cases, which were carried out as part of the JoIn-DemoS project, were all best-practice examples and could not have been representative of all podcasts in their countries. Nevertheless, commonalities were identified. Podcasts were intended to address new target groups who have little use for the classic, linear media. They should be enabled to receive information independent of time and place. At the same time, podcasts, because of their length, provide deeper insights into certain topics. The aim was clear: in-depth quality instead of meaningless quantity. This would have led to society being better informed about relevant topics. It was, therefore, important to have experts on the team in the specific media companies who were specifically familiar with these audio formats and who pushed the projects forward strongly.

It also became evident from the interviews that podcasts were more of a format innovation and not an innovation of journalism or a media company per se. It was and still is (tech) companies such as *Apple* or *Spotify* that have decisively driven the development and contributed to the current popularity of podcasts. Journalism and the media have taken up the podcast as an innovative format with the aims and conditions mentioned earlier. Based on these findings, the success of the innovation podcast could be understood better and classified more precisely. In addition, there is a need for further approaches – for example, around the potential monetization of podcasts – which can be addressed in future research based on these results.

Note

- 1 The D-A-CH countries are three German speaking neighbors: Germany (D), Austria (A), Switzerland (CH).

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17 Citizen participation

On the way from the audience to the community in European news media

Mirco Saner and Maike Körner

Only a few media industry relevant innovations can be designated as genuinely journalistic in origin. Active engagement of the audience is one of them. The politically connotated term “citizen involvement” has long been known from political processes (OECD 2020) and then later from business and scientific research (Butkevičienė et al. 2021). Measures of how great the effective social influence of citizen participation in journalism is are ambiguous (Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022, 367), but a crucial act for journalistic media in the last decade was to pave the way from audience to community (Zeilinger 2020, 168). Strengthening audience loyalty through community spirit is seen as a central goal of innovations in journalism. The respondents of our online survey (see Chapter 2 on methodology), on a five-point Likert scale, assigned this goal an average value of 3.9. The allure of a journalistic product for the audience was rated, with an even slightly higher value, as a central quality feature of innovations. Citizen participation can play a supporting role in both aspects.

Though participatory practices have never been unconditionally appreciated by the audience (Carpentier 2009, 408), dialogical audience engagement has become a commonly accepted practice (Wall 2015, 807) and is seen as a key factor for journalism in the post-truth era, becoming increasingly crucial in the years ahead (Meier et al. 2018, 1060). This prediction has proven correct, and the gain in importance does not seem to be over yet, though citizen participation alone cannot be a cure for the manifold challenges the media industry faces (Deuze et al. 2007, 335; Mathisen and Morlandstø 2022, 1714). It is not just a matter of including user-generated content; rather, it is about getting in touch with the audience, getting feedback, and getting ideas and suggestions for future coverage to record the audiences’ interests and tie them to the brand. However, internationally, the degree of participation varies from passive to more active models, depending on strategy, topic, and channel, but mostly through social media and other online platforms (Buschow and Schneider 2015). Participation is generally low, although more of the elite or media-critical people holding formal positions associated with societal power are participating in online news channels (Fletcher and Park 2017, 1281; Spyridou 2019, 842; Mathisen and Morlandstø 2022, 1713).

A plethora of terms describe citizen participation in journalism,¹ none of which, despite each being well defined, has yet to gain the consensus of acceptance (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016; Bosshart 2017). Existing forms of citizen participation cannot be easily put as innovation in online news progression (Scott et al. 2015, 755). Cross-country comparative research of citizen participation is a necessity (Nielsen and Schröder 2014), as media systems and professional culture affect editorial boards' participation strategies. Our sample, which is about to be presented in the next section, mostly consisted of participatory journalism case studies; only the UK case study was an example of citizen journalism. Bosshart (2017, 129) explains that participatory journalism is understood as citizen participation institutionalized in the context of the professional editorial boards of corporate-owned legacy media, and thus, this user-generated content is subject to routines of professional journalism before publication. However, Bosshart (2017, 129) does assert citizen journalism includes independent online publication activity of lay people with a journalistic intention. This second type of participation involves recursive exchange relations with professional journalism in the form of follow-up communication or topic diffusion and is understood as an innovation coming from committed laypeople and thus as a civil society phenomenon (Bosshart 2017, 130). In the present sample, more passive and more active models can also be recognized.

Case studies

The Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project survey identified citizen participation as one of the 20 most relevant innovations in journalism in four of the five countries (see Chapter 2 on methodology). Whereas in Switzerland and Germany, citizen participation has a high status, the United Kingdom and Austria deemed it to be less significant, and in Spain, where the innovation did not make it into the 20 most important of the last decade, as rather insignificant. Best practice projects were selected from each country for the case studies. The selection criteria were either or both their importance and pioneering role in the respective country for this innovation category. The case studies in Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom did not involve the audience in the active production of journalistic content but focused on audience information or opinion input. By contrast, in Austria, citizens have become part of the actual production of content.

- Austria: *RegionalMedien Austria (RMA)* is a legacy media company that produces free newspapers with local and regional content in all national districts and operates regional online portals. Since its founding in 2009, the direct, large-scale participation of readers has been considered in the project design. Following the societal spread of smartphones, contributions from readers have been included in almost every print or online issue.

Users can register to become “Regionauten”² and publish independently local or regional information and produce user-generated content for the website *meinbezirk.at*. Editorial boards at the regional level then select articles and publish from this pool. Meanwhile, ten regional content managers normally work on this project. The interviewee was Maria Jelenko-Benedikt, the editor in chief for all regional and local editions.

- Germany: One example of citizen participation in Germany’s journalism landscape is the *Westfalenpost*. The circulation area for this local newspaper is Westphalia, a region in northwestern Germany, where it distributes local editions. For many years, the *Westfalenpost* has made several attempts to involve the audience. Their aim is to get to know the users better and to find out about their current needs. The focus of the interviews was the innovative project “Heimatcheck” (Hometown check), an online survey for the audience concerning relevant topics in the region. Around 16,000 people responded to the questionnaire. Afterward, the results were analyzed and master themes identified. The interviewees were Annika Rinsche, head of online and in charge of “Heimatcheck,” and Jost Luebben, editor in chief of the *Westfalenpost*, who has, over the years, been involved in various citizen participation approaches.
- Switzerland: During the international innovation inventory, Swiss experts frequently mentioned the “news scouts” of legacy media *20 Minuten*, as the participation aspect is more pronounced here than in other news media. The *20 Minuten* is a free tabloid newspaper for commuters as well as one of the most frequented online portals in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. It belongs to the large media house *Tamedia (TX Group)*. Although citizen participation has existed since 1999, at *20 Minuten*, it has taken a new twist due to the use of social media and smartphones. The audience now sends in eyewitness reports via *WhatsApp*, *Telegram*, *Signal*, or *Threema*. At some point, the editorial board realized the important value the community has as an asset. All journalists working at *20 Minuten* check “news scout” content and use it for their articles. The interviewees were the head of the community department, who is responsible for moderating the comment columns of *20 Minuten* and supervising about 20 moderators, and a member of the editorial board who was familiar with the initiatives’ development.³
- United Kingdom: The *Bristol Cable* was launched in 2014 in response to widespread political apathy and the collapse of local journalism publications. This case was selected because it was considered particularly innovative by several experts during the inventory (see Chapter 2). The *Cable* provides local and investigative news, both online and in a printed version. To begin with, the *Bristol Cable* consisted of just two journalists who organized workshops and events but then brought together the first volunteer team, which started publishing the website. Later, they managed to get funding from US philanthropic organizations and continued to grow. As a result, they became increasingly important in the innovative and

journalistic sector. *Bristol Cable* uses membership models with monthly fees. It is 100% member owned, currently with about 3,000 shareholders. For audience involvement, discussion spaces are available for members who can then participate in identifying topics and shaping the editorial teams' work. However, members are not involved in producing or editing content, which is done exclusively by the editorial board. As the media company's members are shareholders, they must be consulted on in-house decision-making. The interviewee was *Bristol Cable's* founder, Adam Cantwell Corn.

Aims of the innovation

A lack of information availability at the regional and local level played a decisive role in *RegionalMedien Austria's* implementation of the Regionauten system. Maria Jelenko-Benedikt, the Austrian expert, said RMA's aspirations were to improve regional conditions, to connect with the audience, and to achieve a suitable representation of the community. The region should not only be provided with information but also be actively shaped. However, there was a lack of information about the region's inhabitants and the issues concerning them. Therefore, the goal was to narrow this gap with local and hyperlocal content coming directly from the residents. Around 2014, the ever-increasing functionality of smartphones and their high penetration in society gave this concept of democratizing journalism additional impetus, as everyone had the potential to be either or both a photographer and content deliverer.

Strengthening customer loyalty and community building was crucial for the "Heimatcheck" at *Westfalenpost* in Germany. Responsible editors were aware that the audience has a great interest in local issues and should feel they are taken seriously and involved. Following the success of the first online survey, the Heimatcheck was once again used during the COVID-19 pandemic to reach the local population and has since become a standard tool. "The social task of journalism is particularly meaningful at the local and regional level as democratic shaping takes place at municipal and city level," Luebben emphasized.

Audience loyalty and being close to the community through low-threshold access to the fourth estate are important goals for the Swiss case study, *20 Minuten*, as the interviewees saw multiple benefits from their "news scout" approach in that interactions with the audience opened up an inexhaustible source of information. The approach not only allowed the editorial team to stand out from competitors conceptually and to have a speed advantage over other media waiting for authorities' official media releases but also suited society's zeitgeist that everyone is also a producer. The reason for the outlet choosing "news scouts" for a German-language medium was due to the requirement for a gender-neutral term that nevertheless sounds appealing.

At *Bristol Cable* in the United Kingdom, Cantwell Corn said, “[W]e want to be the link between what is happening locally and what is happening nationally or even internationally.” He further explained local journalism needed to do more than produce good content, it needed to build active, loyal communities. *Bristol Cable* wanted to fight the assumption that local news lacked quality, depth, and explanatory power and did not hold powers to account. To achieve this, changes in the editorial approach to local journalism, the ownership model, and the interaction with communities and individuals were needed. Shareholders who wanted to actively participate could be involved in shaping conversations, editorial decisions, feeding into stories, or providing information, insights, and experiences.

Supportive and obstructive conditions

RegionalMedien Austria recognized technological development as a major support. On the one hand, the national penetration rate of smartphones enabled almost 82% of the population in 2023 to record and send audio and video as well as photographic material. On the other hand, web functions based on content management systems allowed user-friendly uploading of content. Due to *RMA*’s decentralized organizational set-up, the necessity to draw up cross-regional guidelines was a complicating factor for the innovative initiative. The guidelines needed to answer such crucial questions as, How did Regionauten write? What was the underlying code of conduct? How were certain issues dealt with? “Otherwise,” Jelenko-Benedikt explained, “it is like a bag of fleas.”

Westfalenpost deemed a constructive, trust-based error culture supported by several hierarchical levels was crucial. To this end, the “Future Lab” was launched, in which innovation ideas could be conceived. Having the freedom to try out new concepts, to fail, and to learn from them, staff became aware that ideas for further development were taken seriously. Open-minded editors in chief provide the basis for this. The innovative initiative was driven by an interdisciplinary, multigenerational working group, including a data analysis specialist. Moreover, exchanging with the personal environment also provides profitable insights into citizen participation projects. Employees from outside the region who have no connection to the area and do not have the same drive as employees who live in the region themselves inhibited the process at *Westfalenpost*.

At *20 Minuten*, the interviewees highlighted an imaginative boss and the working atmosphere in which anyone could come up with innovative ideas. An increasing variety of messengers made it easier for the editorial board to reach people and get information. At the same time, this diversity of sources also multiplied the news scouts’ amount of information that had to be processed before publication. Unlike information from the authorities, scout reports could not be trusted per se. As manipulation attempts had already occurred in the past, each content had to be checked. “Out of 100 scout

reports, there are one or two pearls,” one interviewee stated. The flood of information had made it necessary to introduce dedicated software to handle it. The expansion of the multichannel environment (Smartphones, Apps, Social Media) also posed new questions concerning data protection since data and user metadata were stored on foreign servers.

Bristol Cable did a lot of network and community building before they published any content. This was crucial for obtaining financial support. The founder, Cantwell Corn, saw the notion of initially thinking about whatever can be offered to the potential community, so they would reciprocate, as a long-standing tradition of organizing communities. *Bristol Cable* had to challenge the widely held belief that local journalism was boring and not an impactful form of information and was dominated by the economic and cultural problem of not wanting to pay for journalism. Thus, funding was difficult to unlock, for which reason *Bristol Cable* sought funding from the United States.

Societal impact

In Austria, the interviewees observed an increase in the audience’s identification with the medium due to the Regionauten contributions in each issue. “The fact that one recognizes an ordinary citizen who provides content reinforces the feeling of being represented and immediacy,” Jelenko-Benedikt emphasized.

The interviewees at the *Westfalenpost* amplified audience participation and said the creation of more “talk town” content was achieved and suggested the citizens might feel the outlet’s interest in them and their topics. Heimatcheck supported the opinion-forming process and strengthened the trust in media. “If people trust us, they have no reasons to drift off into social networks,” Luebben said. Through journalism supported by citizens, regional problems could be identified and compared to other regions before political decision-makers adopted and changed them.

For *20 Minuten*, news scouting led to a leveling between journalists and the audience, as it provided lower-threshold access to journalistic content. The interviewees, therefore, considered themselves as a social version of the venerable Swiss Army knife and supposed the notion of the audience being heard was relevant to democracy. Moreover, media literacy among the scouts was fostered when they understood what it meant to have their face, name, and story seen by several million people. Before a story is published, a briefing takes place with the scout. *20 Minuten*’s pioneering approach to the audience led various other media outlets to introduce reader reporters as well.

In the United Kingdom, there have been a few instances where the work of the *Bristol Cable* directly influenced court cases. Cantwell Corn was confident the media outlet had contributed to people’s engagement and participation in social issues. Moreover, the *Bristol Cable* had been an influence on the industry since other outlets wanted to have citizen journalism, so they asked *Bristol Cable* how to get started.

Conclusion

The sharing of citizen participation information has become more extensive and more widely applicable compared to its beginnings because technological developments facilitated the sending of images, audio, and video material, and, subsequently, the content reached the editorial teams on multiple channels. However, contemporary citizen participation simultaneously required additional editorial resources as long-known problems remained, like plausibility checks or the search for great stories within the wealth of information. Also, a need for new skills emerged, demanding a dedicated, interdisciplinary team.

The JoIn-DemoS project had several main findings: citizen participation initiatives were mainly implemented as a strategic tool for community building and increasing audience loyalty, and thus were primarily based on commercial considerations. Citizen participation is used to reinvigorate journalistic coverage, being dismantled at the local and hyperlocal level and implemented to strengthen the democratic purpose of local journalism. It keeps people informed, which is essential for a well-working democracy. Citizen participation also provided the opportunity to improve the current relationship between the public and journalism and had the potential to reduce social fragmentation, for example groups hostile to mass media, as people feel represented and involved. Furthermore, journalists and users were increasingly meeting on level terms, and the audience was increasingly involved in the journalistic working processes, from topic identification to research. However, the case studies indicated that in the past decade, citizen participation had primarily been used cautiously or conservatively by editorial teams – i.e., mostly limited to information input without enabling direct participation in the production process.

Future citizen participation initiatives should ensure that audience diversity is adequately represented (see Chapter 11). Not only because society is fragmenting but because participation favors specific population groups. One of the greatest opportunities and challenges of contemporary journalism is to stay true to its normative values while reaching out more to the audience.

Notes

- 1 Audience engagement, participatory journalism, conversational/networked journalism, citizen journalism, lay journalism, democratic journalism, street journalism, people/grassroot journalism, crowd-sourced journalism, produsage, or public/civic/communitarian journalism.
- 2 While Regionauten are defined as “reader reporters on the online platforms of the district newspapers of Regionalmedien Austria” (source Meinbezirk.at), their news is region-specific. The etymology of “naut(en)” is the ancient Greek ναύτης (nautēs) for a traveler or specifically a sailor.
- 3 The Swiss experts were assured of anonymity.

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18 Mobile/live journalism

The impact of the small screen and breaking news on media organization and production

Dámaso Mondéjar

Media have, through digitalization, had to adapt their products and workflows to reach audiences across multiple formats, channels, and devices. In just seven years after the introduction in 2008 of Apple's iPhone, the first mobile device designed for the global mass market, as opposed to business-oriented devices like the Blackberry, rapid technological development pushed smartphones to become the new dominant player. In 2015, mobile devices, including smartphones and tablets, broke the 50% barrier of time spent globally on digital media (Molyneux 2017). Research for the Reuters Institute's *Digital News Report* shows that in some countries, such as Spain, mobile news consumption is around 75%, and for Germany and the United Kingdom, it is around 60% (Newman et al. 2022). These trends are mirrored by those of the media, whose news production has undergone far-reaching changes. The smartphone's small screen, likewise, is intrinsically linked to "breaking news." Technological evolution has accelerated the constant flow of information into our pockets through push notifications, social media posts, or live tickers that allow the user to follow the news almost minute by minute.

Technological progress and the speeding up of publishing have resulted in paradigm shifts in daily routines and rhythms, business models, and even the democratic functions of journalism (Westlund 2015). The paradigm shifts have also disrupted the relationship journalists had with their sources and the way they do journalism, as MoJo (mobile journalism) has emerged as a successful format, which has naturally led communication studies investigating this phenomenon from multiple points of view. Oscar Westlund (2013) and João Canavilhas (2021), for example, have each reviewed the changes in journalistic production and distribution caused by mobile devices; Fletcher and Park (2017) examine changes in consumption habits from the perspective of participation and trust in news, and Adornato (2021) produces a comprehensive guide to understanding all these changes. To delve deeper into this subject and to contextualize the opportunities and challenges of these new consumption habits, this chapter gathers the experiences of country-specific media that have proven their ability to offer quality content in multiple formats.

Case studies

The adaptation to “mobile (live) journalism” was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations by the experts in four countries in the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project (Austria, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom), following the research methodology outlined in Chapter 2. These are the four chosen case studies:

- Austria: *Der Standard*, a general daily newspaper, was founded in 1988. In 1995, it launched its website, making it one of the first German-language media with an online presence. In this sense, it was a notable first mover in the production of not only digital but also live content. As early as 1998, it had a ticker system that provided small capsules of recent information, although, at the beginning, it was exclusively focused on sports.

Over the years, this ticker system moved from one section of the newspaper to another: first in culture, in topics related to music or, for example, films awarded at the Oscars. At the beginning of the 2000s, its live online information was already covering political issues and became a daily feature. From 2013 onwards, *Der Standard* experienced a sophisticated adaptation to being read on cell phones. Indeed, in the 2020s, the newspaper integrated new functionalities, such as live video broadcasting or social media embedding. In this regard, the live ticker itself has served as a generator of engagement among the newspaper’s readers, to the point that the medium has organized physical events and meetings with the most active users. The interviewee was Rainer Schüller, the deputy editor in chief and head of live journalism.

- Germany: The Cologne-based TV channel *ntv*, a traditional audiovisual media, began broadcasting in the 1990s. In May 1999, the channel launched its website and, in 2009, developed its mobile app, which has aroused the interest of this research for being one of the pioneers in its context, especially in the television field, and for its ability to deliver breaking news online.

The *ntv* app offers specialized information on politics and business (with up-to-date stock market data), breaking news push notifications, live tickers on sports such as soccer and Formula 1, connectivity with smartwatches, weather forecasts based on the location of the mobile device, and offline news saving options. The interviewee was Samira Lazarovic, project manager.

- Spain: *Ara* is a daily newspaper that was established in 2010, and despite being regional (based in Catalonia) and having print editions, it is at the forefront of technology. As interviewees explained, the newspaper has been acquiring a digital work role for years. In their organizational management, they use the design-thinking framework, so all product developments follow a research, definition, and testing process.

Indeed, within the newspaper, there is a product team of editors, technicians, data, product, and UX specialists who are especially focused on the development of mobile content.

All these elements make *Ara* a newspaper with an innovative gene that translates into a solid value proposition. *Ara*'s own data shows that in 2021, the newspaper had more than 41,000 paying subscribers. There are several editions, in addition to the general one in Catalonia, spread throughout northeastern Spain: Andorra, Tarragona, Lleida, Girona, and the Balearic Islands. *Ara* is trilingual, with editions in Catalan, Spanish, and English, and a print edition from Monday to Sunday. The interviewees were Esther Vera (editor) and Pablo Casals (marketing manager).

- United Kingdom: The *Times* is a national newspaper published daily in the United Kingdom with a history of more than 200 years. In 2013, the *Times* pioneered the introduction of a mobile version of its print version, prior to which the paper was struggling to achieve digital success. In 2022, after a boost of interest in the Ukraine war, the *Times* surpassed 400,000 paying subscribers (Newman et al. 2022), giving it the 17th global rank of newspapers with the most digital-only subscribers (Kersley 2022).

The *Times* had to make a major effort to adapt to new consumer habits. The exponential growth of digital consumption forced the creation of new products, distribution channels, and redesigns in information. However, it was also vital not to lose the essence of such a consolidated brand with significant credibility in the British market. Nevertheless, as the interview with Matt Taylor (digital development editor of the newspaper at the time) indicated, this transition was not always successful. The print edition routines still prevailed in the newsroom, although other positive aspects did stand out, such as the preservation of journalistic quality in the face of technological drift.

Aims of the innovation

In the context of the aims of this innovation, the case study outlets in Spain (*Ara*) and Germany (*ntv*) stood out for their expertise in adapting and creating ad hoc content on mobile devices. In Austria, on the other hand, the milestone achieved by the case study revolves around live content, while in the United Kingdom, the chosen media outlet values its contribution on mobile devices but doubts the benefits of breaking news exacerbation for the population.

In Austria (*Der Standard*) and Germany (*ntv*), the aims behind their innovations were to deliver news to their readers as fast as possible, as well as to increase reading time and brand loyalty. In contrast, the needs and objectives in the United Kingdom (the *Times*) and Spain (*Ara*) differed. The *Ara* newspaper sought to adapt to the consumption habits of its users. One of the interviewees explained there is now data that allows professionals to know in detail the readers' information routines, which revolve around the mobile

phone. The *Times*, for its part, did not want to be left behind in the face of market movements and competition. The changing context forced a traditionally paper-based newspaper like the *Times* to innovate to remain relevant.

At *ntv*, Samira Lazarovic stated the channel understood that it was not enough to provide information to desktop computers. “There is another screen in people’s lives, which is just something that people hold in their hands and look at, and that’s where we have to go,” Lazarovic said. For *Der Standard* in Austria, Schüller emphasized that the intention was always to be close to readers and news events, which was the reason that *Der Standard* worked so hard to promote live reporting.

Supportive conditions

Wherever you look, the factors that have driven this innovation are linked to technology. From the case in the United Kingdom, they point out that in just five to ten years, the mobile ecosystem has evolved in an unprecedented way. Taylor, the former digital development editor at the *Times*, said the impulse of mobile journalism was due to the improvement of the devices and the parallel increase in bandwidth. The interviewees at both *ntv* (Germany) and *Ara* (Spain) said that the improvement of smartphones and apps had been crucial. This has been accompanied by data, as *Ara*’s interviewees claimed, that on some days of the week, the mobile audience can exceed 85% of the aggregate. “Consumption data (...) has led to the adaptation of newspapers to the mobile format. We, like any other media, do not have different data,” explained Casals, the marketing manager. This statement suggests there still might be people who connect to their website from their desktop computers, but when *Ara* analyzed the percentage of news consumed by each device, the mobiles are dominant. “From this perspective, ignoring the mobile strategy does not seem like a good idea,” Casals explained.

However, there were other factors apart from technology that the interviewees also considered important. The Austrian, Rainer Schüller, highlighted the organizational culture of *Der Standard* and how the whole company was involved in the innovation. This included the management, who were particularly interested in the development of live content, showing “a great willingness” to try new things and giving them time to develop. “When that is driven from the top, it certainly brings enormous advantages,” said Rainer Schüller, adding, “you also need a team behind it that thinks as creatively as possible about what can be done with this tool and how it can be used differently.”

Something similar happened in Germany, where the work of the *ntv* team was seen as a driving force for innovation. Project manager Samira Lazarovic said that people “were free and could try different things.” When they launched their mobile app back in 2009, the same thing happened to them as to the *Der Standard* team. Engagement increased as the app grew in popularity. The broadcaster was one of the first media to develop this type of

technology in the country “because there was a drive to innovate within the company,” Lazarovic explained. This was not the case in the United Kingdom, where the organizational culture and inherited routines were, in the interviewee’s view, one of the barriers to progress in technologies related to live reporting.

Obstructing conditions

Just as some of the cases in this chapter pointed to the organization as a driver for innovation, it can also be a barrier. The most obvious case was in the United Kingdom, where Matt Taylor claimed that the journalistic mentality was a key problem against making digital advances. Indeed, Taylor admitted that at the peak of mobile and live technology development from 2013 onwards, the *Times* was still anchored to paper routines. Editors viewed mobile and live journalism as both new and outside their expertise. They also prioritized journalistic work in its more traditional format and doubted the advantages of investing in new, more technical professional profiles, such as software engineers. “The focus was not on innovation and building out new technologies. It was in the production of stories. And if you weren’t producing stories, you weren’t of a value,” Taylor said.

In this sense, the digital development editor affirmed that the newspaper had always advocated hiring one journalist rather than two engineers, leaving aside multiple possibilities that would improve the digital experience and bring other types of readers closer. However, he also stressed that this was an attitude that sought to defend the journalistic task, and this could also have a positive side, especially in respect to the effects of focusing excessively on breaking news. “The step away from live journalism was really somewhat protective to give journalists the space to think and do things that they wouldn’t have been able to do in a world where they’re just being chased constantly for the latest line,” Taylor emphasized. *The Times* refused to go too far for live reporting because it had a clear intention to give readers the best possible information, extruding a sense of calm, accompanied by analysis signed by recognized writers and not playing the game of being the first to publish everything. Even so, this would also have resulted in ignoring changes in the habits of its readers, which in the digital era were crucial for the survival of the media.

In the Spanish case, the interviewees also pointed to the inertia of paper processes and workflows as obstructions to innovation in the production of mobile content. This led to effects that point not only to the drift of technological improvement, as in the *Times*, but also to specific aspects of the mobile phone. Casals said that although *Ara*’s newspaper journalists were far from rejecting innovation, they could not but help to continue to work with the desktop format in their heads. Working on a computer makes it difficult to visualize and design content on a small screen. Therefore, he said, the

solution lay in making content that went to the basics of journalism (more direct information, with better analysis) and should be packaged to reach the user in the best possible way.

Germany and Austria, on the other hand, have innovation barriers in common, but these were more external to the organizational culture. In these case studies, the problems they had seen most in this innovation were work overload and lack of resources. In this sense, the *ntv* interviewee explained that the channel's incorporation into a large European media group (*RTL*) made their workflows more complex in all respects, although it also brought benefits. At *Der Standard*, Schüller lamented that the development team (in charge of the live ticker tool) was one of the most overloaded in the newspaper. Schüller also claimed there was a lack of resources for developing new technologies.

Societal impact

Schüller indicated that *Der Standard's* innovation had generated a good social impact because of its call for audience participation. The outlet's ticker system enabled readers not only to have access to live news but also the possibility to comment on the news and even give feedback to the authors and relate to each other. They noticed they were increasing mobile use because the users not only informed themselves but also intensely discussed and gave strong feedback, especially during the pandemic. In the case of the Corona ticker, Schüller emphasized,

[W]e've noticed that there's a community of its own for which this has become the living room in the course of the pandemic, and this has degenerated to such an extent that there have been meetings between Corona ticker users.

(Schüller, *Der Standard*, Austria)

In the *ntv* case, Lazarovic said, thanks to the popularization of news apps, a large number of people have access to relevant news. Lazarovic gave the example of information related to the coronavirus and vaccines, which directly affected the health of the population. The outbreak of the pandemic caused *ntv* to realize

how important information was to people, whether it was about the rules in their federal states, or about the number of new infections, and so on. These were things that people were interested in, and very directly, because they had a very immediate impact on their everyday live.

(Lazarovic, *ntv*, Germany)

According to Lazarovic, users' need for information during the pandemic led to the one billion page impressions per month mark being reached for the first time.

However, they also pointed to a negative factor. In a way, they consider that the media had been partly responsible for the addiction to mobiles and news, generating consumption patterns that could be counterproductive for democratic quality. Lazarovic explained, “[S]martphones have a certain addictive factor for everyone who uses them intensively.” Journalists and audiences would put each other under pressure, she warns, “[O]n the one hand, the editors always come out with the latest news, and the users demand the fastest news. A dependency has developed.”

In the Spanish newspaper *Ara*, Pablo Casals shares some of the German theses. “Any method that facilitates the distribution of quality journalism contributes to improving democratic health.” However, Esther Vera also pointed out that the mobile phone “brings us everything good and everything bad.” The editor fears that the news did not reach those sectors of the population that were more keen on social media, such as young people. “The problem is that something that reaches you through the mobile, especially if it reaches you through social networks, comes to you with an extra bidirectionality that carries a kind of credibility. I am concerned about young people,” Vera emphasized. Thus, she argued that the popularization of mobile phones was potentially good and bad and suggested,

The question is that we provide them with sufficiently attractive and quality content so that they prefer to consume that rather than something else. It is a very good instrument for democratic quality and at the same time very dangerous for democratic quality.

(Vera, *Ara*, Spain)

In the UK case of the *Times*, there were doubts as to whether such formats were more beneficial than detrimental. Taylor lamented that live content could leave out relevant information because of the need to report everything all the time, often about banal topics. “You’re just trying to decipher fact from fiction,” he said. The problem was that in live journalism, there was hardly any time for verification. Consequently, Taylor did consider that there were other news items that were especially beneficial to society, such as those related to service information, tips, and practices that can improve the daily lives of readers. However, Taylor did admit those items were often not related to breaking news. He gave the example of the coverage of the war in Ukraine and concluded that

it is not realistically useful or healthy for anyone outside the political bubble that is trying to resolve the crisis. It is unrealistic to think that telling people that a nuclear warhead might fall on their house will help their mental health.

(Taylor, *The Times*, United Kingdom)

Conclusion

Compared to other innovations, the production of journalism for mobile and live formats is especially linked to the development of technology. However, it is quite clear how the boost of these new formats gets hidden behind the complex workflow, in which the attitude of the newspaper and the mentality of its employees play a key role. The commitment and intention to innovate within an organization are fundamental factors in the face of the denial of technological development. However, it should not be forgotten that uncritical adoption of technology is far from being a guarantee of success. The arguments of Taylor comprise a good example of this: oversaturating resources to provide live content could reduce the quality of the information, given the lack of time to check with multiple sources or to carry out a thorough gatekeeping task.

In this chapter we have examined an innovation with visible ambivalence, which also opened up a gap due to recent changes in audience consumption habits. Although most of the information is consumed live and via mobile devices, social networks often act as the main intermediary. Casals, one of the Spanish interviewees, said that in the past, information was associated with a newspaper brand, but nowadays, that association is blurred. These factors meant that the social impact of this innovation was high but, at the same time, positive and dangerous for the democratic function of journalism, especially in light of the dependence on technology and the potential negative effects on mental health because of being exposed to information saturation. Experts highlighted the virtues of both live and MoJo for their abilities to address current affairs, to be where readers are (so journalism remains relevant), and even, as is the case in Austria, to encourage participation and interactivity. Thus, this chapter emphasizes the importance of packaging information and establishing a link with the audience that builds trust in the press, although this is a difficult task in the face of an increasingly fragmented audience.

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19 New digital storytelling

Innovative narratives that make a difference

Jose A. García-Avilés

Interactive narrative formats, often combining information and entertainment, allow the media to attract younger users and involve them in the production, consumption, and distribution of content (Sixto-García et al. 2022). Innovations in narrative formats have moved beyond the traditional “inverted pyramid hierarchy” so that the information provides valuable context for users about the story and more interactive engagement to enhance their experience (Kulkarni et al. 2022). However, the hybrid nature of these formats often challenges the traditional values of journalism, as researchers have not yet reached a consensus on their essential characteristics (Lopezosa et al. 2021, 14).

Interactive news narratives are defined as “the expression of a content through specific forms and structures with which the news teams seek to connect with the users” (García-Avilés and Herrera-Damas 2020, 229). Journalists take advantage of visualization, multimedia, hyperlinking, immersion, etc., with the aim of attracting the user’s attention and telling stories through multiple “layers of content” (Vázquez-Herrero 2021). Interactive narratives usually have collective authorship because of the work of multidisciplinary teams of developers, data journalists, designers, video and audio editors, computer graphic designers, etc. (García-Avilés and Herrera-Damas 2020). Innovation in narratives is associated with the use of expressive forms that combine text, audio, infographics, image, and video resources with other elements of data visualization, virtual and augmented reality, or artificial intelligence, originating from the intersection of documentary and journalism, as well as from immersive technologies (Vázquez-Herrero and de Haan 2022).

Case studies

New digital storytelling was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations by experts in four countries (Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), following the research methodology outlined in Chapter 2. There is one case study per country analyzed in this chapter:

- Germany: *Spiegel Online*, launched in 1995 as an online offshoot of the print magazine, developed a multimedia team to diversify its journalistic offerings. In 2019, the website of the German news magazine (*Der Spiegel*) was renamed *Spiegel* (Hans et al. 2019). Their interactive storytelling seeks to increase efficiency within the editorial team and to promote a visual presentation of online content. About 50 employees from the interactive, data, and social media departments are involved in this innovation. The interviewees were Jens Radü, head of the news desk, and Ferdinand Kuchlmayr, leader of interactive graphics.
- Spain: *RTVE Lab* was launched in June 2011 by the Interactive Media Strategy and Business Development area in collaboration with the corporation's research and development department. The lab has won many awards for their interactive projects, focusing on the production of audiovisual formats, such as webdocs, 360° videos, and newsgames. The lab has a multidisciplinary team of 15 professionals consisting of journalists, developers, designers, and videographers. The interviewees were César Peña, reporter, and Joel Filipe, product design lead.
- Switzerland: *Reflekt*, founded in 2019, is Switzerland's first independent non-profit newsroom for investigative and cross-border journalism. There are seven professionals, including journalists, web developers, graphic designers, and photographers, in the core team, which aims to uncover injustices relevant to Swiss society. To increase its reach and impact, *Reflekt* collaborates with larger media organizations and focuses on investigative research and quality journalism. *Reflekt* has won several awards for digital storytelling. Their maxim is that "content determines the form, not vice versa." The interviewees were two of *Reflekt's* core team.¹
- United Kingdom: *BBC Global News* intends to provide context and depth to coverage around the world. Its journalists offer a wider and deeper look at news content, experimenting with different formats (video, text, images, graphics). A team of around 20 professionals is involved in this innovation. The interviewee was Richard Fisher, senior journalist at *BBC Future*.

Aims of the innovation

The ability to innovate in news formats is related to journalistic standards and news quality, making it possible to overcome traditional production routines and implement agile processes and flexible workflows as teams develop minimally viable products. A narrative might be innovative because it effectively tells a story, achieving success in terms of audience, revenue, brand image, or prestige for the company.

Der Spiegel's main goal was content delivery through the complementary use of text and images to exploit their respective potentials, fostering news relevance and in-depth coverage. The team wished to create reading stimuli for the audience and to trace dramaturgies through visual processing because,

as one interviewee said, “visualization enables low-threshold access to complex information and arouses emotions.” A key objective was to deliver on the brand’s promise of quality, exploiting the information mandate in the digital world.

RTVE Lab’s raison d’être was innovating both in storytelling and in applying technologies and languages to content production. Both interviewees said that working for a public company enabled them to focus much more on “the story itself” than on specific results or KPIs (Key Performance Indicators). They argued that journalism was undergoing a paradigm shift in the sense that journalists must find the format most suitable for each content and not the other way around. “We have all the formats available to cover any issue and finding the best way to tell each story,” explained a lab worker.

RTVE Lab members explored all the available digital narratives so that they had in-house knowledge of how they work, what they can be used for, and what content can be replicated so that these formats could be mainstreamed at *RTVE*. They also intended to make people’s lives better by telling stories in an innovative way, making them easier to understand.

You can innovate a lot, but if nobody understands what you have done, then the innovation won’t do you much good. We are a public service, and we must fulfil that premise. For example, we can explain flamenco in a fun, innovative way so that anyone can put on their headphones in his smartphone and learn flamenco without much fuss.

(César Peña, *RTVE Lab*, Spain)

Reflekt’s main goal was to figure out how to tell a story based on their research findings. “At the beginning, everything came about more organically, spontaneously. Now there is a lot more planning. You think about how to tell a story from the research,” said interviewee 1. They also address different target groups at the same time. “We once formulated the claim: great research, great effect. Not that a lot of time goes into research that no one reads. The output should match the input,” explained interviewee 2.

“Our digital storytelling is getting noticed. It has already won awards, which gives us a certain standing in the media industry. Getting closer to the readers then influences the community, donations, etc.,” said *Reflekt*’s interviewee 1. “There are a lot of news-deprived people, especially young people. We don’t address an elitist audience, but a broad target group. We try to break down complex issues so that they can be understood in the shortest possible time,” added interviewee 1.

Alongside investigative research, storytelling is at the core of *Reflekt*. Various target groups (decision-makers, traditional media consumers, and young people) can be addressed at the same time. As interviewee 1 explained, “You don’t need a 30,000 Swiss Franc advertising site to carry multimedia content. Our website and social media content is created to tell stories independently. That is the core of innovation for us.”

BBC Global News emphasized the need to be alongside the audience, being adaptable to their needs. This is the reason for using digital metrics and not just the retrospective type. The *BBC* wanted to tell stories across social media and engage young audiences. “One of the *BBC*’s strategic goals is to engage young audiences. The average age of *BBC*’s users overall is slightly older and that’s an existential question for us,” explained Fisher. Several television programs and radio newscasts had moved online in what Fisher described as “a strategic shift to move to video and digital storytelling, keeping in mind that we need to reach out to younger audiences.” For example, Radio 4’s morning show produced the spinoff podcast *Beyond Today*, which focused on attracting young audiences. A key goal for *BBC Global News* is enhancing the breadth and depth of their storytelling.

Supportive conditions

The interviewees at *Der Spiegel* noted the editors-in-chief had strongly supported the implementation of digital storytelling over the last few years. In addition, the storytelling team benefited from increasing digitalization, new market possibilities, and developments in teleworking due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The establishment of a separate department and having extra motivation in the team boosted their teamwork.

RTVE Lab employees argued that because they worked for a public broadcaster, they could concentrate on fulfilling the fundamental public service values and on producing content quality. Another advantage was the existence of the lab, a space where they could work freely. Collaboration with other labs from public service media was also relevant, as they were integrated into a European network of media labs that shared knowledge and expertise.

The core of innovation for *Reflekt* was digital storytelling, which had won awards and given the news outlet a certain standing in the Swiss media industry. According to the interviewees, the awards had had an impact on the community, on management, and on donations.

Reflekt’s journalists had the chance to build something new, which brought challenges, but it had been helpful in terms of being innovative with storytelling. “For good storytelling, you must think the story from scratch. Stories are developed as a teamwork from the very beginning. Each team is made up of freelancers who think independently,” explained one professional. The decision-making paths were oriented to leadership by competencies. “We are not tied into a large organization that dictates anything to us. The decision-making paths are incredibly short. We are not restricted to our channels and can also publish what other media would not buy,” said interviewee 1 at *Reflekt*. The emphasis was that they thought as a team from the outset. “Many traditional editorial teams often despair because the interdisciplinary approach doesn’t work, because journalists are not interested in the data team. As we are forced to work together, it makes the story better,” explained interviewee 2.

The *BBC Global News* had been developing storytelling on *YouTube*, *TikTok*, and other platforms, with digital innovations that changed the way they told a story from the traditional unit of delivery – i.e., a TV package, a TV news program, or an online text story. Some innovators had individually embraced new platforms, even when the general direction did not encourage it, such as Sophia Smith Galer’s publishing on *TikTok*.

A journalist willing to just experiment with new platforms as they emerge, provides a cultural approach that improves the storytelling. For example, Ross Atkins, a traditional *BBC* presenter who has worked through his explanatory videos and storytelling to make things that would normally not work on linear television. The role of a digital storyteller is like doing a Ted Talk on stage where you start a story speaking to the audience and then you show a picture. Then you go back to talking and then you show a video. Moving between the different forms as you deliver the story is essential.

(Fisher, *BBC Future*, United Kingdom)

Obstructive conditions

The interviewees at *Der Spiegel* highlighted that the editing process and workflows were too focused on the print edition, so they regarded them as barriers to online storytelling. Technical conditions in the editorial system that produced and edited the data in an online article had been difficult for a long time. The intra-editorial climate of on-call working also generated some resistance from the staff about getting involved in this innovation.

RTVE Lab staff underscored the habits of the internal structure and the routines that slowed down their work. Members of the innovation lab said they lived with constant frustration because plans

never turn out exactly as you would have liked, and you must give up many of your ideas in favor of those of others, because the approach of a designer or a developer or a journalist to a news story is very different.

(Joel Filipe, *RTVE Lab*, Spain)

They did not have as much support from management as they should: “[T]he lab should have a larger role in *RTVE* and expand much more. We must do a lot to fighting for our place every day,” stated one interviewee. They valued the experience of trial and error in projects that worked or failed.

One of the main barriers to digital storytelling innovation at *Reflekt* was finances. Professionals could not be hired full time because of a lack of money and other resources. This implied a certain flexibility in the way projects were created to be efficient. For example, according to one journalist,

there was a certain logic to how you must publish content on *Facebook* and *Instagram* without even looking at any other content, which contradicted *Reflekt's* maxim.

Another obstructive condition at *Reflekt* was the absence of a physical newsroom. “We are not located anywhere; we don’t have an office. Especially during the COVID-19 period, we realized that it is good to physically meet every now and then, to have meetings in the newsroom,” explained one journalist.

The *BBC's* digital infrastructure underpinned all the websites, as projects were usually easy to develop in isolation, but implementing them on social platforms was harder. Technology was the key to innovation, but it could also be a barrier because sometimes journalists did not have those tools, or they were not accessible. “Journalists ask the development team to introduce a new feature on the web, but often it is not easy, because sometimes it requires many teams across the *BBC* to work together,” said Fisher.

Societal impact

The interviewees in all case studies agreed that digital storytelling played a key role in promoting journalism’s public service function in society, as it provided some elements for dealing with important issues that enabled keeping citizens informed.

Der Spiegel's interviewees mentioned the benefits of innovation for the democratic function of journalism by promoting critical monitoring of day-to-day events, stimulating topics and debates in the public arena, and fighting misinformation. They also mentioned that this process was enhanced by bringing transparency to research and promoting audience participation through interactive elements.

The professionals at *RTVE Lab* said that digital storytelling helped people to make important decisions for society and to debate about problems and possible solutions. “The way you tell the news gives you an idea of the state of the country, and if you tell it wrong you can give completely bizarre ideas about what really matters,” said César Peña. He explained that some lab projects deal with suicide, anxiety, disability – i.e., issues that could help people understand the society they lived in.

We are doing an interactive project on disability because we believe that it is a topic that needs to be talked about a lot and that our society is not aware of the problems of people with disabilities. We also talked about suicide and violence against women, and we will do a project about mental health. These topics provide an important public service.

(Cesar Peña, *RTVE Lab*, Spain)

RTVE Lab's staff kept public service in mind throughout all their projects.

Some projects were based on an idea that is almost a paradigm of public service, such as “A thousand murdered women”, because it had a great impact that changed the way of dealing with gender violence. We did not talk about the victims of gender violence, but about women whose lives have been taken away from them and the personal stories of each one of them, through the testimonies of those who knew them best.

(César Peña, *RTVE Lab*, Spain)

They had also developed environmental, social, and cultural projects.

By making elaborate, in-depth, and investigative research accessible to the largest possible audience, *Reflekt* contributed to disseminating information in society and to a democracy based on transparency and public service. Belonging to a small news organization, both interviewees believed their role was to tackle important issues and to contribute to the public debate in Swiss society.

Through its digital output, the *BBC Global News* filled a lot of gaps that would not have ordinarily been filled, specifically in local journalism. In the regions of the United Kingdom where there was not a thriving newspaper or a local news broadcast, the *BBC* helped to deliver the local news, and digital storytelling was often central to that, with its principles of public service and impartiality. Fisher mentioned the *BBC Global News*, promoting a service of digital innovation over the past ten years with the increase of many language sites. Delivering *BBC News* in many parts of the world, in their local language, has had an important influence. As Fisher explained,

[T]he *Global News* had a massive impact in terms of filling the gap in nations where there is a governmental controlled or a highly biased media; thus, the *BBC* provides impartial news to people that would not otherwise get news at all.

(Fisher, *BBC Future*, United Kingdom)

There are still many users of radio and TV, but the ability to reach larger audiences was particularly important, especially for younger people who had not grown up with legacy media brands and were getting their news from *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, or *TikTok*. Fisher believed if the *BBC* were not present on those platforms with its innovative storytelling, then civic awareness of what was happening in the world would be different.

Conclusion

The selected media outlets (*Der Spiegel*, *RTVE Lab*, *Reflekt*, and *BBC Global News*) were producing innovative storytelling formats, which were defined as new digital storytelling in the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project, as a strategy to differentiate themselves from the competition, appeal to younger users, and offer explanatory journalism that addressed the issues in depth. Thus, news organizations that incorporate

innovation strategies could differentiate from their competitors and generate a valuable brand image. This innovation adhered to journalistic standards and translated into effective ways of designing content that combined rigor in substance with attractiveness in form. There was consensus that innovative projects had to be successful in terms of audience, advertising revenue, brand image, and prestige for news organizations.

Digital storytelling projects demanded planning in advance, multidisciplinary work, and execution with wide production margins, far from the immediacy of the day-to-day news coverage. As some interviewees underlined, it was necessary to go beyond the traditional articles and the news based on the inverted pyramid to tell the important issues through innovative formats that met users' information needs and connected with young people. The process involved several phases, including design, experimentation, testing, development, dissemination, and learning. Of course, tools and technologies have played a fundamental role in narrative innovation, but there are also other relevant aspects to consider, such as management and leadership skills, professional culture, and talent.

The storytelling formats mentioned by the professionals include multimedia reports, webdocs, newsgames, explanatory videos, and stories for social media. They shared the goal of putting the users at the center of the narrative so that they choose the route from which to access the information. In this way, users became more integrated into the narrative, which ideally allowed them to gain a deeper, more direct, and meaningful understanding of news events. Another key aspect of these narratives lay in the richness that arose from combining languages and technologies, such as artificial intelligence or newsgaming, with original proposals.

The adoption of innovative narrative formats was a reality across countries and journalistic cultures, both in native media and in the digital editions of newspapers, radio, and television, making the most of these formats based on interactivity, hyperlinking, and multimedia. The combination of these elements offered the promising potential for journalism in a market of overabundant supply, limited attention, and an increasingly fragmented audience by tapping the creative possibilities of explanatory, visual, participatory, gamified, enriched, and personalized journalism.

Note

- 1 Anonymity was agreed upon in the interviews with the Swiss interviewees.

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20 Remote media work

Hybrid formulas for journalistic daily routines

Dámaso Mondéjar and Alicia de Lara González

The COVID-19 outbreak caused changes in the daily routine of the media. The work in newsrooms was affected by the restrictions of government and health authorities (García-Avilés et al. 2022; Greene González et al. 2022). Digital tools served as lifesavers for the activity of organizations, especially in the context of guaranteeing virtual connections and teleworking. Managers did their best to coordinate teams, manage the various tasks, redesign communication systems, and adapt workflows, increasing the use of digital tools like Zoom, MS Teams, or Meet, and others such as WhatsApp, Slack, and Telegram. Management boards worked assiduously with tech engineers to develop content management systems or VPNs so that information in the digital realm would continue to have an accurate format.

Research has addressed telework since the mid-1990s. For example, Iturbe (1995, 19) critiques the negative aspects of telework, saying that it could become “a formula of precarious and poorly paid work, conducive to exploitation,” and de Pablos et al. (2002) were among the first to report on the adoption of telework. The literature on journalistic work during home confinement and subsequent de-escalation agrees that professionals quickly adapt to remote work, which has a steep learning curve (González Alba 2020). Once the coronavirus pandemic had passed, the changes in newsrooms working routines that had occurred during the home confinements imposed in many countries around the world were not simply temporary: “News organizations have embraced the shift, with 61% of the survey respondents saying that their organization has largely implemented hybrid and flexible working” (Cherubini 2022, 3).

On the one hand, it is interesting to analyze how innovation did not only revolve around the ability to work remotely but also in the adoption of new hybrid models (a combination of face-to-face and telework) that could improve working conditions as well as keep productivity intact. It is also of interest to study how the implementation and development of work management tools have improved not only daily practices and coordination but also offered the possibility to collaborate with other digital initiatives. On the other hand, it is necessary to focus on the reasons why the

adoption of teleworking could be problematic and the justification for needing to maintain physical contact in the newsroom for various purposes. Besides, the difficulty of motivating creativity was also identified as one of the most important components in managing journalism and media work (Appelgren 2022).

Case studies

The evolution of telework and management tools was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations by the experts in three countries (Germany, Spain, and Switzerland) in the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project, following the research methodology outlined in Chapter 2. A case study was selected for each country:

- Germany: The company VRM, with headquarters in Mainz, has 1,300 employees spread over 26 locations and has an aggregate of 900,000 daily readers of its many brands. There are 20 subsidiaries and collaborating companies. Daily, VRM publishes 24 editions of newspapers and magazines in the areas of Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate. It stands out for having its own content management system (CMS) called “CUE,” co-developed with an international company. The CUE is a work environment for the creation and administration of the media group’s various websites. Its current strategy is to bet on digital first so that any content that is conceived on its platforms is designed to be published first in digital format, the client’s gateway for this company. The interviewees were Tobias Goldbrunner (deputy editor in chief of the content department) and Julia Lumma (deputy editor in chief of the content development department).
- Spain: *Heraldo de Aragón* is a leading regional newspaper of information about the Autonomous Community of Aragon that has implemented a deep digital transformation. In March 2020, due to the pandemic, almost the entire staff left the newsroom to work from home. The measure that had been designed in advance allowed forced telework to be implemented quickly and flexibly. The interviewees were Mikel Iturbe, the editor, and Elena de la Riva, head of SEO.
- Switzerland: *We. Publish* provides technical infrastructure to the media. It offers an open-source CMS, which allows journalists from affiliated media to write and publish their articles, as well as sell their subscriptions and manage their members. It is a pioneering initiative, especially focused on small and recently created media that have nodes in urban areas, for example, Basel, Zurich, and Lucerne, which form a media network. It is an expanding project that currently has eight employees. *We. Publish* is characterized by facilitating the interconnection and exchange of content between its portals. There were two interviewees who were granted anonymity.

Aims of the innovation

The aims of the innovations related to hybrid teleworking formulas and the tools that allow content management were related to the organization of teamwork in the digital environment and the generation of networks. For example, the implementation of an in-house CMS enabled secure work and collaboration with other colleagues, whether they were in the newsroom or working from other places, and also enabled connections to other journalistic initiatives, which could promote a range of related journalistic values.

Germany's *VRM* used a CMS that was developed in collaboration with *Stibo*, a software company. The *VRM* aimed to increase its digital reach and get better data on subscriptions. The interviewee explained that the reason they decided to implement the "CUE"-CMS was that it was capable of incorporating in a single place many of the digital elements that were previously produced separately, such as infographics, videos, and other visual elements. Through this tool, the aim was to have a responsive interface that would prioritize the "digital first" and simplify the work of editors.

The need to facilitate the work of the editors was a challenge for the media during the months in which the forced lockdown for health reasons caused workers to leave the newsrooms. The newspaper *Heraldo de Aragón* was an example of the adoption of remote work, in which the objective was to facilitate coordination and the possibility of maintaining its activities during home confinements without lowering the quality of the content. In this sense, the newspaper executed multiple organizational changes and relied heavily on digital tools to facilitate and coordinate the work. For example, the purchase of laptops that functioned as portable devices allowed workers to maintain their activity from home. But at the same time, these same computers in the newsroom acted as central processing units (CPU) thanks to an existing anchor mechanism that the editors could use or not as they wished. As the director explained, "The day the pandemic started, the workers took their laptops and went home to work without much trouble." In this sense, teleworking emerged as an innovation in the field of journalistic organization since it meant adapting to a virtual work system in which team collaboration was crucial. The adaptation entailed a more proactive role on the part of managers and incremental changes in the value chain.

Switzerland's *We. Publish* made an open-source CMS available to small media outlets with an objective that went beyond technological advantages. The initiative sought to have a transfer of synergies, and the main goal was to generate a network of information initiatives that promoted media diversity. The platform was also an intermediary that brought groups together and promoted economic and social exchanges. It was also a technological solution that could save costs for associated media through an open-source philosophy, in which it was possible to share not only content but also processes, developments, and knowledge.

Supportive conditions

In the German case, two factors that benefited the development of innovation are worth mentioning: an internal one related to the organization of the business and an external issue that pointed directly to the COVID-19 virus. The pandemic was not a supportive condition but generated a crisis situation, which motivated the need to innovate. Regarding the organization, VRM assured that the development of its CMS was a turning point in the day-to-day work of the editors in the newsroom. This varied from the facilities and tools that the editors had to create interactive graphics and embed them in the text to the organization of the team, in which all the workers had faster and more efficient access to the content.

Julia Lumma explained concerning the conception of CUE that there were ten people working on the project, especially in the preparation phase and in the selection of suppliers. “People from very diverse backgrounds were involved,” she noted. Significantly more people were involved in implementing the publishing platform. Additionally, it was a project that followed an unusual workflow in legacy media. At VRM, Lumma and her team were able to follow flexible methods.

We had never done such large projects in an agile way before. Yes, we are used to it from the web and the further development of our digital products. But in the VRM context it is still not very widespread and, as a project manager, I found it very useful to be able to organize the project as I think it should be, even if it had to be discussed a bit at the beginning.

(Lumma, VRM, Germany)

On the other hand, the development of CUE took place at the same time as COVID-19 was hitting the world. Inevitably, the disease disrupted the initial plans for this project, but paradoxically, in some cases, it was a catalyst for innovation rather than a barrier. “In project development we were completely in the coronavirus era. That helped in many ways, because we were holding all the meetings digitally. I found it very useful, because it made the meetings faster and more productive,” said Lumma. In other words, teleworking played a key role in achieving the proposed objectives and even improved the efficiency of some processes, which Lumma emphasized. “The coronavirus has rather helped us, because a lot of things have really happened to us in the course of this with a digital way of working and good cooperation.” However, it was not all positive, as the VRM team lamented that there were several colleagues who were caught by the disease, and this sometimes meant a setback in the development of the work.

Concerning the Spanish case, the newspaper’s decision to adapt to teleworking in advance of its competitors was the key to success. Unlike what ever happened to most media in Spain, the adaptability to telework in

Heraldo de Aragón did not start with the COVID-19 pandemic. On the contrary, the management had previously decided to provide employees with resources for teleworking. This meant the digital transformation process had begun to be implemented five years before. Mikel Iturbe described the implementation process: “We kept 99% of the things we did before because when you have a doubt, if you don’t have an answer, chaos starts. On the other hand, if you follow the same routines, everything works.”

In the Swiss case, *We. Publish* pointed to experience as a major driver of innovation. Several members of the team had previously worked in the development of content management systems, as well as in large media companies. “I’m lucky enough to find talented people and then pass that on. We found the drive that way. And most importantly, we managed to make this whole foundation funding thing happen,” explained one of the interviewees.

In addition to this, other beneficial factors include economic and social elements. *We. Publish* was funded through public foundations and donors. The manager of *We. Publish* highlighted how regional and local journalism, on which the collaborative and teleworking network they have created is based, has gained importance in society. Thus, a push was generated to join their services. One interviewee highlighted that there was an awareness that the criticism and control function of the media (also by local media) was important in a democracy.

Obstructive conditions

In Germany, VRM’s interviewees suggested a series of factors related to the mentality of journalists were obstructive. The head of content development at VRM assured that achieving the complete adaptation of their CMS was still a challenge, especially because of the tradition of the paper-based print press and the work routines that many professionals still carried with them. “There are many colleagues who are very socialized with print, who not only have to change their way of thinking in their heads, but also have to ‘get to their heart’ so that they have internalized it,” stated Lumma.

However, Lumma also remembered that this was a common procedure in any transformation process, so it was important to communicate clearly to coworkers the reason for the changes. In this sense, for VRM, the biggest obstacles revolved around work deadlines. “We had very little capacity to implement outstanding tasks at the speed we wanted.” Lumma said all those changes in the organization of the production of the journalistic offers affected and provoked new ways of working.

In Spain, despite having embraced teleworking prior to the pandemic, *Heraldo de Aragón* recognized that it was not a method that could be fully adopted. Indeed, journalists not being in the newsroom was counterproductive. The main drawback for *Heraldo de Aragón* management lay in the detriment of the attitude toward collaboration among colleagues. “Journalism is an effort of collective intelligence, and seeing each other’s faces, contributing

criteria, and having a collaboration could be complicated by teleworking,” said Iturbe. The director exemplified some relevant problems in the application of teleworking as the loss of the editorial identity of the newspaper, as well as the isolation and the possible lack of interaction with other colleagues. “Here many problems are solved by raising your head and consulting a colleague,” said Iturbe. Thus, the Spanish newspaper maintained that teleworking “is effective for specific, orderly and sustainable issues.” However, the director explained that solving daily challenges face-to-face has important advantages.

In Switzerland, at *We. Publish* they also pointed to the mentality of journalists as one of the main problems for the implementation of telework, and not only in the way they organize themselves, in their tasks or their field of work, but also when undertaking projects.

The culture of error in the newspaper industry is cruelly bad. Whoever dares to do something new is looked at with total skepticism. [...] Many have a kind of Stockholm syndrome and the feeling that, somehow, everything that is new, and that they don't have, threatens their existence. The culture of learning is also bad.

(Anonymous manager, *We. Publish*, Switzerland)

Societal impact

The implementation of some technologies could facilitate journalistic work:

If you don't have to worry about other more bureaucratic things or even distribution, you can focus more on the content. This is not necessarily only in the sense of being able to produce more content, but that this content is also better prepared and more understandable for the user.

(Lumma, *VRM*, Germany)

Facilitating and enabling remote work in a situation in which labor concentration was dangerous because of the probability of contagion and establishing teleworking formulas had a social impact during the pandemic. The possibility of continuous reporting during the most critical months of the pandemic, when there was great uncertainty about the virus, made it possible to satisfy the information needs of society: “In the pandemic, we felt tremendously useful. We felt that what we were doing had all the value in the world, and we were highly rewarded by readers, with letters thanking us for what we were doing,” explained Iturbe, the director of the regional *Heraldo de Aragón*. Teleworking, despite existing only because of the mass communication afforded by the World Wide Web in the early 2000s, had been rediscovered as an efficient solution to support organizational processes in such a way that the current debate is on how to establish the most appropriate hybrid formulas. In this sense, the concept of “smart working” stands out, which goes beyond understanding teleworking as a remote task and conceiving it as

an “adaptive organizational development and reinforcement of management capacities” (Rimbau-Gilabert et al. 2022, 2).

Those teleworking approaches gave workers spatial and temporal flexibility, supported by technological tools. These were, therefore, advances that went beyond the news industry and were directly related to aspects such as work-life balance and, ultimately, the improvement of the quality of life of workers. For this reason, it was possible to assume that the rise of remote work and the hybrid formulas derived from the pandemic had led to an ongoing labor revolution that affected working across countries around the globe. For example, in the case of Spain, these demands can be seen reflected in Law 10/2021, which established the characteristics, rights, and obligations of remote workers.

Regarding the benefits for the audience, the director of *We. Publish* explained that open content initiatives contributed to improving the debate around the topics in contrast to paywalls. In a system where a lot of media offered their content through a pay-to-content system, the risk existed that a part of the audience could not access the information. Therefore, to guarantee an open and accessible debate, the coexistence of alternatives that offered open content with other types of models could become necessary.

Conclusion

From this analysis, JoIn-DemoS deduced that innovations related to hybrid teleworking formulas and tools that allowed content management were directly related not only to corporate aspects of teamwork but to others close to organizational culture. The case studies of the JoIn-DemoS project have also shown that while technology enabled changes and adaptations, it did not constitute an aim but the path to achieve multiple objectives. Technologies designed to coordinate networking and digital environments could also make an important contribution to combating some of the challenges facing local and regional media landscapes, such as the lack of both independence and pluralism.

On the other hand, the great technological dependence of media companies on digital management tools and the effects that they can have must not be ignored. Continuous technological development can also overwhelm professionals who are not tech-savvy, and furthermore, certain forms of teleworking could lead to social isolation in an increasingly virtualized world, thus dehumanizing the profession.

The cases analyzed show how remote work combined with face-to-face interaction can facilitate flexibility in tasks and collaboration between professionals. At the same time, the implementation of the hybrid teleworking model has meant an unprecedented organizational change. In parallel, new management tools are considered the backbone of many media companies and could even play a key role in the relationship between assorted media actors. Moreover, we can see how several types of technology could allow the existence of alternatives beyond paywalls, embracing an open-access philosophy that can coexist with the pay-for-content model.

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21 Donations and crowdfunding

New strategies for financing (investigative) journalism

Korbinian Klinghardt

Some former certainties in journalism are now outdated. This includes the traditional rather distanced relationship of journalists to their audience, which has changed in a fundamental way, especially during the digital transformation. Today, people no longer just receive journalistic offerings but can, in follow-up communication on social media, make direct contact with journalists and be seen as an inspiration and corrective authority in the journalistic production process, for instance, through topic ideas or error notices. Recipients are not only co-producers but also distributors (Krumsvik 2018, 19). Loosen (2019, 1) confirms this idea: “[t]he audience is a constitutive part of the journalistic process.” She emphasizes that in journalism, but also in journalism research, there are several conceptions of audience, “which both endeavor to categorize or define it in a variety of ways, for example, as (active) users, readers, commentators, co-creators, recipients, members, or customers” (Loosen 2019, 1). The digitally induced possibilities of direct audience influence on journalistic working methods also mean that journalism companies can monitor audience activities intensively (Hohlfeld 2016, 265). The contribution of the audience to journalism is presented in other chapters in this book: opportunities for citizens to participate in journalism are discussed in Chapter 17, while Chapter 12 focuses on the extent to which data on the usage behavior of recipients influence the production of journalistic offerings.

The increasing importance and integration of the audience into journalistic work processes is also evident in the economic sphere. The possibilities of a profit-oriented media economy have diversified significantly in recent years, which was necessary because, in newspaper publishing, the revenue model via advertisements has become increasingly untenable. New media companies with start-up characteristics rely on donation models and the involvement of users via crowdfunding. Picard’s analysis is, therefore, still highly appropriate: “The business of news is changing worldwide, creating economic and managerial challenges that are affecting both news organizations and how journalism is practised” (Picard 2010, 17).

Crowdfunding is valued as a way of financing journalism that is detached from traditional funding strategies, especially in the context of investigative research (Prinzing and Gattermann 2015). By crowdfunding, we mean

“a new model for funding journalism in which reporters solicit micropayments from readers to finance their reporting” (Jian and Shin 2015, 165). In the German media market, the community that participates in these projects has the self-perception of being a supporter that contributes research impulses but does not want to be further involved actively in the journalistic realization (Prinzinger and Gattermann 2015).

Theoretically, crowdfunding is also a kind of donation. However, as we will see, crowdfunding campaigns are often tied to time-limited projects with a narrowly defined goal, while donations from individuals or institutions can be seen less as project-bound and more as actor-bound (journalistic start-up). Crowdfunding can, for example, serve as start-up-specific financing, while regular donations can be part of a long-term financing strategy for a journalistic media company.

Case studies

Within the framework of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-Demos) project (see Chapter 2 on methodology), media companies that use donations and crowdfunding for their financing were selected as case studies. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with practitioners from these media companies. The following overview shows the selected cases and the corresponding experts for media companies from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland.

- Austria: *Dossier* was chosen for the Austrian media market because it can be seen as a first mover regarding crowdfunding as a form of financing. *Dossier* was founded by a group of journalists who discovered the lack of independent investigative journalism culture in Austria. Their aim was to be completely independent of possible influence from advertisers, or corporate and organizational sponsors, or funding institutions; for this reason, *Dossier* used crowdfunding in 2018 as start-up financing. *Dossier* also has a membership model involving the crowd as the main principle – e.g., by offering special events for “members,” such as off-the-record-conversations, film, and theater events. Further sources of income are commissions for investigative work for other media houses and for training journalists. The interviewee was Florian Skrabal, the founder of *Dossier*.
- Germany: *Correctiv*, founded in 2014, was chosen because it was the first donation-funded medium in Germany that aims to trigger public debate through investigative research. Current funding is based on three pillars: private donations; institutional support, for example, from foundations; and its own income, generated, for example, by the sale of books or workshops. However, this was not always the case. In the beginning, funding was secured through a membership model. With the help of surveys, *Correctiv* realized that the regular contribution was too high a commitment for some people, said the interviewee, Luise Lange-Letellier, who is responsible for community engagement and fundraising.

- Switzerland: *Hauptstadt*, an online media start-up from Bern, was founded in 2022 and has 15 employees. The founding motivation was to increase media diversity in Bern. The idea to develop *Hauptstadt* was triggered by the merger of the editorial offices of *Der Bund* and *Berner Zeitung* (both *Tamedia* titles).¹

Aims of the innovation

For Florian Skrabal, a selective crowdfunding campaign was a new way, in addition to other user-related financing models, to ensure independence from possible influence from advertisers or corporate or organizational sponsors and funding institutions. “*Dossier* was born out of the necessity that publishing houses have to save money, cut staff and have fewer resources available for research and investigative journalism.” *Dossier’s* reporting was designed to fulfill the function of criticism and control, which was important from the perspective of democratic theory. Skrabal emphasized that the aim of *Dossier* was to “basically just control power and point out grievances, failures, weaknesses of individuals or systems.” This goal was derived from his normative understanding of journalism. In his view, the function of journalism was to contribute to decision-making and opinion-forming and to create a discursive public sphere in which social aspects of all kinds were discussed and debated. Skrabal also explained the investigative orientation of *Dossier* by saying that there was “the lack of a culture of investigative journalism in Austrian media.” The crowdfunding campaign was specifically aimed at kick-starting funding for print editions of *Dossier*, and it succeeded. To date, *Dossier* has not engaged in any marketing or advertising activities. *Dossier* gains attention through word-of-mouth, citation by other media, or through the dissemination of its journalistic offerings on social media platforms.

Luise Lange-Letellier points out that a central goal of *Correctiv* was to develop a new financing model alongside the public service and private commercial ones that would enable long-term research. Lange-Letellier said that *Correctiv* founder David Schraven had been guided by successful American donation-financed models he believed would strengthen journalism and become a sustainable model. Furthermore, innovations should be promoted, and more time, compared to other media companies, could be gained for working on topics. Journalism should be made more independent through the new funding strategy, without pressure to justify certain topics. Instead, topics could be generated by social impulses – for example, by pointers to the editorial staff. Lange-Letellier said donation-based funding had created more editorial freedom.

The main goal of crowdfunding was to finance *Hauptstadt* as a journalistic media company. The interviewees said *Hauptstadt* was about not limiting journalism to classic editorial work but to being open; trying out new things, for example, by moderating live discussions on current topics; and being

present in the agglomeration and strengthening of Bern's media diversity. To achieve this, *Hauptstadt* tried to develop new forms of cooperation with other independent media companies.

Supportive conditions

From the point of view of the Austrian interviewee, it was beneficial for the implementation of the innovative financing strategy that there was a constant dialogue with the people and an involvement of the audience, also regarding topics for research.

We deliberately don't call our subscription model a subscription model, but we call it membership because we also want to involve the crowd, for example through personal meetings. We actually see the crowd, our members, as part of the extended family, if you will, who can give us tips.

(Skrabal, *Dossier*, Austria)

At the time of the interview, *Dossier* had about 6,400 members, which Skrabal said was an advantage, as *Dossier* was not a large media organization, so there were not any structures that had grown over time or a corporate culture that would have obstructed the new financing strategy.

Advantageous at *Correctiv* was, Lange-Letellier believed, the realization that the donation-based models in the United States had worked, which provided orientation for their use by *Correctiv*. Before creating *Correctiv*, the founding members had been active in the United States and had looked at best-practice examples of donation-based models. Lange-Letellier also believed the personality of David Schraven had been a promoting factor for *Correctiv*, especially through his founding spirit. In addition, Lange-Letellier felt that not only had the employees always been very committed, but they were characterized by a particularly high intrinsic motivation to contribute to the success of the organization.

The interviewees from Switzerland cited numerous factors that had promoted the development of *Hauptstadt* and the implementation of new financing strategies. For example, other Swiss media start-ups had served as inspiration as well as a source of experience. This exchange that had, to date, only been systematically institutionalized in isolated cases between established media houses helped *Hauptstadt* to develop its own journalistic identity. The financial resources for *Hauptstadt* were initially raised via crowdfunding. However, this way of raising funds was only planned for establishing the business because crowdfunding does not enable sustainable financing. A prerequisite for successful crowdfunding is a good story or a special corporate identity. Initially, *Hauptstadt* conducted online sounding boards with people from the *Republik*, a Swiss online magazine start-up that generated a successful crowdfund in 2017, and others from political

crowdfunding and fundraising agencies. In this way, advice and experiences could be collected. The crowdfunding was also supported by the unusual measure of renting a restaurant, which afforded backers the opportunity to meet the start-up team in person and give them feedback.

Obstructive conditions

An inhibiting factor in Austria was the difficulty of motivating people to pay for journalistic offers. Skrabal explained that Austrians were not used to paying for journalism because of the free culture on the internet and free newspapers. Another obstructive factor was the lack of innovation support in Austria.

Lange-Letellier thought that journalism in Germany not having nonprofit status was an obstacle. She felt that some aspects of the German political framework, such as the nonprofit law, had also been obstructive factors. *Correctiv* was one of the first nonprofit newsrooms in the D-A-CH region. According to her, the nonprofit status can only be achieved in a complex, roundabout way, making it difficult for other organizations to achieve. *Correctiv* only managed to do so, not through journalism, but through the education the business offered. Donations became tax deductible once the nonprofit status was granted. Lange-Letellier said another obstacle was the difficulty in the beginning to generate understanding among the audience that journalistic offers had to be paid for. This awareness initially had to be created among the recipients, although at the same time, resources were scarce. To start with, *Correctiv* was a small organization with few staff members because hiring additional staff was not financially possible. But an increase in donations was dependent on new hires taking care of funding issues.

The Swiss interviewees said it was difficult to obtain foundation money. Many foundations have not integrated the media into their purpose. They also considered that some of the employees still working for *Der Bund* or the *Berner Zeitung* during the crowdfunding campaign and, therefore, were not able to appear in public as supporters of *Hauptstadt*, as a serious obstacle. The interviewees felt that crowdfunding brings consequences that you cannot fully control, such as the time regime to which you must subordinate every action. Another inhibiting factor was that results had to be delivered quickly after a successful crowdfunding campaign.

Societal impact

Skrabal explained that *Dossier* adopted topics of public interest, researched them comprehensively, and presented them in a clear and balanced way. The direct exchange with the crowd and their support was essential to *Dossier*. The financing models via the audience, such as crowdfunding or membership models, guarantee editorial independence from the interests of third parties in politics or business.

Lange-Letellier was convinced that *Correctiv's* funding model strengthened and protected independent journalism. In her view, a diversified funding model could also strengthen local journalism. This, she said, was visible in the new, small editorial offices that had emerged in the local sphere. *Correctiv*, she said, strove to support local journalism through a network of journalists. However, Lange-Letellier sees social added value not only in *Correctiv's* journalism, but also in the media competence created through the educational program. For example, the fact-check editorial team explained how users could now recognize false reports. Lange-Letellier was convinced that media competence strengthens society and democracy because journalistic media companies were unable to check all false information. Lange-Letellier also said the work at *Correctiv* was characterized by not only drawing attention to grievances but also presenting potential solutions. This should provide impulses for a constructive debate.

According to the Swiss interviewees, it was necessary to maintain media diversity and support democracy.

Conclusion

The JoIn-DemoS project found that new, alternative financing models, not involving advertisements were particularly attractive for media companies and journalistic start-ups. Donations and crowdfunding had not rendered the traditional financing strategies in the news business obsolete, but they were helpful funding models, especially for new journalistic players who focused on investigative research (see also Chapter 9). These new media initiatives sometimes aimed to fulfill their critique and control function. With a view to this valuable task, the innovation of financing via donations and crowdfunding campaigns contributed to media companies achieving a higher degree of journalistic independence. Financial independence (for example, vis-à-vis the advertising industry) is thus intended to increase independence in reporting.

It also became clear that financing through donations and crowdfunding democratized the production process of journalistic offerings. Crowdfunding campaigns were successful if the donors were involved in the journalistic work process, which guaranteed a high degree of transparency. However, audience involvement could also be a risk, such as being financially dependent on a major donor. Another risk was the lack of assurance that private donors would maintain their willingness to fund in the long term. The sustainability of donation and crowdfunding projects in journalism was and remains precarious.

In summary, donation models and crowdfunding campaigns have so far proven their worth as financing models for media companies in Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. They ensure independent, investigative journalism. Moreover, they change the journalist-audience relationship. The audience does not only represent the masses willing to pay but actively participates in the journalistic production process – for example, through topic impulses.

Note

- 1 The Swiss interviewees were assured of anonymity.

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22 Fact-checking

Strengthening democracy through verifying

Korbinian Klinghardt and Michael Graßl

The Washington Post claims the 45th president of the United States, Donald J. Trump, made a record 30,573 false or misleading statements in four years (Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly 2021). His presidency caused the popularization of the term “fake news” and set in motion worldwide social debates about the dangers of the spread of manipulative and misleading information in democratic societies. Communication science approaches the phenomenon from assorted perspectives. Grinberg et al. (2019) examine fake news on *Twitter* during the 2016 US election campaign. Tandoc et al. (2018) present a typology of scientific definitions of fake news, while Apuke and Omar (2021) explore fake news during the coronavirus pandemic.

Post-factual narratives, particularly those promoted by social media, pose major challenges to journalism because they generate mistrust, which is also directed against media professionals. Nevertheless, journalism is not at the mercy of the targeted and manipulative spread of fake news, as it has responded with fact-checking, which means “evaluating the truthfulness of claims presented in public” (Nieminen and Sankari 2021, 358). The checking and correcting of fake news represent an important field of innovation in journalism on various levels. Fact-checks that examine rumors and conspiracy theories and refute them on factual basis, for example with the involvement of experts, can be understood as a new form of reporting that is implemented across both formats and types of media. Fact-checker-formats exist, for example, in TV programs, on Instagram, and on websites. In this respect, fact-checks can be classified as a product innovation. In addition, the innovative potential of fact-checks is visible at the level of the organization, for example, when new fields of work are created, which in turn leads to the development and establishment of new work routines. Today, fact-checks are carried out by established media organizations and by start-ups.

Fact-checks were established in journalism in the 2010s. As Graves (2018, 613) notes, “The last five years have seen a global surge in political fact-checking, reporting that specializes in debunking political misinformation.” At the same time, science also took up the topic (Graves 2016). Nevertheless, the first fact-checking projects had already occurred before our study period

from 2010 to 2020. In 2009, for example, the fact-checker project *PolitiFact* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in the national reporting category for its coverage of the 2008 US presidential election campaign (Adair 2009). In contrast, the worldwide network of fact-checkers is relatively young. The International Fact-Checking Network was founded in 2015 and organizes trainings where fact-checkers can learn how to use tools and improve their fact-checking skills (Poynter 2023).

Case studies

The research of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project identified fact-checking initiatives as an important innovation in journalism in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom. For specific information about the methodology, see Chapter 2. The selected media companies and experts are presented in the following overview.

- Germany: The fact-checking unit of *Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR)* was selected. The *BR* is part of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ARD)* and thus a public media institution, which is financed through broadcasting fees. In 2016, the *BR* created the *#Faktenfuchs* with the essential task of debunking rumors and conspiracy theories that social networks share and spread. The team consists of nine staff (*BR24 Redaktion* 2022). The interviewees were Gudrun Riedl (head of the editorial department *BR24 Digital* and developed *#Faktenfuchs*), Janina Lückoff (team leader of *#Faktenfuchs*), and Stefan Primbs (social media officer of *BR*).
- Spain: *Maldita.es*, established in 2018, is the first project dedicated exclusively to fact-checking in Spain and works as a nonprofit organization (*Maldita.es* 2018). The team of 28 people has been a pioneer in debunking hoaxes and using new distribution channels (WhatsApp, Twitch, TikTok), and in the 2020s, it was one of the most visited fact-checking websites in Europe. They work against fake news in the fields of politics, climate change, feminism, science, immigration, and technology. The interviewees were Clara Jiménez Cruz (CEO, co-founder) and Julio Montes (chief editor, co-founder).
- United Kingdom: In the first substudy of the project, *Full Fact* was the most frequently mentioned best practice example in the United Kingdom by the country's experts. *Full Fact* is a nonprofit organization (*Full Fact* 2023) and was founded in 2009 with the aim of improving the information published around elections and working against misinformation coming from media organizations. *Full Fact* also has a partnership with *Facebook* to check content that has been published on the social media platform. The interviewee worked as online fact-checking lead.¹

Aims of the innovation

In the context of the goals of the innovation, the cross-national comparison shows great similarities. Janina Lückoff of *BR* viewed fact-checks as pursuing the goal to provide verified information to people who are unsettled. Lückoff argued there were people who distrusted the established media and, through their own research via *Google*, also landed on platforms that spread disinformation. The aim of *#Faktenfuchs* was to ensure that misinformation on platforms did not remain unchallenged on the net or was spread but that it was countered with facts. Lückoff pointed out that the involvement of the audience via email, community management, or social listening was an important stimulus for the work of *#Faktenfuchs*. The subject of fact-checks did not have to be just textual but also images and video material. Lückoff estimated, however, that the verification of textual claims represented the largest part of the work. Since fake news was often spread on controversial and, above all, emotionally charged topics, her colleague Stefan Primbs believed that fact-checks should be used to ensure that public discourse relied more on facts. At the organizational level, he emphasized the need to create fact-checking units that could quickly perform fact-checks – for example, in breaking news situations – and thus debunk misinformation in the early stages of its dissemination. Primbs argued that journalistic media have lost their gatekeeper function, because information and even misinformation could now be published by anyone on social media platforms. This led to a new task on the part of the media. They now had to correct this misinformation from other nonjournalistic actors. In addition, one core aim of fact-checks is, Riedl explained, to reach a large audience. Fact-checks should, therefore, be designed in such a way that they are interesting for the user.

Summarizing the statements of the Spanish interviewees, the innovation served as a support for people to distinguish real information from misinformation. *Maldita.es* wanted to empower citizens “so they don’t get screwed,” explained Clara Jiménez. Doubts about certain topics were to be dispelled. In this sense, fact-checking was a very user-oriented innovation. Fact-checks helped to fight fake news about certain topics like politics, climate change, feminism, science, immigration, and technology.

The expert from the United Kingdom argues similarly. They emphasized that the aims of fact-checking were to provide “good information,” to improve the information for voters, to better inform the public, and to combat misinformation. This implied that journalistic media companies acted as a corrective, checking and verifying the news in circulation, especially, the interviewee said, “the stuff with the biggest potential for harm.” In this sense, fact-checking can be understood as a regulatory measure that helped to ensure the stability of the news industry, especially regarding factuality and truth of information.

Supportive conditions

The interviewees of the three case studies named various factors that had a positive influence on the successful development and implementation of fact-checking units. In the German case, the political environment was named as an important reason for beginning to implement a fact-checking unit. Janina Lückoff said it was visible in the 2016 US presidential election campaign that American society was divided and that misinformation was also increasingly spreading in Germany ahead of the 2017 federal election. Fact-checks should, therefore, strengthen democracy. Stefan Primbs emphasized that Brexit and misinformation circulating about it have also promoted the development of *#Faktenfuchs*. This case showed “how politically powerful fake news can be.” For a public service medium, the opportunity had now presented itself to “objectify the discourse, bring it back to facts.” Also, internal conditions like the goodwill of the management had been an important pillar in the establishment of the fact-checking unit. In addition to the resources made available, employee training and the willingness at the management level to allow a new organizational structure to develop had played a decisive role. Furthermore, technical cooperation with *Google* and the right timing for the implementation of the *#Faktenfuchs* were mentioned as important factors for success.

The interviewees at *Maldita.es* described multiple factors that favored the introduction of fact-checking. They argued socio-political developments were of particular significance, such as the effects of the economic crisis of 2008, the increase in instability, polarization, and changes in the political discourse. One of the milestones was the 2016 US elections, where, according to Julio Montes, “disinformation arrived as an industry.” However, the interviewees also pointed to other factors at the national level that had facilitated the establishment of their initiative. Thus, some public service institutions developed an understanding that fact-checking is an important and valuable part of democracy. For example, government employees assisted the media in fact-checking by providing information and data.

At *Full Fact* in the United Kingdom, there were three main factors that supported its successful development. First, the financial backing provided by donations, which came from both a few larger supporters and many small donors, was a major support. Second, the special political environment in the United Kingdom, with its numerous elections and referenda over the past decade, has created a great need for verified information. For this reason, the development of fact-checking initiatives in the United Kingdom began somewhat earlier compared to both Spain and Germany. Third, individual politicians and social media have had a reinforcing effect as a booster for fact-checking because their involvement in the spread of fake news had made fact-checking an increasingly important task.

Obstructive conditions

According to the German interviewees, one obstructive factor was initially that too few resources had been made available to the teams. There were too few staff members for the heavy workload. The staff had also had reservations and were skeptical at the beginning. Inhibiting factors had also been the influence of politics, for example, when parties were critical of fact-checks.

The Spanish interviewees felt that although there were some employees of public institutions who fought against disinformation, there was a general lack of institutional transparency. Ministries in other countries would take less time to respond to requests for information than in Spain. In addition, acceptance problems within journalism were mentioned as an obstructive factor. This was because the news media did not like to be corrected. Although some newspapers understood that these initiatives should exist, others complained that the verifiers were not the ones to label their content as fake. Julio Montes said economic considerations also had an inhibiting influence. Online media companies still earned revenue through advertising sales and were accordingly dependent on visits and clicks. The articles that were particularly popular had not necessarily been fact-checks. From an economic perspective, media companies were, therefore, less interested in fact-checks, even if they were journalistically relevant.

The British interviewee said a major inhibiting factor was that certain groups of actors and institutions, for example, politicians and government departments, did not provide the fact-checkers of *Full Fact* with information. “That’s probably one of our greatest hindrances as far as fact-checking is concerned.” That was because they did not perceive the fact-checkers as a fully-fledged editorial team.

Societal impact

The statements of the German interviewees highlighted that fact-based reporting gives users a foothold in the midst of information overload and helps to correct misinformation. In this respect, fact-checking could be seen as a new task for journalistic media organizations. To reach more people, the fact-checker offerings from the *#Faktenfuchs* were even translated into seven languages. This ensured access to reliable and verified information was also guaranteed to people whose knowledge of German was insufficient. In addition, political decision-makers had become aware of fact-checks. Fact-checks distributed on social media, for example, could also help a young target group to be provided with socially relevant information about political elections. Like Spain, Germany’s fact-checks have generally created an awareness in society of the spread of manipulative misinformation:

Who we are reaching is something like the middle class, which is threatening to drift away or which can no longer find its footing in the abundance of disinformation. And I think we have already contributed to a certain stabilization of the level of information through such fact-checks.
(Gudrun Riedl, #Faktenfuchs, Germany)

The social added value of the innovation field was not only reflected in reaching a large audience, but also that fact-checks had appeared in political discussions. The references to fact-checks and the feedback from users on the offers had been frequent.

The Spanish interviewees saw a positive influence in the growing social awareness of misinformation. People realized much more that disinformation was a problem that threatened democracy. In addition, fact-checks could be carried out in various areas. This included checking such topics as political and scientific content, as well as detecting and debunking misinformation. “Fact-checking is a social necessity in a lot of areas. Political verification came at a time of the late 10s, crisis, instability, polarization and a different way of monitoring political discourse,” said Julio Montes. In this respect, fact-checks were an effective means of combating misinformation that harmed democracy.

The British interviewee also believed that the impact on society lay in securing a higher level of correct information. “I mean, our whole thing is we want the public to have the access to the best information possible.” In addition, citizens should be empowered to fact-check on their own. This could be achieved, for example, through fact-checking instructions in articles or manuals. In this way, readers could be shown how to recognize misinformation as such. The expert was convinced that *Full Fact* had a positive impact on society:

Yeah, I am glad to say that we do. I mean, the people who donate to us, like individual givers, often say really nice things. You know, they’ve read our work and they like it so much that they are going to personally fund us, which is just like the greatest endorsement of your work that you could ever have.

(*Full Fact*, United Kingdom)

Conclusion

The JoIn-DemoS project concluded the development of fact-checking was an important field of innovation in journalism and had been self-driven as a reaction to political developments (e.g., the presidency of Donald Trump) and the influence of fake news. Other areas of innovation, such as news on social media, had been initiated by technological progress (e.g., the rise of social media platforms and the subsequent change in media use behavior).

By contrast, fact-checking was understood as an innovation driven by the strong commitment of journalists to strengthen the core tasks of journalism in democratic societies: information, criticism and control, participation, and opinion forming.

The main objective of fact-checking units across the three countries was to counter misinformation and fake news and thus to increase the quality of both journalism and public discourse. Providing information and giving orientation on socially relevant topics could be identified as the core aims of this area of innovation. Fact-checks could also help users to strengthen their media literacy by learning how to recognize fake news. Consequently, it is no surprise that fact-checkers have considered their work highly relevant to the well-being of society.

The interviewees defined adding value for society as another core aim of their work, while positive effects on their own work or economic goals played only a subordinate role. This correlates with the nature of the organizations in which fact-checking has been successfully established. The selected case studies were either nonprofit organizations like *Maldita.es* or like BR's *#Faktenfuchs*, which was predominantly financed by public fees and thus not greatly dependent on the economic goals and reach of privately owned media companies. Observing whether fact-checks could help to objectify emotionally driven controversial debates would be a relevant task for future research in communication science.

Note

- 1 The British expert was assured of anonymity.

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23 Media labs

Agents of innovation

Jose A. García-Avilés

“Media labs” focus on experimenting with news products and reaching new audiences and are considered “drivers of innovation” for many media companies (Hogh-Janovsky and Meier 2021). These units can adopt diverse structures, such as separate departments integrated into the main organization, a team selected to carry out special innovation tasks, an agreement between a news company and a research center to collaborate in the development of projects, or a combination of all these (García-Avilés 2018). Projects arising from these labs are varied, such as the development of digital tools, platforms, or distribution channels; the implementation of new business opportunities; the design of narrative formats usually involving novel software applications or data; the promotion of entrepreneurial initiatives and start-ups; or even providing professional training (Mills and Wagemans 2021).

Scholars have applied case studies and mapping strategies to explore media labs’ roles and goals, including experimental labs within a wide range of private news companies and public service media (Zaragoza Fuster and García-Avilés 2020). For example, 15 European public service media have launched laboratories to implement innovation strategies, technological tools, or storytelling formats (Zaragoza Fuster and García-Avilés 2022). Media labs’ relevance lies less in their technological focus than in their ability to create spaces for interdisciplinary experimentation that facilitates the imagination of media futures (Bisso Nunes and Mills 2021). The integration between a particular news lab and other departments in the newsroom is crucial to the diffusion of innovations and knowledge transfer in the media company.

Case studies

The implementation of media labs was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations by the experts in three countries (Austria, Spain, and the United Kingdom), following the research methodology outlined in Chapter 2. These are the three case studies analyzed:

- Austria: The *Austrian Press Agency (APA)* was, in 2016, the first and largest media organization in the country to set up a media lab as an in-house incubator for innovation. The lab develops and tests innovative ideas in a structured way, processing its findings to the rest of the agency and its cooperative members. The lab's core team is made up of three professionals whose work seeks to influence the whole organization. The interviewee was Verena Krawarik, head of the *APA lab*. She said the initial goals of the media lab were to get a foothold in the digital age and to help *APA* gain the position of an innovative, digitally aware media company in Austria and internationally, as well as to invest in research and international exchange. Thus, the *APA lab* intends to be a "rapid action [and] reaction force" for innovative digital media products that develop new projects. In the beginning, *APA* was based on "design sprints" and included colleagues from across internal departments and sections, as well as "external guests." The *APA lab* shifted over the years to a stronger focus on the implementation of fields such as artificial intelligence and news automation. Market research and collaboration with the media industry are important elements of their strategy.
- Spain: The idea behind *El Confidencial Lab*, launched in 2013 by digital-only news outlet *El Confidencial*, was to set up a unit that would push innovation throughout the whole company in an integrated way. The emphasis was that the lab personnel would work with other colleagues from the main newsroom (about 150 staff) to avoid creating "an innovation silo" at the expense of the rest of the staff. About 35 people work for the lab, who are divided into several multidisciplinary teams (journalists, developers, and designers) of between three and eight people each. Teams' projects include branded content, which later became independent from the lab, AI, data journalism, audience development, users' research, and subscriptions. The interviewee was Juan Cía, chief product officer. *El Confidencial Lab* stands out for its use of flexible methods to improve many areas of the organization.
- United Kingdom: The *BBC News Labs* was launched in 2012 as part of the R&D (research and development) department with the aim of promoting innovation and boosting the *BBC's* leadership as a global news provider. This innovation incubator comprises a multidisciplinary staff of over 20 professionals with assorted profiles and training, which is one of the keys to its operational success. They include software engineers, experts in natural language, robotics, and artificial intelligence, as well as journalists with technical experience, designers, and a social media manager. The interviewee was David Caswell, executive product manager. The rationale for the creation of the lab was the need to adapt to the changing media market and digital transformation. Caswell explained that *BBC* journalist Matt Shearer created the lab as a small project, and it quickly became successful. "Matt brought together different parts of the organization to make it permanent as an innovation department that

served the whole of the *BBC*, which is a crucial aspect,” says Caswell. He underlines that the lab has a connection with multiple departments at the *BBC*, as some of the funds for the lab come from these departments and areas.

Aims of the innovation

The core objective of the *APA lab* was to develop prototypes and new products, and to generate digital innovation within the company and for its members. Another goal was to experiment with new ideas and test them quickly, also with the customers. Thus, the improvement of their news offer was a central goal. The lab contributed to developing strategies to enhance the quality of the content and to facilitate the work life of news editors and journalists. On an institutional level, its objective was to ground the *APA* as an innovative and progressive entity that served its members. *APA* focused on research on digital innovation and on the provision of background information internally and for its associated companies.

El Confidencial Lab's main objective was “delivering the best possible content with the best possible customer experience,” explained Juan Cía. The lab, Cía said, was a structure within the news outlet “because all organizations need structures and departments with specific budgets.” The lab underwent a transformation whereby it was internally “disappeared” so that its methods and skills could be adopted by the whole organization. Thus, at the operational level, the laboratory was conceptually killed off because all the lab teams were fully integrated into the newsroom, working for the success of *El Confidencial*. Management emphasized the need to provide value to the whole organization and its users based on a strong teamwork culture. “You cannot add value to the proposal if you do not work as a team. We need professionals from diverse backgrounds that design a value proposition with different approaches working as a team,” argued Cía.

BBC News Labs' key goal was to develop a portfolio of innovations that would increase an investment program in digital news products and journalistic tools as well as improve its audience reach. The lab also sought to be more inclusive. Caswell explained, “since the *BBC* is one of the most relevant media organizations worldwide, we need to be understood by all kinds of audiences.”

Supportive conditions

APA lab received clear backing from its management, which supported its development within the company from the outset. This commitment was reflected in the allocation of a specific budget and resources to carry out its mission. Besides, “*APA* has strongly promoted a culture of innovation linked to the mission of the company as a quality news provider in Austria,” said Verena Krawarik.

At the strategic level, innovation was strongly connected to APA's platform strategy, because they no longer had individual products and projects but those that are played out on platforms with a strong cooperative value. Krawarik argued their research was based on identifying international benchmarks, and then they searched for service providers who could support them. They promoted a solid set of innovation skills, i.e., in digital product development, so that they aligned with the company strategy.

El Confidencial Lab was not just one team but was composed of various teams embedded throughout the company. It never pretended to be an isolated "silo," as they had a product team embedded in the editorial staff. This team had constant meetings, during which the product was defined with commercial and editorial staff. Thus, *El Confidencial's* newsroom made a value proposition for its readers with support from the lab. Innovation teams are in permanent contact with the newsroom and develop products that will change the media reality in the future. "Innovation is not a process where someone will have a super-happy, super-disruptive idea that makes billions the next day. That is the exception. At its core, the value is in the day-to-day business and how you change processes, teams, and objectives," argued Juan Cía.

The *BBC News Labs* was launched as the organization realized that more intensive innovation was required. Management invested in the lab because they had seen how important innovation could be for the *BBC's* future. For example, David Caswell highlighted the production of automated journalism during the United Kingdom's 2019 general election and how they had started prototyping with automated journalism stories. "The impact has been more indirect and into the news product, based on the innovation that has been demonstrated by *BBC News Labs*," said Caswell.

Obstructive conditions

The *APA* management explained that changes in staff members were an obstructive condition in the development of the lab. Restructurings were frequent. "Somehow it was clear that we would have to change our position because this department would no longer exist with its actual size and staff," Verena Krawarik emphasized.

Lack of funding for some projects was also an issue. "Not every cool idea finds a sponsor who will invest in its development in the long term. Some topics exist as prototypes, but they will never become products," Krawarik added.

At *El Confidencial*, the main drawback was that some experiments or projects launched by the lab team did not reach real value propositions. "Labs tend to die because their innovation doesn't translate into anything," argued Juan Cía. He added that the ideal is for innovation would become an integral part of the newsroom, not just a goal for labs that tended to become isolated "silos." Experimentation meant that professionals could make mistakes and learn from them, as they faced various problems and had multiple tools to solve them.

At *BBC News Labs*, the biggest barrier was the difficulty that the editorial leadership had with abstract thinking and a broad mindset. Caswell argued that in Silicon Valley companies, senior leaders tend to be engineers or people with an analytical business background who just think in terms of patterns, principles, and fundamentals. “Whereas I think with editorial people, there is much more of an artisanal approach to things. So, they think in terms of producing content for today and that means getting the news as quickly as possible,” he added.

Caswell thought a more holistic approach was required in that environment: “The ability to stand back, look at the past, the future, and the trajectory of the market, the audience, the technologies, your organization, and develop an abstract view about where it’s all going and what are the gaps and what you must do to fill them. That’s a difference of mindset,” he concluded.

In this regard, some managers have argued that the *BBC* is a large organization and has sufficient in-house talent to figure everything out, and it does not need to look externally. “I think that’s fundamentally wrong and I’m continually trying to get the *BBC* to look outside the walls a little bit more,” Caswell explained.

Societal impact

The *APA lab*’s main contribution helped stakeholders define and adapt to journalistic basic needs in a digital age. Labs are often too technical, but “the core must be the social impact: the journalistic values must remain. Certainly, there is a lot of technique on AI, Augmented Reality, or cloud computing, but the focus is journalistic,” argued Verena Krawarik.

In terms of society’s transformation, management at *El Confidencial Lab* linked the impact of their news content to their capacity to provide relevant information. The news organization’s key goal is to obtain information and publish it, which obviously generates relevant social change. “We produce truthful and useful articles so that people can make decisions; stories that show how to save on the energy bill, choosing this company or another or voting for this or that party [...] decisions that are valuable for their daily lives,” said Juan Cía.

The *BBC News Lab*’s work on format innovation and audience accessibility was the main benefit because they made journalism more accessible to everyone. Caswell explained: “Some of the most rewarding experiences at the *BBC* were watching people experiencing these new formats, suddenly realizing that there are formats accessible to them, like image galleries, data stories, and so on. They serve their news consumption needs.”

The *lab*’s staff also kept public service in mind. Some of their projects covering social and cultural issues were regarded as a paradigm of public service. “For commercial organizations, it is relevant to their economic impact on the bottom line. But from a public service point of view, the relevance is whether you are making a difference,” emphasized Caswell.

Conclusion

The Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project found that media labs tend to regard innovation as a strategy for developing projects effectively to enrich people's lives and solve their needs. Thus, innovation did not just mean creating something new but making an idea scalable, which could be the result of long research. Innovation strategies also sought to make their production more efficient in other areas of the organization to help journalists in their tasks.

Despite belonging to assorted organizational cultures and betting on diverse strategies, these media labs fostered innovation through a collaborative culture. Flexibility, autonomy, teamwork, constant experimentation, and the predisposition of members to share their knowledge were common. The media labs' culture created a comfortable environment for workers since they were given autonomy and were allowed to participate in the process of idea and project development. Thus, collaboration among lab members and with professionals from other departments in the organization was essential. Lab members shared a collaborative culture whose internal operating rules pursued the corporate mission, encouraged experimentation and creativity, and sought to achieve the maximum transfer of their production to other company areas and also society.

Media labs' innovation strategies stem from the idea that they must provide new ways to improve processes and products as well as to increase the value of the news brand. Innovative projects shared the challenge of being useful to the media outlets and to their audiences, helping to maintain their leading position in the journalistic field in their respective countries. A relevant challenge for these labs was to further spread their innovation beyond the media sector to society, extending their achievements to the professional and academic environment and to the general population.

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24 Membership models

Quality journalism? Pay up, please

Dámaso Mondéjar

Business model transformation has been a matter of paramount importance in the media industry (Nyre et al. 2017) because, since the beginning of the century, the newspaper industry has been immersed in a perpetual crisis. Bakke and Barland (2022) point out that, depending on the country, newspapers have lost between 25% to 50% of their revenues, circulation, and journalists.

The media have had to rethink their strategies. Since the early years of the 21st century, several companies have opted to move from the “Advertiser First Paradigm,” in which advertising revenues represented between 60% to 80% of the total, to the “Reader First Paradigm,” where the proportions are reversed (Bakke and Barland 2022). In this context, we speak of “engaged journalism,” which aims to “build and preserve relationships of trust between journalists and the public” (Green-Barber 2018, parr. 4).

The term “engagement” refers to the cultivation of deeper relationships that increase the loyalty of potential members or subscribers, which is where the membership model comes into play. Following Carpes da Silva and Sanseverino (2020), digital native media are the news organizations that have been best able to establish more meaningful and inclusive relationships. The membership model, moreover, welcomes “memberful routines” of activities that incorporate members and produce value for a news organization (Quamby et al. 2019).

In practice, there are few close definitions of the membership model. One of the most interesting approaches comes from the Membership Puzzle project (Zirulnick 2020), developed by New York University, which delved into the emergence of membership models in newspapers around the world. This research revealed that the models typically had three membership components. First, the strategy that “defines where membership fits into the vision for the medium” (Zirulnick 2020, parr. 6). Second, the aforementioned memberful routines. Third, a program, or “the product that someone interacts with when they become a member” (Zirulnick 2020, parr. 8). However, the research clearly showed that in the complex realm of business models, exact formulas are hard to find. Indeed, Zirulnick (2020) points out that some media with memberships do not yet have all three components, and even

those that do have them “present different levels of development.” Zirulnick also highlights that membership can be a complementary model for the media to obtain revenue from their audiences as well as to increase engagement, but attention must be paid to the various existing value propositions and the needs of each case. In general, as Zirulnick (2020) states, there are three main identifiable payment models consisting of subscriptions, membership, and donations, and they are not mutually exclusive. As Zirulnick (2020, parr. 40) argues, “[B]lended models are increasingly common.”

In this context, the research work of Eduardo Suárez (2020, p. 18), who concluded that the boundaries between models are increasingly blurred, is noteworthy. “Open vs closed is not the right framework,” he points out. Some news organizations with a membership model would run very hard paywalls, while newspapers with subscriptions would allow sampling opportunities through free trials, social, and search. “Open news organizations are more closed than you think, and vice versa,” Suárez notes.

Despite the difficult demarcation, the introduction of membership models was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations in three countries of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project (Germany, Spain, United Kingdom), following the research methodology outlined in Chapter 2. The following three case studies, which are very different in type, allow us to explore membership models as an innovation field and as a potential tool for the sustainability of media companies.

Case studies

These are the three case studies that are analyzed:

- Germany: *Steady* is a venture capital-funded media and technology start-up that develops technologies that are then available as platforms for other media start-ups and individuals to launch their own membership models. *Steady* was founded in 2016 as a spin-off of the cooperative *Krautreporter*, one of the paradigmatic examples of the membership model in the German newspaper market. Currently, more than 1,700 publishers are active on *Steady*. The interviewee was Sebastian Esser, co-founder of the initiative and product officer.
- Spain: *eldiario.es* is a digital native media (online newspaper) launched in 2012. The entity has stood out since the start for both its business strategy and membership model, which reached a peak during the Coronavirus lockdown by going from 36,000 to 56,000 members in a matter of weeks. The interviewees were Esther Alonso (director of marketing and development) and Ander Oviden (deputy director).
- United Kingdom: The legacy media the *Economist*¹ is a weekly publication that follows a model clearly closer to subscription than membership. However, the outlet’s strategies and relationship with the audience show the existence of a certain hybridization between the models. As described

earlier, the value propositions of successful media are complex and do not embrace just one revenue model. Therefore, we analyzed this case from the perspective of how a media business with subscriptions and a paywall can also adopt certain behaviors of being membership-based.

Aims of the innovation

The clear aim for implementing membership models was to find a sustainable business paradigm for the media. Sebastian Esser from *Steady* pointed out that media business models “are still very much characterized by a sender-receiver mentality.” The key, the interviewee argued, was to create a connection with the audience so that they were willing to pay. “That’s why it’s not called subscription, where you pay to access a set of content, but membership, where people connect with journalism to better understand the world,” Esser explained. He believed membership covered a classic journalism issue, in which journalists “join forces with the public to make independent journalism possible.”

This context of building trust in the media was also a catalyst for the Spanish case model, *eldiario.es*. “We wanted to break the credibility crisis, turn the tables and show that it was possible to restore that connection between journalism and citizens, but for that we needed a special newspaper recipe,” said Esther Alonso. All case studies on the membership model highlighted this ethical intentionality that went beyond the purely transactional.

The *eldiario.es* interviewees recognized there were very few media that had opted for the membership model, basically because it required a very specific “magic formula,” which included imitating the language and taking inspiration from other models more related to institutional settings and non-profit organizations. *Eldiario.es* decided to ask readers for an “economic and emotional involvement” in support of free and independent journalism. “The content is open to everyone, you don’t pay to read the content and you don’t build a paywall,” states Esther Alonso, marketing director of the newspaper.

In this sense, the model of *eldiario.es* differed from the others in that there was no obligation for readers to pay. Readers saw a paywall appear on their screen when they read more than ten articles in a month, but there was the opportunity to set the amount at “0 euros” (Escolar 2021). The intention of the newspaper was to communicate to the user the need to become a member but, at the same time, “not to leave anyone out because they cannot pay.”

The opposite occurs at the *Economist*. The interviewee recognized that the newspaper’s efforts were focused on subscriptions. Nevertheless, the *Economist’s* main aim was to generate a greater relationship with subscribers, and to this end, they employed the strategies of membership models, such as webinars, through which the audience could have a personal interaction. “On topics such as the war in Ukraine, inflation or the energy crisis, subscribers can listen to our main editors and can also send questions to be answered during the webinars.” The fundamental intention was to create as much

satisfaction as possible among those people who had decided to put their money into the brand. “The more we can offer subscribers and engage and involve them in our news process, the better,” concluded the interviewee.

Supporting conditions

In the German case, Esser claims that the main condition that allowed the *Steady* project to exist was external investment. This highlighted the differences between cases because *Steady* followed a model closer to a technology start-up than that of a media company as such and revealed differences in its financing strategies. Specifically, *Steady* received a grant of 350,000 euros from a *Google* fund supporting start-ups. “Without it, there would be no *Steady*,” Esser explained. Furthermore, he valued the membership model over other strategies, such as crowdfunding, which can be useful in the short term but “are not really a business model, but a round of investment.”

In *eldiario.es*, the interviewees pointed out that the factor that most contributed to the success of their membership model was the platform’s own ability to communicate sincerely with readers. This had been an outstanding feature, as other media were reluctant to talk face-to-face with their audiences, mainly due to strategic issues or “for lack of interest.” The pandemic had also been a decisive moment for the strengthening of its partnership model. Indeed, Alonso said that, in the midst of the home confinements, *eldiario.es* launched a new membership drive to convert more regular readers and, for the first time in its history, asked existing members to increase their membership dues. In a matter of two months, the platform gained 20,000 subscribers, and more than 90% of members increased their financial contribution to the newspaper in some way.

Finally, in the case of the *Economist*, changes in consumer habits had been a boost to reach new audiences. “The bigger audiences are out there on social media and we have new audiences discovering us on newsletters and through *Google* as well,” said an audience officer. For this reason, the incorporation of new profiles into the newsroom has also been crucial, such as the creation about five years ago of a digital news editor position or a large group of 20 people specialized in social networks and SEO.

Obstructive conditions

In the German case, Esser doubted the usefulness of the membership model for large media companies. Many of the successful initiatives of digital journalism had revolved around the economy of the creators, in principle outside the routines and models of the traditional press. Furthermore, Esser pointed out that one of the major barriers to entrepreneurship and the ability to implement this type of innovation was the inefficiency of government subsidies. “There are programs all over the place where things are funded, but we still don’t know exactly who will benefit and what the return will be,” the

co-founder of *Steady* lamented. The state would have to accept the deal “that it may not get this money back in the form of massive economic growth, but in the form of democratic performance.”

In the Spanish case, the most complicated obstacle to overcome was the idiosyncrasy of the Spanish market. Alonso said getting the audience to pay for information “regardless of the type of journalism, the newspaper and the method of payment” was extremely difficult. “We are still very immature when it comes to paying for journalism in general. Understanding that quality journalism has to be paid for is our unfinished business.” The membership model may have had some weaknesses compared to other payment models, such as subscriptions. Specifically, Alonso indicated that these other models “can play much more” with pricing or other transactional strategies. Also, another major barrier may revolve around market concentration. While on-demand consumption platforms such as *Netflix* or *Spotify* may have contributed to changing users’ mindset toward payment, the increase in the number of services available increases competition.

For the *Economist*, one of the major constraints was the difficulty for users to pay for news, especially in a digital context, which was not the norm for them. The interviewees also highlighted the competition, which “for *The Economist* is not just other news organizations, it’s also *Netflix*, *Spotify*, *Amazon* or anything that you might spend money on,” they explained.

Societal impact

The mechanisms behind the conception of an innovation, such as the membership model, point directly to the democratic functions of journalism. At *Steady*, the German content platform, Esser appreciated that the quality of journalism grew with a membership model. “If people are willing to pay, then they are saying that this journalism is important enough for them to pay. In other words, the business model has a good impact on the type of journalism that is produced,” Esser said. He added that “the old-fashioned business structure” of traditional media perpetuated self-interested behavior and lack of independence in German journalism. In contrast, the membership model, Esser felt, had considerably more democratizing potential. For *Steady*, the involvement of people in the project is fundamental. Keeping the audience in mind throughout the process, even before creating the journalistic product. “And not in a patriarchal, condescending way, but as sources,” concludes the interviewee.

At *eldiario.es*, the interviewees felt that, far from being a constraint, their membership network was a springboard for higher quality journalism, which implied a benefit for society. Specifically, the membership model, as the interviewees pointed out, would be less restrictive with information than other modalities, such as paywalls, whether hard or metered. A group of people voluntarily had decided to pay so that everyone had access to free content and, at the same time, sustained a journalistic brand with which they had connected at assorted levels (informatively, emotionally, ideologically).

“In our case we have to be especially careful with credibility,” says deputy director Andel Oliden, as the revenues of *eldiario.es* were already split 50/50 between advertisers and readers.

Concerning the impact that this model also had on the industry and journalistic production, *eldiario.es* was convinced that despite the demands of their members, it was always better to deal with them than with other stakeholders. Oliden also spoke of an improvement in the relationship with advertising. In this sense, membership models could be a good antidote to some negative journalistic practices, such as clickbait or the ruthless pursuit of internet traffic just to get more advertising revenue.

The *Economist*, in contrast, did not see a direct relationship between subscriptions and membership and democracy. In their case, they recognized that they had actively listened to their readers, but this did not imply that the audience was explicitly part of the news process. Even so, they did admit that generating feedback with the audience was positive and that there were currently other channels, such as newsletters, that facilitated this process.

Conclusion

The case studies analyzed within the framework of the JoIn-DemoS project provided insight into the changing and innovative role of membership models. In the digital era, in which the media faced an unprecedented crisis, and in which the audience was more involved in the production of information than ever before, the interconnection with readers has become crucial. Membership models appeared to be part of the solution by providing a space for the reader and engaging their interest in supporting quality journalism. However, achieving a solid membership base was an extremely complicated task.

The media faced markets that had already forgotten what it was like to pay for news. The barriers became higher when the membership model did not contain a transactional agreement, as would happen with a paywall where, if you did not pay, you could not get access to the content. On the other hand, the members had to be aware that they were contributing to the information remaining accessible to those who could not afford it. This meant that, as the analysis of the case studies explained, it was difficult to think of the membership model as a large-scale system that alone could guarantee the survival of the media.

Creating an intimate relationship between the newspaper and the audience required time and great communication efforts. However, once that had been achieved, there were signs of good health in news companies: accountability was given to the members, and the need to seek traffic at any price decreased, avoiding the risk of falling into clickbait practices. The cases studied revealed that members' high expectations of the newspaper are not a problem but a catalyst for producing higher quality content, even if sometimes the newspaper has to publish information that the reader does not like because it clashes with their ideology or biases.

In any case, the examples analyzed here have shown that membership models were a feasible option, but they also show the existing hybridization and the complex mechanisms behind the business models. In the case of the *Economist*, where despite considering itself an example of a subscription model, it occasionally displayed patterns of a membership model, such as active listening to members and the opening of communication channels.

Finally, important communication campaigns such as those that *eldiario.es* did for years, convincing tens of thousands of people of the importance of paying for journalism, were also carried out to attract new members. Thus, an important conclusion is that it is important to pay attention to the multiple ways in which a media outlet can carve its way to economic sustainability. Moreover, there is a societal impact on the adoption of such strategies. Memberships are part of a complex, increasingly user-based business model whose core is the generation of value for the audience. Ultimately, better-funded journalism could translate into higher quality and thus contribute positively to the democratic function of the profession.

Note

- 1 The interviewee in this case was anonymized.

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25 Newsletters

The renaissance of a valuable product to reach the audience

Dámaso Mondéjar

“Newsletters” are the order of the day. This traditional product, which first appeared in the 1980s (Jack 2016), is experiencing a renaissance in many businesses, including journalism. Charlotte Fagerlund (2016) indicates in an extensive report on the evolution of newsletters that the irruption of social networks was conceived for a while as a threat to email. New and better technology occupied users’ attention, but in a matter of a few years, it became clear that newsletters were far from dead. Instead, the use of email for content curation and information production has reached a phase of “maturity” (Pellicer 2018) but not aging.

Recent data show how newsletters are still an important product across countries. Some statistics from the case studies of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) project reveal (Digital News Report 2022 cited by Newman et al. 2022) that in Austria, 25% of respondents had access to information content via email newsletters. In Switzerland, 20% shared this pattern, and in Spain, the figure was 15%. Furthermore, it was not only the major media and established brands that attracted the attention of readers. In recent years, the emergence of paid newsletter platforms, such as *Substack* or *Revue*, has created opportunities for small content producers who, in some cases, have achieved revenues and popularity worthy of large newspapers (Newman et al. 2022). There are multiple factors as to why an outdated channel continues to be a reliable journalistic offer for various sectors of the audience. As some studies show, one of the keys to newsletters is that they offer finite content, which is particularly valued by readers (Suárez 2020).

The newsletter can also play a fundamental role in the evolution of personalized communication thanks to communicative elements, such as the inclusion of the name of the email receiver. They also give the media back their role as gatekeepers since they provide access to a place as intimate as the users’ mailbox without as many filters as would occur with social networks (Hendrickx et al. 2020). However, there are also some negative interpretations, as Guallar et al. (2021) in Spain reveal, where they saw how most media with newsletters curate content exclusively from their own newspaper,

reducing the number of sources. Against this background, this chapter analyzes three case studies of newsletters launched by news initiatives in Austria, Spain, and Switzerland.

Case studies

The use of newsletters was identified as one of the 20 most important innovations by the experts in three countries in the JoIn-DemoS project (Austria, Spain, and Switzerland), following the research methodology outlined in Chapter 2. These are the three analyzed case studies:

- Austria: *Falter* is a well-established weekly magazine whose newsletter has been a pioneer in gaining a foothold in the concentrated Austrian market. Its product, *Falter.morgen*, is a free newsletter distributed from Monday to Friday, focusing exclusively on Vienna. On the one hand, the paper reports on (hyper) local topics, and on the other hand, it picks up on topics that already exist in the *Falter* publishing environment, mainly related to politics, culture, and urban life. However, *Falter* also has other products distributed as newsletters. For example, *Falter.maily*, distributed “almost daily,” as the magazine explains, in which the editorial team makes a selection of the magazine’s most recent and relevant topics. There is also another newsletter called *Falter.natur*. This is a weekly newsletter in which the head of the nature department, Benedikt Narodoslowsky, and other members of the editorial staff provide the most important information on the topics of sustainability, the environment, nature, and agriculture. *Falter* is a rather small but very agile media house with innovative and motivated employees. This leads them to develop their products rather quickly. Indeed, its newsletter was conceived at the end of 2020, launched in 2021, and in just over a year, in June 2022, it had already reached 40,000 subscribers. *Falter.morgen* insists that it has a highly local focus that can select stories that would not be reported in larger daily and weekly newspapers. The interviewees were Martin Staudinger, head of *Falter.morgen*, and Florian Klenk, editor in chief.
- Spain: *Kloshletter* is a daily newsletter created in April 2017 and edited and distributed by a single journalist, Charo Marcos. In this initiative, users have access to a content curation system in which the five main news items of the day are explained, as well as a topic for further reading, other topics for quick perusal, and recommendations for leisure and culture. There is also a spin-off in the form of a podcast on *Spotify*, where a small group of journalists narrate in around five minutes the same news presented in *Kloshletter*. It is the first independent newsletter of general information to be published in Spain. In the media field, *Kloshletter* was a pioneer in not conceiving the newsletter as a distribution channel or a complementary product to a brand but as the backbone of the project. Indeed, this makes the newsletter the central element of its business model:

subscriber retention attracts companies to advertise in the emails they send. Marcos said around 50% of *Kloshletter*'s revenue comes exclusively from sponsorships. The other 50% comes from these spin-off products, which are still related to the newsletter format. Currently, *Kloshletter* has about 30,000 subscribers.

- Switzerland: *Heidi.news* is an online magazine focused on science and health journalism. *Heidi.news* was officially launched in May 2019 and began to exist precisely through newsletters. It had newsletters before its own website. Four newsletters exist, like “Le Point du jour,” “Le Point fort,” or “Heidimanche.” The project was launched by a small team of journalists and entrepreneurs, with philanthropic and mostly subscription support. Indeed, *Heidi Media SA*, the company that publishes *Heidi.news*, was created in 2017 by ten co-founders; it is mainly financed by readers and has no advertising. It offers various paid subscription formulas, as well as “exploration magazines,” which are distributed in print and sold individually (Kelly 2020). Subscription is free to most of its newsletters, although “Le Point du jour,” a daily summary of news written from around the world, is exclusively reserved for paying subscribers. The periodicity of the newsletters also varies. “Le Point fort” is distributed from Monday to Friday. In this newsletter, the magazine takes an in-depth look at a single current topic (from AI-related issues to the environment, politics, or health). “Heidimanche” is sent out on Sunday evenings only and reviews the most relevant news of the weekend. There is also a special newsletter: “Événements & offres.” It is sent out only a few times a year with the function of informing about events organized for *Heidi.news* readers and subscribers. The interviewee was a chief editor.¹

Aims of the innovation

In *Falter.morgen*, Austria, the main objective of newsletters was to acquire more readers. Despite being a brand that was already consolidated, the weekly magazine had a loyal community of readers but saw that it could go a step further, especially in the delivery of local information. “We needed to revive local information and, specifically, make online offerings to people here who want independent news from the city but can’t find it anywhere. And electronically, that means being in the mailbox every morning,” said Florian Klenk.

In the case of *Kloshletter*, in Spain, the objectives and the start of this innovation revolved around the potential of newsletters to strengthen relationships with users. “Newsletters are a fantastic way to connect with readers without intermediaries,” says Charo Marcos, founder of the project. However, in this case, the newsletter was also seen as a key content aggregator. In the wake of digitalization and the exponential increase of content on the internet, some of which was also likely to be fake, the creator of *Kloshletter* saw the need for an effective and finite system to summarize the most

important content of the day. This newsletter, she says, was born out of her own need to separate interesting information from uninteresting information to avoid “infoxication.”

Finally, in the case of *Heidi.news* in Switzerland, the germ of the project was to reach readers in a novel way. “We had to make ourselves known and go to the people. The newsletter was the best way to reach people,” says the interviewee. The newsletter was created before the magazine since it was considered that being low cost and “generating a direct relationship between the author and the reader” was the perfect entry barrier for a project that no one knew about yet.

Supporting conditions

The Austrian interviewees valued the spirit and positive dynamics in the magazine on a preexisting basis. “*Falter* was always distinguished by the fact that the staff came up with their own projects.” Chief editor Florian Klenk argued that, although resources were limited, the innovative spirit and the trial-and-error-philosophy were encouraged at the company: “We go to the field, we try and we start. Starting quietly is better than drumming. So you only drum when you take off. And then improve. See if it works and improve,” concluded Klenk.

In contrast, in the other two cases (*Kloshletter* and *Heidi.news*), the interviewees considered the pandemic a key element for the success of their innovation. In the Spanish case, Marcos defined the coronavirus crisis as a driver of innovation even “when it could have been lethal.” *Kloshletter* was conceived with the intention of funding itself through sponsorship. When the disease reached its peak, newspapers around the world saw their advertising revenues plummet.

At the same time, however, *Kloshletter* began to grow more than expected because readers’ need for reliable, concrete, and concise information had been awakened. “I get constant feedback from my subscribers, and during the hardest months of the pandemic they told me that they needed to be informed,” says the creator of the newsletter. She notes that, for many subscribers, *Kloshletter* was even their only means of obtaining information during those weeks, as they could not stand the “constant bombardment about COVID” and the “extremely high pressure” of being locked up at home. In order to survive, *Kloshletter* was able to withstand the hardest economic bumps during the pandemic thanks to the preagreements it had signed prior to the onset of the disease. Subsequently, with a high rate of subscribers, the *Kloshletter’s* market recovered.

In the Swiss *Heidi.news*, the organization appealed directly to the nature of their content and how – unexpectedly in their estimates – in just one year, interest in their subject matter had skyrocketed. “When you launch a media about health and science and a year later a global pandemic breaks out, it is an important condition that explains the development of your media, for example in the year 2020,” the chief editor explained.

But it is not enough to simply provide scientific information at a time when there is widespread demand. It is a matter of finding the best packaging for such information, something that *Heidi.news* was able to do. In this sense, the chief editor considered that the newsletter, just like print journalism offerings, was not designed to be constantly updated; quite the opposite of online offerings, such as those found on news websites. This aspect that in the past could be considered a disadvantage would now be an incentive for its consumption. “It’s a stop, a pause,” says the interviewee who, again, valued the concept of finitude as a crucial element for the success of their newsletter, essentially for its ability to display accurate, simple, and concrete information in the ocean of information in which users find themselves.

Obstructive conditions

According to the media analyzed, the barriers that had obstructed the launching of their newsletters varied considerably from one case to another. In the Austrian case, interviewees of *Falter* named organizational and resource issues as obstacles. As they explained, the company has undergone a transformation process, also of a business nature: “*Falter* has always been a very small company with little money. And it has never been able to spend money on large management consultancies or large processes,” chief editor Klenk lamented.

At *Kloshletter*, Marcos pointed out that the biggest barrier they had to face was the market’s inexperience with an informative product based on a newsletter. Charo Marcos asserted that she had many doubts about whether it would be acceptable for the public and advertisers, basically because there had, as yet, been nothing similar in Spain. It was an opportunity but also a risk: “When I started with the newsletter it was Martian. People thought I had become a fool because people were [writing] their algorithms, AI and metaverses and I started writing emails, which seemed antique,” she explained.

In Switzerland, on the other hand, the interviewee said that one of the most decisive obstacles for not having greater success was the growing competition of newsletters nationwide; moreover, with extensive free offers. They also pointed to other drawbacks, such as the lack of budget, resources, and physical constraints imposed by the pandemic since at the key moments of the brand’s expansion, the pandemic was at its worst.

Societal impact

The impact generated by newsletters can be seen from two perspectives: societal and the journalistic industry. In the first case, in Austria, *Falter’s* chief editor maintained that journalism must exercise that classic function of being a “watchdog” and that, nowadays, this function is more necessary than ever due to digitalization. The newsletter was another means of providing truthful

information to the public, although experts in *Falter* argued that it was not enough simply to compile news but that it must be based on analysis and rigor, as well as on public service.

Klosbletter was convinced of the relevance of their product from an editorial point of view. The newsletter connected with the public, but the determining factor was that this product provides users with access to valuable information. Newsletters helped to separate the needle from the haystack, to discern what is information from what is not, and, as Marcos, the creator of the brand, explained, this was linked to the democratic function of journalism.

In Switzerland, the interviewee had a similar opinion because they were convinced that their newsletter, although in a modest way, contributed to improving the democratic quality of journalism. “When there is the media, there are readers. It means that we participate in the mixing of ideas,” they pointed out. They affirmed that the newsletter allowed an author to speak directly to the readers and generate a new gateway to valuable information, and that in its context, there were various sources of information that helped to improve the quality of journalistic work.

In terms of industrial impact, the interviewees considered that, in some way, they had contributed to the revitalization of newsletters as a popular information product. *Falter* believed that its newsletter initiative, although it had not contributed to inventing new products, “has helped to initiate many things” in the Austrian industry, said Klenk.

At *Klosbletter*, Marcos pointed out that the newsletter has been positive for newspaper companies because it has enabled them to free themselves from some of the chains with platforms that are not journalistic. In this regard, they believed that for a long time, the media had relied on social networks for the distribution of their content. This had two effects: the first was that the economic return had not been as high as expected, as companies such as *Facebook* and *Google* had emerged as the main rivals for advertising revenue. Second, social networks contributed to a lot of brand noise. In other words, readers may read the news but are not able to distinguish the news outlet that published the information. In Marcos’ opinion, newsletters were an opportunity to establish deeper connections with the users without intermediaries.

Finally, at *Heidi.news*, the interviewees pointed out that multiple media outlets launched newsletters after their lead. However, they did not believe that this was solely and exclusively due to the success of their brand but because these companies have now found the right moment to try this format, unlike previous projects that did not have continuity. In any case, they did sustain their contribution to the increased popularity of this product.

Conclusion

The analyses of these three cases about newsletters in the JoIn-DemoS project led to the conclusion that it was a valuable product to enhance the reach and the positive impact of media outlets. The promoters of these initiatives had

evaluated that newsletters were an excellent way of creating bonds and accessing the audience in an intimate way. They also highlighted that, especially in the face of digital media's tendency to publish endless feeds, readers appreciated a product that was finite and manageable. Through newsletters, users might access information without the usual anxiety and mistrust generated by the excess of information and the constant stimuli caused by digitalization. Media practitioners admitted that the newsletter was an outdated channel and that there were other technologies that could have generated even greater interest among users. But it was also noted that email is still a key tool in the news routine of the population. Email inboxes, therefore, offer great potential for journalists.

Newsletters are also an interesting component of the business model. In the Spanish case, it was directly the product that guaranteed the survival of the company because, although there were other products derived from it, subscribers and, therefore, sponsorships were concentrated in the newsletter. In the cases of Austria and Switzerland, newsletters were presented as an entry point to obtain new subscribers. In most of the examples, access to them was free of charge and provided a sample of the content produced by the media company. However, at *Heidi.news*, for example, there was even a newsletter whose access was reserved solely for paying customers. Indeed, in recent years, its main source of paid subscriptions were its newsletters, followed by *Google* and then *Facebook* (Kelly 2020).

Finally, as with other innovations, such as the growth of teleworking or the emergence of science journalism, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a driver, mainly because of the increased interest of the audience in information and their intention to seek new channels through which to access content. The interviewees also considered that the newspaper industry had not been oblivious to these consumer habits and that newsletters were experiencing a second life with interesting benefits for the media. The main one is the avoidance of intermediaries and the possibility of creating an intimate relationship with readers, in which the brand name is always in their minds. This is beneficial for the fight against disinformation and the reinforcement of the democratic role of journalistic media organizations.

Note

- 1 Anonymity was granted to the Swiss interviewees.

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Part V

**Journalistic innovations and
their socio-political
framework conditions:
a five-country comparison**



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26 Media systems on the meta-level of change

How economy, tech development, and media policy create the framework for innovation in journalism

Andy Kaltenbrunner

Introduction

In a world of ever-new challenges of global communication and more, the comparative view across borders is as important as ever (Esser and Pfetsch 2004, 384). After all, as the authors argue,

researchers can benefit from comparative research by using it as an instrument for analyzing processes of transnational diffusion and integration of politics, communications, economics and technologies in a globalized world where approaches confined to isolated regions are increasingly deemed parochial.

(Esser and Pfetsch 2004, 385)

Yet, comparative media and journalism research still progress on thin ice in the context of adopting innovations. Practitioners in, and observers of, the media industry each perceive the aspects that constitute and define a journalistic innovation in their own ways. The diffusion of innovations, especially the technological forms, spreads across continents at a variety of speeds and times. For example, in the expert interviews for our research, podcast production was mentioned particularly frequently in Austria, Germany, and Spain as a most exciting journalistic innovation of the late 2010s, and declared sometimes in Switzerland, while colleagues from the United Kingdom no longer attribute any innovation value to podcasting, as it has been established there for much longer. Indicators of economic development differ significantly from one country to another, whether inside the European Union (EU; Austria, Germany, and Spain) or outside (Switzerland and the United Kingdom). Despite the pervading oversight of Brussels, concrete media policy for EU member states is expressly a national matter, as it is for the two nonmembers. The pressure to use innovations to respond to changes in audience behavior has regional prerequisites. In southern Europe, during the peak 20th century circulations of the print press, no more than a third of the population read newspapers every day. That readership statistic has

halved in the 21st century. Likewise, in the German-speaking D-A-CH region of Europe, readership has also shrunk significantly, but it started from a readership of 70% in the last century.

In the research project *Journalism Innovation in Democratic Societies* (JoIn-DemoS), we have identified those areas in which innovations in journalism are located (see the chapters in Part IV of this volume and also Meier et al. 2022). This chapter analyzes the ways that the diversity of media systems and their economic and political basis on the macrolevel influence the differences and commonalities of innovations. The findings from more than 100 expert interviews on these questions about systemic aids and hurdles for media innovation form the primary basis of this analysis. Key data on the economic and political conditions in the five detailed country reports (see Chapters 3–7) form the secondary and supporting analysis.

The framework of comparative innovation research

For our comparative research project, we needed to include the model media systems that Hallin and Mancini (2004a) delineate. The United Kingdom is representative of the “liberal model,” which is “characterized by a relative dominance of market mechanism and of commercial media” and is also called “Atlantic” because of the sociocultural and economic bridges to the United States (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 11). We apply the “polarized pluralist” or “Mediterranean” models with a strong political left-or-right orientation of companies and journalism and a strong state regulatory power to Spain (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 11). We cluster the D-A-CH countries of Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH) as the “democratic corporatist model” (with some comparability to Scandinavia). This model is characterized by independent private media but with social partnership proximity to political, ideological, religious, and other interest groups. There is limited state regulation of the media market but relatively strong protection of public broadcasting (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 194, 197). This 20-year-old systematic assignment of state media realities to three larger media systems as “ideal types” was conducted in the traditional, methodological manner, like that of Max Weber, who argues it is better to order the “infinite manifoldness” (Weber 1922, 4) through science. The strength of such systematization relies on the self-awareness of its weaknesses, limits, and volatility. Already in 2004, Hallin and Mancini refer to trends that can change any classification, for example, a continuous “Americanization” of media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004b), which was discussed in Europe at the turn of the millennium. Many scholars perceive Hallin and Mancini’s arguments as a threat to losing cultural independence and journalistic traditions and as an unwelcome alignment from the North Cape to Sicily through the “commercialization of the public sphere” (Karmasin et al. 2001). Hallin and Mancini (2004b, 38) see this commercialization as “the most powerful force for homogenization and globalization within the media system,” especially in a radio and TV

market increasingly oriented toward economic profit. Such a takeover of the “liberal model” would be made possible by media policy *laissez-faire* or even specifically promoted by political support. The activity between media economics and media policy of Silvio Berlusconi, an Italian TV tycoon with the powers of a prime minister, in phases between 1994 and 2011, was seen as a worrying personified case study.

While this trend of commercialization was taken very seriously, in contrast, the World Wide Web, already present for a decade in 2004, was mentioned only in passing by Hallin and Mancini (2004a, 2004b) as a possible factor of major change. Research pointing in the right direction on the foreseeable social upheavals due to digitalization and the internet, such as in *The Rise of the Network Society* (Castells 1996), were hardly considered in Hallin and Mancini’s media models. That technological development for journalism, which “tends to create a global culture of technical expertise that is relatively separate from national political cultures” (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 261), was raised as an issue for future generations: “The homogenization produced by technological innovation mainly involves younger professionals who are more exposed to innovations.” This was in line with many assessments in the media industry, which, 20 years later, we know were short-sighted. Digitization and its many facets quickly became a topic of discussion for all generations, and in the expert interviews for our research project, they are now mentioned in all participating countries as central factors of change and drivers of possible innovations for journalism.

The extent to which innovation and its interpretation are ever children of time and place can be seen by looking at the work of one of the predecessors of innovation research, Joseph A. Schumpeter. His conceptualization of innovation as the result of new combinations of existing ideas by many entrepreneurs was originally formulated in 1911, in German, based on the experience in Austrian and German economic developments. Economic development is not uniform because “the new combinations (...) are not evenly distributed through time,” Schumpeter (1949, 223) states after the worldwide Great Depression in a revised version of his “Theory of Economic Development.” After moving to the United States, Schumpeter’s work *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* was published during the Second World War in 1942. Schumpeter’s understanding of innovation is based on the profound reading of Marxist theory on production conditions and the following analysis and how industries in capitalism self-renew. Any capitalist industry that wants to maintain its existence at all costs is doomed to die through “creative destruction.” This catchword is today one of the magic formulas also for understanding upheavals of the media industry and journalism in the 21st century (see, e.g., Ruß-Mohl 2009). Examples of the ways existing ideas, concepts, processes, and technologies are resorted and reassembled in order to remain or become economically successful with such innovation can also be found in many of our hundred case studies of individual innovation projects in the five countries. Indications of the ways new journalism can best rise from the ashes

are still rare in the still-saturated (Northern and Western) European media markets. But they do exist.

Schumpeter's work on the emergence of innovation in seemingly incalculable cycles was also shaped by the political, geographic, and temporal environment. He held civic participation in rather low esteem as a factor in changing the cycles of the market economy. After all, he had seen the rapidity with which democracies can be erased. Schumpeter claims entrepreneurial elites and creative entrepreneurs are the decisive operators of innovation. Today, in the interactive era of millions of digital "producers" of permanent life in networks (García Avilés 2015), we see that innovation in journalism depends not only on elite groups but also on the conditions of digitization and globalization, very much on civil society participation. "Audience engagement" (Meier et al. 2018), initiatives for more direct "citizen participation" in new dialogue formats, and "crowdfunding" as a collective basis for new (local and investigative) journalism are frequently mentioned in our expert interviews in the five countries as important innovations of the decades having a social impact. New forms of citizen participation in the journalistic process are particularly important in Germany and Switzerland. "Corporatist" media systems with a traditionally stronger welfare state-community tend to integrate the audience more strongly in journalism development.

Such current perceptions of innovation are based on the historical-cultural roots of the respective media and political systems. Innovation in journalism has never been politically agnostic. Technology innovation in media cannot simply be evaluated independently of market-structures. Its influence on the media system "cannot be separated from the social context in which technologies are adopted and implemented" (Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 260). The invention of the cheap "Volksempfänger" radio ("people's receiver") was spectacular in Germany (and subsequently in Austria) in the 1930s for the implementation of mass broadcasting. At the same time, it was the invention of the central propaganda tool of National Socialism. The Volksempfänger was the tail end of the idea and development of two-way broadcasting via radio, in which each receiver could, at least theoretically, also be a transmitter (Brecht 1992). It was not until the World Wide Web that we saw this old dialogic principle again as a central part of the innovative media upheaval brought about by the internet. The easily possible "sharing" of information and knowledge became part of our communication world again (Jarvis 2011). Innovation research thus also poses questions of ideology, such as "[r]esearch into media innovations increasingly becomes research into societal change itself" (Bruns 2014, 18).

On the macrolevel, the fundamentals of these social changes can be examined accordingly in three media-related fields relevant to the predisposition of innovation in journalism:

The first was economics. JoIn-DemoS compared the economic framework on a national level. Especially in the 2010s and 2020s, we witnessed what

Kaltenbrunner (2015, 17) describes as “shifts in the audience and advertising market which have been eroding the legacy media’s financing, their business models and their investment in journalism.”

The second was technology. JoIn-DemoS analyzed the catalytic aspect of technology developments as a key driver of a fast-changing economy and new developments in media and journalism since Tim Berners-Lee’s HTML invention popularized the World Wide Web. Today, the “digital disruption” (Christensen 1997) must also be read as part of a targeted innovation strategy (Christensen 2015).

The third was policy. JoIn-DemoS analyzed the variations visible “significantly across countries because politics and policy have made a difference” (Humphreys 1996). Media policy is undoubtedly of great importance for shaping media structures, which subsequently predispose (journalistic) mediation performance and thus the possibility of producing a critical democratic public sphere.

Is it the economy...?

In 1992, Bill Clinton’s strategists coined the slogan “[It’s] the economy, stupid,” a catchphrase in the US presidential campaign, to be more focused on understanding the economic situation as a priority for understanding change. Also, in media innovation research, the first topic to examine in country comparisons is the key economic data (for more data, see Chapters 3–7). For example, abbreviated comparable data for the project’s five countries are as follows. The gross domestic product per capita in Switzerland is almost twice as large as in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria and thrice as high as in Spain. Unemployment rates in 2013 showed 27% in Spain but only 7.7% in Germany. National investments for research and development as a basis for determining the rankings in the Global Innovation Index 2022, which has Switzerland (1st), the United Kingdom (4th), Germany (8th), Austria (17th), and Spain (29th). Current geopolitics with consequences for innovation capability are also translated into true-to-life figures: Brexit caused each UK household to lose an average of 1,000 GBP in income per year. The performance and development of European media systems is usually also measured in comparison with trends overseas. At the start of our key observation period on innovation development, in 2010, the Pew Research Center wrote in its annual “State of the News Media” report for the United States, “The losses suffered in traditional news gathering in the last year were so severe that by any accounting they overwhelm the innovations in the world of news and journalism” (Pew Research 2010). Europe saw such economic developments in the US media industry as harbingers of developments on the Old Continent. Even in the comparatively stable, predominantly German-speaking D-A-CH region, crisis reports on journalism developments in the 2010s became increasingly condensed (Hanitzsch et al. 2019). The continuous erosion of old revenue models of established media

houses was identified as a critical development by the regulatory authority in Switzerland in 2014 (BAKOM 2014). Cost-cutting programs in Austria led to the loss of a quarter of journalistic jobs (Kaltenbrunner et al. 2020, 81), which the interviewed experts viewed as hostile to innovation. Traditional print media production during the 2010s declined sharply in the United Kingdom, with total daily newspaper circulation falling by more than 40%; the comparable statistic for Spain was a fall of 80% by 2023.

Ownership concentration processes have been a common consequence in such scenarios. The question of whether mergers were inevitable to achieve viable company sizes was already being asked by media research before any digital disruption (Kopper et al. 1994, 38). During our core research decade of the 2010s, the five countries experienced not only reductions in the size of their media markets but also media ownership concentration. In Spain, the Italian Mediaset group, with its Spanish flagship Telecinco, bought out smaller private broadcasters, allowing Mediaset to become the dominant group in the TV market (Riese 2017). In Germany, the Springer Publishing Group bought up private TV broadcasters and became a dominant player in the digital business, with many online ad portals and venture investments in nonjournalistic digital start-ups. By contrast, the traditional print business of the tabloid giant Bild-Zeitung contributed less than half of the group's revenues (around 3 billion euros).¹ Austria has had a highly concentrated ownership market since the late 1980s (Steinmaurer 2002). The regionally strong Styria owner of the daily *Kleine Zeitung* took over the national *Die Presse*, a magazine group and the *WirtschaftsBlatt*, which was closed soon after. The private Swiss media market is dominated by four large groups (Tamedia/TX Group, NZZ, CH Media, and Ringier) but experienced the loss of regional print titles and a concentration of journalism ownership in a few centralized newsrooms, which must serve increasingly weak regional partners. Similar trends were also evident in the United Kingdom. The loss of regional newspapers, ownership concentration, and the growing commercial influence on editorial content resulted in a "high risk" for media pluralism finding for the United Kingdom as early as 2016 in the annual EU "Media Pluralism Monitor" (Dzakula 2016). Since Brexit, the situation has become even more difficult for the media industry and independent journalism.

A common feature of all the media systems studied is, therefore, that increasingly fewer owners, as the media elites, have a decisive influence on the development of fewer remaining media titles. This shows the opposite face of the traditional desire for a pluralistic system with media producers "many, and different from each other" as the ideal prerequisite for journalism that is "creative, free, and original" (McQuail 1987, 85ff).

Concentration of ownership and growth with a focus on fewer products alone is not a strategy for the future in economic terms. For example: Bertelsmann, by far the largest media group in Germany with 19 billion euros in sales, is aggressively asset stripping and reducing the numerous *Gruener+Jahr* magazine titles and laying off hundreds of employees. Austria's largest

publishing group, Mediaprint, owner of *Kurier* and the market-dominating *Kronen Zeitung*, and the owners of the large free newspapers *Österreich* and *Heute* would already be making losses without the often dubious advertisements from ministries and public-sector companies and without government subsidies (Kaltenbrunner 2021). The Spanish Mediaset/Telecinco-group announced in 2011 the first hundred layoffs at the same time as the takeover of smaller TV stations. Generally fewer titles in more concentrated newsrooms in print, TV, and radio brought the loss of 12,000 fixed journalistic jobs in Spain, about a quarter of the aggregate between 2008 and 2015. In legacy media, this is an ongoing trend. How much space and power were then and are now available for creativity, diversity, and new development in journalism for less traditional players under continuously difficult economic conditions?

This question was and is closely related to that of the quality of technology development. The willingness to accept digitization as a driving factor and to place an understanding of technology at the center of corporate strategy and newsroom (Küng 2008) varied, as our interviews showed, both individually and at the corporate level. In all the countries studied, journalism's oft-cited revenue crises were closely related to legacy media's loss of audience to new, digital, nonlinear media offerings. The sequence of events was time-delayed across the countries, but the sequence was the same: First, the printed daily newspapers and their publishers weakened, then print magazines and journals, and, finally, linear TV lost ever-larger market shares. The limited (time) budget for media consumption was redistributed. Key data on internet penetration in the countries we studied can only be presented here in cursory form to illustrate the clear trend: in Germany, the number of regular users of news websites rose from around 60% in 2010 to 70% of the population in 2020. In the United Kingdom, after an internet boost during the 2012 Olympic Games in London, online news overtook linear TV as the most important source of information for the British as early as 2015. Social media became the most important news medium for people under 30 years old everywhere (Newman et al. 2023, 12). Facebook, founded in the United States in 2004, was available in German only from 2008 and in Spanish only from 2009. By 2020, it had close to 3 billion users worldwide and over 30 million in Germany alone. One prerequisite for this was the expansion of the internet infrastructure throughout Europe. In the five observed countries, more than 80% of the population were regular users of the internet. In 2022, a good third of people in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (34.7%) had access to broadband internet. In Switzerland (49.9%), Germany (44.4%), the United Kingdom (41.3%), and Spain (35.2%) had access, even more than the OECD average.² Austria lags with 28.7% users of broadband internet.³ While 40% of the Swiss and 33% of Spaniards had more than 100 MB of internet access by the end of 2022, just 20% of Germans and only 10% of Austrians or Britons did so. For innovative concepts in online journalism, such as the expansion of moving image content, broadband internet connections are a key factor.

Whether and how to monetize digital engagement and new formats remains another challenge. Willingness to pay for news titles online, most of which still arrive as brands from long-established media, is still very low across Europe, except for Scandinavia (Newman et al. 2023, 18). This is also repeatedly cited in our interviews as an obstacle to innovative development. At the same time, advertising gives little hope on the European national level. According to industry estimates, 80% of online advertising revenues in Germany went to international platforms such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, Amazon.⁴ In Spain, about 70% of national advertising expenditure on the internet flowed overseas in 2019.⁵ In Austria, the dimension of these shifts could be measured more precisely for the first time because of a tax on advertising payments to international platforms introduced at the end of 2020: according to this, a larger share of Austrian advertising budget flows to the major US platforms, especially Google, Facebook, Amazon, and the Chinese TikTok than to all traditional Austrian media houses in print, radio, TV and their national and regional internet presences combined.⁶

Reaction to these fundamental changes at the macrolevel of the economic framework conditions of the media systems due to digital, global money flows was possible at the mesolevel of entrepreneurial decisions through innovative broadening of one's own digital journalistic portfolio and internationalization, for example. A well-known European large-scale experiment was the transformation of the Guardian. The Scott Trust, as the newspaper owner, made very large losses for a decade until the Guardian broke even again for the first time in 2018.⁷ The risky investment made a daily newspaper, only number seven in circulation in the United Kingdom, one of the international top five online information leaders with today around 350 million monthly visits to the website.⁸ But hardly any private shareholder would have accepted such losses for so long as the trust behind the Guardian did. Our interviews and case studies described the lack of financial resources and lack of long-term risk investment in innovation as the greatest obstacle to digital transformation and innovation.

But how much investment is needed to get customers to pay online? The online world experienced a stronger "rise of the subscription economy" only in the second half of the 2010s among the countries we studied, especially in the United Kingdom and Spain (Suárez 2020, 9). But we also found examples of successful new paywall strategies in D-A-CH countries at the end of the decade (see Chapter 14). The innovative development of completely new community and membership models for financing journalism was mostly more successful in completely new news portals, such as the relaunched international online Guardian or, in our case studies, the Spanish start-ups *ElDiario.es* or *ElConfidencial.es*. They even gained tens of thousands of additional paying members during the coronavirus pandemic from the beginning of 2020, as the interviewees explained. New business models and forms of data-driven audience engagement were some important case studies for innovations after 2010 in all the countries studied, with more examples in the

United Kingdom and Spain and some in the German-speaking center of Europe. In the United Kingdom, new online media such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism or the Bristol Cable emerged under member ownership. Less frequently, but nevertheless, such innovative community-funded projects emerged in German-speaking countries, such as Dossier in Austria; Correctiv in Germany, which also receives foundation money; or Hauptstadt in Switzerland.

These national media systems show large quantitative differences in the number of journalistic start-ups during the 2010s. Close to 3,000 online journalistic projects were identified by researchers in Spain in the decade (Salaverría et al. 2018). A great many of them were (hyper) local projects of individual journalists and digital developers or narrowly specialized channels. But some larger digital general interest projects such as *El Diario*, *El Confidencial*, or *El Español* became serious competitors of the established publishing houses. In German-speaking countries, there are (still) no comparable start-ups on this scale. In Spain, a very large number of new projects were also registered at the regional level. For example, of 256 online journalism portals counted in the Valencia region, around half were start-ups, from general interest local reporting to specialist portals with a range of topics from medicine to bullfighting (García-Avilés and Lugschitz 2022). Comparable densities of founders were not ascertainable in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, or Great Britain. Research stated the contrary: when starting new journalism projects, particularly high hurdles are set for founders in Germany (Buschow 2018). The concern that, consequently, regional “news deserts” could arise, as in the United States (Abernathy 2020), is also often expressed in the D-A-CH region. Surprisingly, initiating start-ups is particularly difficult in the “democratic corporatist model” under comparatively better conditions on the economic macrolevel than in southern Europe. The comparison with the Mediterranean “polarized pluralist model” as found in Spain is supposedly paradoxical: “Digital media, especially digital native media companies, proliferated even more when the economy was at its worst” (Salaverría and Martínez-Costa 2023).

... or rather media politics?

In the public perception, the role of media policy “often ekes out a shadowy existence” (Puppis 2023, 30). In some ways, it seems to be handled the way Schumpeter describes innovation development a century ago: as a rather discrete affair for knowledgeable industrial elites and some interested policy-makers. Yet, media politics is at the start of the decision-making process about national media structures, which in turn enable or obstruct professional journalistic production in the first place. The procedures of media politics and concrete media policy are still predominantly national matters in the EU states (as described in our country reports; see Chapters 3–7). This results in clear differences, even in the five countries we studied, concerning the

question of the supporting mechanisms for quality development and innovation in journalism. This usually receives more interest from the public in the regulation of public broadcasting. There has been a broad research substrate over the years (Thomaß 2007; Künzler et al. 2013; Schweizer and Puppis 2018), specifically on the financing issues and the media policy framework, which have a direct impact on the innovation potentials of public broadcasters.

This was also made clear in our interviews and case studies. In the United Kingdom, for example, the BBC's iPlayer has been in operation since 2007, and the corporation's experiments with new storytelling formats and also the news production for social media are international landmarks for innovation of journalism in the public sector. In Germany, a window was opened in 2016 in terms of media policy so that a new program network of ARD and ZDF, called Funk, could also reach young audiences on all (including social media) channels with quality-assured information in new formats. A structural change like that was impossible in Austria because any production by ORF for social media was tightly restricted by law. Narrow legal loopholes were used for almost partisan journalistic acts, such as the development of a 100-second news broadcast on Facebook, which was widely considered an interesting innovation. In northern and southern Europe, public broadcasters experimented much earlier than in the continental center. Media laboratories were established at the BBC (for digital test formats with research collaborations and new audience interactions) as early as 2008 and at the Spanish RTVE (for cross-media, interactive formats) in 2011. Those more frequent broadcasting innovation activities occurred with shrinking budgets, as in Spain, where public broadcasters had their advertising revenues cut entirely in 2010. The BBC lost about a quarter of its license fee during the 2010s. In the D-A-CH countries with relatively stable revenues, on the other hand, the options for digital experimentation and journalism innovation for public broadcasters were greatly reduced by media laws. The question of how much innovation is possible in public media, "with new responsibilities added to existing ones" (Van den Bulck 2021, 322), was still answered differently by media policy at the national level. This depends not least on political majorities and their positioning concerning private-sector broadcasting in the dual system. While the market for private TV providers in Germany was wide open from the mid-1980s, Austria followed with licensing for private channels only around 2000. Thus, for a long time, the private TV market had very little room to maneuver. Accordingly, in Austria, the establishment of Puls24 in 2019, a subsidiary of the German ProSiebenSat.1 Group, founded as a permanent news channel, was assessed as a relevant journalistic innovation on the national level. The format of 24-hour TV news has long existed in Germany (ntv since 1992) and the United Kingdom (Sky News since 1989).

Publicly, media policy regulation of broadcasting is discussed more than for the traditional publishing markets. Coming to terms with government subsidies and international comparison in the private media sector is more a topic of research expertise (Murschetz 2013) and internal industry disputes.

In the five countries we studied, media policy intervention through direct financial support measures for publishers and private broadcasting was most pronounced in Austria. Since the 1970s, this has been an attempt to preserve the traditional print media system for publishers. The closeness between political decision-makers and media houses, which has been maintained over decades with such subsidies and indirect support through advertising payments (Kaltenbrunner 1998; Kaltenbrunner 2019) is also striking in comparison with Germany and Switzerland, the two other examples from the same “democratic corporatist” media system, according to Hallin and Mancini (2004a).

In Germany (2020/2021 and 2023, respectively), two separate government coalitions proposed entirely new press subsidies. More than 200 million euros were to benefit the distribution of print media in particular, however these plans were withdrawn. Subsidy models were sought that would ensure journalistic independence and state neutrality, especially in precarious local and regional journalism (Cornils et al. 2021). A central point of criticism at the time was the lack of support for (digital) innovations. The interests of media producers were clearly divided: while 93% of German print publishers would find distribution support very useful, 67% of digital publishers advocate start-up support (DIW ECON 2022, IV). Very high barriers to start-ups in journalism were identified (Buschow and Wellbrock 2020), although the need and goals of innovation funding for journalism have long been described conclusively (Buschow 2022).

In Switzerland, an attempt to tie support for both legacy media and start-ups failed because of the citizens’ rejection. In a referendum in 2022, most citizens voted against a corresponding bill. One plausible hypothesis is that the opposition was directed more against payments to large media corporations than against start-up assistance for new journalism.

In recent years, there have been rather modest approaches to targeted support for journalism and innovation on the national levels. In the United Kingdom, the government-commissioned so-called “Cairncross Review” (Cairncross 2019) proposes, among other measures, the introduction of continuous innovation funding to support journalism. This eventually resulted in one-off, start-up grants of a maximum of £100,000 for 20 new journalistic projects. This “Future News Pilot Fund” was then discontinued by the government. In Germany, programs were launched by media authorities (“Landesmedienanstalten”) in several federal states, primarily to fund training, coaching, and consulting for journalistic start-ups. In Austria, the city of Vienna introduced the “Wiener Medieninitiative” (“Vienna Media Initiative”) in 2020, the first journalism innovation funding program open to established media of all types and journalistic start-ups. Around 20 journalistic innovation projects every year, selected by an independent international jury, are financially supported with a maximum of 100,000 euros, and dozens of new journalistic ideas are supported with small-scale subsidies for developing prototypes and coaching.⁹ At the same time, at the national level in Austria,

new highly endowed funding programs, such as 54 million euros in 2022 for the “digital transformation” of media, exclusively support already established media houses and thus make the entry barriers higher for all media businesses, as the expert interviews in Austria also show. In Switzerland, start-ups can only hope for support from foundations and private investors after the withdrawal of the media subsidies, which the state had recently proposed but which the citizens had rejected. Journalistic start-ups rank especially high on our list of relevant innovations for the Swiss Confederation. In Spain, there are no state media subsidies worth mentioning on a national level for either established media or innovative projects. Those hundreds of viable digital journalism start-ups in the 2010s managed to get off the ground on their own as local one-person blogs, local news networks, or large digital information providers. Spanish media policy offered neither encouragement nor hindrance.

Schumpeter (1949, 229) would not be surprised by this “appearance of entrepreneurs in clusters.” In his theories of how the creatively reassembled becomes innovation, he assumes that committed pioneers are always pathfinders and magnets for other entrepreneurs. They remove hurdles and provide thought-provoking impulses for the ensuing innovative cycles beyond their own narrow industry. This was already the case in the United States well before 2010 with tech development in California and beyond. Through our research in the five European countries, we only identified the “first leaders” of innovation in journalism, by whom Schumpeter (1949, 229) argues “the economic system is drawn more rapidly [...] into the process of technological and commercial reorganization which constitutes the meaning of periods of boom.” Such a renewal capacity of journalism on its own would be good news. The increased commercialization of the media system predicted by Hallin and Mancini and many media economists at the turn of the millennium is an evidenced framework condition. Competition has become digital and global. National media policy, which still plays a central role in European media market development, has not yet found its role in effectively supporting innovation in any of the media systems we have studied.

Conclusion

Economic and socio-political conditions play decisive roles in the development of innovation in journalism, as our research showed in all five countries studied, where the conditions for innovation at the macrolevel are often described by the interviewees as more obstructive than beneficial.

Global digital competition continuously puts established media companies under pressure nationally, initially in the print media sector and then in the linear broadcasting sector. In all countries, legacy media experienced continuous audience losses and an outflow of a huge part of national advertising revenues to the large digital platforms in the United States. This resulted in a

reduction of media titles and high losses of journalistic jobs. Developing innovations at all levels of journalistic production thus became a particular challenge for management and journalists in the 2010s.

Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, all “democratic corporatists” (Hallin and Mancini 2004a), with favorable national economic data and a strong publishing industry, reacted more slowly to measures for the digital transformation of legacy media than in the United Kingdom’s “liberal” model and Spain’s “polarized pluralist” media system. Strong concentration in media ownership provided additional transition time for large industry groups. In Germany and Switzerland, government initiatives to introduce high subsidies, especially for the publishing industry, partially to foster innovation, failed politically. But also strong, direct economic intervention by the state, as in the case of Austria, could stop neither the financial losses of legacy media nor journalistic jobs. On the contrary, research shows that subsidies for legacy media and their traditional business models at the national level can hinder and prevent the entry of innovative projects as competitors. In the United Kingdom and Spain, where such direct government subsidies have never been relevant, a variety of innovations were used between 2010 and 2020. In the wake of the general economic crisis, we saw strong “creative destruction,” a boom in journalistic start-ups coming from inside the industry without any state aid. The respective national self-image of media policy and the extent of intervention in the market has thus become an even more important factor for the future possibilities of journalism. For media policy in the countries we studied, however, we can state that new regulations, infrastructural measures, or funding models that might specifically support journalistic innovation with democratic political quality goals are only now being developed and very hesitantly.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/axel-springer-anzeigen-portale-im-netz-gleichen-print-verluste-aus-a-915398.html>.
- 2 <http://www.oecd.org/sti/broadband/broadband-statistics/>.
- 3 <https://www.rtr.at/TKP/presse/pressemitteilungen/pressemitteilungen/pinfo04082022tkp.de.html>.
- 4 <https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/it-medien/werbewirtschaft-69-prozent-mehr-umsatz-google-und-co-gewinnen-am-werbemarkt-klassische-medien-fallen-zurueck/27787322.html>.
- 5 <https://elpais.com/economia/2021-07-26/google-y-facebook-acaparan-el-70-de-la-publicidad-en-internet-en-espana-segun-la-cnmc.html>.
- 6 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000136386907/mehr-werbung-aus-oesterreich-bei-google-facebook-tiktok-als-bei>.
- 7 <https://www.theguardian.com/gnm-press-office/2019/aug/07/guardian-media-group-plc-gnm-publishes-201819-statutory-financial-results>.
- 8 https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/media_metrics/most-popular-websites-news-world-monthly-2/.
- 9 Disclaimer: The author of this article developed the concept of the Vienna Media Initiative on behalf of the City of Vienna.

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Part VI

**Conclusions
and recommendations**



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27 Lessons from the implementation of the most relevant journalism innovations in five European countries

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Introduction: understanding the why and how of journalism innovation

Journalism is undergoing a paradigm shift. As media organizations face disruptive changes related to consumers' habits, professional practices, the use of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), and business models, they are increasingly incorporating innovation as a strategy (Pavlik 2021). Going beyond the repetitive cycle of everyday news production, the implementation of innovation in media companies might help to improve their editorial processes, products, income sources, and organizational structures, and to expand the reach and quality of their journalism. The combination of these elements offers a promising potential for journalism in a market of overabundant supply, limited attention, and fragmented audiences by tapping the possibilities of explanatory, participative, gamified, and personalized information.

Innovation is based on the development of practices and processes that identify existing problems in an organization and solve them successfully. News organizations must find ways to improve processes and products, as well as to increase the value of the brand. Innovative projects share the challenge of being useful to media outlets and their audiences by helping to provide quality journalistic content. Thus, news organizations that incorporate innovation strategies can differentiate themselves from their competitors while adhering to journalistic standards, which translate into effective ways of developing products that combine rigor in substance with attractiveness in form (Belair-Gagnon and Steinke 2020).

The project Journalistic Innovation in Democratic Societies (henceforth JoIn-DemoS) had the goal of exploring the mutual interplay of innovations between news professionals, media organizations, and society. The project's first step was to identify the most important journalistic innovations in Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (Meier et al. 2022). The second step involved the analysis of 100 case studies representing the 20 most important innovations in each of the five countries. This step

used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, which helped to better understand the goals, drivers, and barriers that shape media innovation and, to a certain extent, its social impact.

From where does journalism innovation come? How is it implemented? What factors foster or hinder its development? Scholars have studied these questions from numerous perspectives for over two decades. However, the framework of analysis is diverse and, in the case of media studies, quite limited. A great deal of research attaches decisive importance to technology and the use of tools to implement innovations. The risk is falling into a technological determinism that excludes or relegates to the background the contribution of other factors such as productive processes, work organization, the creative and intellectual capabilities of individuals, or user research. This JoIn-DemoS project advocated a holistic view of journalistic innovation that included the various elements that shaped it. The project adopted a comparative approach to exploring the reasons and the consequences of journalism innovation and took a reflexive stance about the innovations implemented by news organizations in the five European countries.

What are journalism innovations for?

The interviewees in all five countries emphasized several factors that emerge from the internal processes of designing, communicating, implementing, and evaluating the results of the various innovations in the newsrooms. Also, several larger areas of innovation were identified, such as journalistic production, distribution, organization, and commercialization. As a starting point for any innovation effort in the context of organization and newsroom models, the interviewees underscored major goals for innovations at three key levels: micro, meso, and macro. (i) The aim at the micro was to give individual journalists more freedom and creativity. (ii) The aim at the meso was that adjustments to the media brand should help it respond more effectively and accurately to the challenges in the media market. (iii) The aim at the macro was to form a stronger connection to the needs of the audience, in which data and analytics had a decisive role. Media companies were also learning from other industries, such as the video game sector, regarding commercialization opportunities, user research, and new apps and products.

The interviewees presented technology, in most cases, as an indispensable tool to interact with the users and enable their participation. Indeed, AI-based tools currently have a fundamental role in news production and distribution. Automatic content production enables greater flexibility at the interface between production and distribution, providing users with personalized content adapted to their respective interests (including topics, locations, and people). Moreover, innovations related to news formats and narratives have increased due to digitization. In the age of Audio 3.0, podcasting is characterized by fragmentation of offers and listening habits. Most of the analyzed media outlets are implementing innovations mainly as a

strategy to provide value, improve their professional practices, offer quality journalism, and appeal to younger audiences.

New storytelling formats share the goal of putting the users at the center of the narrative so that they choose the route or frame from which to access the information. Another key aspect of new narratives lies in the richness that arises from combining assorted languages and technologies, such as AI, infographics, or newsgaming, with original editorial proposals. Their main goal is content delivery through the complementary use of text, audio, pictures, and animations to exploit their respective potentials, thus fostering relevance and in-depth coverage. A key objective is to deliver on the brand's promise of quality, exploiting the information mandate in the digital world.

In addition, news outlets might innovate to differentiate themselves from competitors, to solve specific problems, and to increase their income and sustainability. Advertising revenues as a financing model have become obsolete, and, in this context, media companies have been forced to adapt to changes and overcome difficult economic conditions. Innovations such as paywalls, membership models, donations, and crowdfunding, reveal the need to diversify the sources of income for news media to make journalism sustainable.

The spread of misinformation, especially through social media, has posed a huge challenge for journalism. The controls established in the last ten years can be seen as an important innovation both at the level of the journalistic format and at the organizational level. Fact-checkers seek to raise the quality of public discourse and strengthen citizens' media literacy through high-quality, fact-based, and credible journalism. The interviewees explained the main objective of this innovation was to serve as a support for people to distinguish real information from misinformation. Additionally, media literacy empowered citizens to verify facts on their own.

Some innovations reinforce the view that communication is not one-way, as in the case of citizen journalism, which encourages users to become actively involved and publish their own news products. Thus, citizen participation engages users at multiple levels of participation, including making comments, providing ideas and suggestions, and even generating content, especially in the case of local journalism. This feedback could also be used to find topics of interest for readers, users, and viewers, and thus link them closer to the news brand.

Factors that drive innovation in media companies

Drivers encompass both internal and external factors that influence how innovations emerge in the varied areas of an organization. Internal drivers refer to aspects such as available resources, human, financial and technological, work processes, knowledge and talent, practices, and professional culture. External drivers include the regulatory framework, the characteristics of the market, the evolution of audiences, and the economic situation that affects the news organization.

The interviewees emphasized the ability to increase the allocation of resources and economic support, to provide solid leadership, and to motivate staff, and allow experimentation and creativity in the development of projects. In terms of organization, the importance of a solid working culture was emphasized, as well as internal communication and transparency in news production processes. Some managers reported a clear company commitment to mix the editorial staff profiles, as digitization enabled them to not only seek and hire across borders more quickly than previously but also to incorporate examples and empirical values from other media companies or direct forms of cooperation through international collaboration.

The interviewees provided many examples illustrating the importance of collaboration and professional networking in media-specific innovations, such as fact-checking, data journalism, and investigative reporting. The driver for some of these innovations is the socio-political situation. Donor support is an alternative driver of innovations that aim at solving key socio-cultural issues like misinformation. Donor support drove the success of fact-checking organizations, which has pushed other media to adopt this innovation, improving the overall quality of news coverage in general. Flexibility, autonomy, teamwork, constant experimentation, and the predisposition of members to share their knowledge were identified as common features of innovations. A collaborative culture provides a comfortable and creative environment for workers who enjoy autonomy and participate in ideation processes and project development. Thus, collaboration among professionals from across departments is essential.

The COVID-19 pandemic was mostly a driver of innovation, although it had the potential to be lethal for news companies. Nevertheless, the pandemic boosted digital initiatives, such as podcasting, newsletters, and data journalism, as their adoption in many newsrooms was accelerated because of the increased audience interest in news about COVID-19 and the appetite for new channels through which to access content. COVID-19's social restrictions all but eliminated the newsroom as the central space of journalistic production, and working from the home office emerged as an efficient solution to support organizational processes. The pandemic was also a boost for increasing the economic support from users in terms of membership and subscription models. In addition, storytelling teams benefited from new market possibilities and the developments of teleworking. The success of podcasts was related to the commitment to specific teams and to allowing the development of creativity.

A marketing focus on increasing engagement benefited from the use of AI tools to provide reliable information on individual media usage and is increasingly used to target suggestions in the design and distribution of news content. The vast amounts of data gathered about users could be analyzed to find their preferences and consumption patterns and thus optimize both editorial and commercial offerings. As a result, the use of AI is leading to the need for new competencies for journalistic practice, and it raises specific challenges,

Table 27.1 The most recognized internal drivers and obstructions of journalism innovations, 2010–2020, by JoIn-DemoS’ interviewees and experts in the three DACH countries, Spain, and the United Kingdom

<i>Internal factors</i>	<i>Drivers</i>	<i>Obstructions</i>
Economic and human resources	Technological capacity Comfortable environment	Scarce resources in R&D Precarious working conditions
Work processes, knowledge, and practices	Leadership skills and motivation High degree of experimentation and creativity Flexibility and autonomy Openness to collaboration and networking	Absence of leadership Print-oriented dynamics in the editorial system Inflexible work processes Inability to retain talent
Professional culture and strategy	Solid working culture Medium/long-term goals Transparency and trust	Skepticism and resistance to change Focused on short-term results Lack of transparency and communication

Source: JoIn-DemoS research.

particularly in terms of news work and the ethical use of data and automated content with transparency and responsibility. Indeed, the capability to gather, process, and visualize data is considered a key competitive advantage for media sustainability.

In the AI context, some projects are oriented to data analysis and content adaptation. Strategies such as personalization gain traction to provide their audiences with intangibles that make the organization achieve a competitive advantage. The increasing importance and integration of the audience into journalistic work processes were also evident, especially for news start-ups that have used crowdfunding and membership models to involve their users, often leading to an improvement in the diversity of journalistic initiatives. For example, an innovation laboratory must have clear support from its management in allocating budgets and resources to carry out its mission.

The main internal (in-house) drivers that contribute to and obstruct the implementation and acceleration of innovations in media businesses are summarized in Table 27.1.

Barriers for the implementation of journalism innovation

Among the main barriers for implementing innovations, the interviewees mentioned the scant resources companies allocate to R&D (research and development), the absence of leadership, the lack of motivation among staff

due to adverse working conditions, and the companies' traditional values that do not foster innovative practices. Moreover, as some interviewees argued, the legacy of the industrial model caused a significant degree of stagnation among senior and middle management because failures in editorial leadership were often linked to the lack of an innovative mindset. The interviewees in several case studies suggested some news editors concentrated on producing daily content and disseminating the news as quickly as possible, and consequently, news editors focused to excess on the present and neglected planning for the future.

The interviewees emphasized the main in-house factors that obstructed media businesses from implementing journalism innovations. First, there were poor economic performance and a lack of financial resources. Second, inflexible working practices that cannot respond to the high 24/7 pressure of the digital news market, which increases pressure to reduce expenses, specifically in human resources. Third, resistance to change in long-standing processes and skepticism toward any form of innovation.

Some interviewees considered that many print-oriented editing processes and workflows were barriers to implementing innovations, such as data journalism, citizen participation, mobile journalism, or new digital storytelling. In the context of technology, conditions in the editorial system that produce and edit online news have been difficult for a long time, and the environment of 24/7 on-call work has caused some resistance from the staff to embrace innovation.

The issue of personnel also raised problems for some organizations in the context of news acquisition. The search for young, social media-savvy people with solid training was proving difficult because most publishers could only offer poorly paid, temporary, or part-time positions for new staff. This situation also reinforced the trend toward high staff turnover in these newsrooms. Flexible processes, knowledge transfer, mentoring, and creativity were thus obstructed. The interviewees claimed that staff shortages were specifically an obstruction in the development of organizational innovations, such as media labs, data journalism, or hybrid models of telework. Several managers emphasized that retaining talent was also a problem.

Technology is one of the keys to innovation but can also be a barrier because sometimes journalists do not have access to the relevant tools. Indeed, some interviewees claimed there was a lack of resources concerning technologies, such as mobile devices for news, AI tools, or storytelling software. Some failed innovation projects had not reached the requisite real value proposition. Also, as some interviewees argued, oversaturating resources to provide live content or news in social media could reduce the quality of the information, given the lack of time to check with multiple sources or to carry out a thorough verification.

Financial constraints were frequently mentioned as being obstructive. The cost factor was mentioned as being important in some areas, such as AI. In addition, several interviewees pointed to a general lack of institutional

transparency, which was necessary to fight against misinformation. In launching innovations such as newsletters and podcasts, one of the most decisive obstacles for not having greater success was the growing competition in their respective countries, with an increase in the market offer, most of it for free. Besides, there was the permanent insecurity that arose from the power imbalance of news organizations vis-à-vis the technological platforms. Journalists and content managers were never sure that their own channels would remain in existence in the long term or that platforms such as *Instagram*, *X* (formerly *Twitter*), or *TikTok* would not, overnight, make any major changes.

The main obstructions to the implementation of innovation in news organizations are summarized in Table 27.1.

Exploring journalism innovation's social impact

The impact generated by many innovations can be considered from at least three perspectives: the news organization, the journalistic industry, and society. Some interviewees said that journalistic products might have a public service impact from an editorial point of view. For example, newsletters that connected with the users and provided useful and valuable news were of help in discerning information from misinformation, thus enhancing the democratic function of journalism in society.

Some professionals mentioned the benefits of innovation for the democratic function of journalism, by promoting a critical monitoring of day-to-day events, stimulating topics and debates in the public arena, and fighting misinformation. This process was enhanced by bringing transparency to research and promoting audience participation through interactivity. For example, data journalism crucially impacted society by effectively sifting through large amounts of information and simplifying complex issues to find what is relevant in the current context. Many organizations use collaboration among professionals and multidisciplinary teams to develop new products with a flexible approach to solving the needs of customers. Analyzing user data and metrics provides strategic information to personalize content to match users' interests.

One of the innovations with the greatest impact in social terms is the search for diversity in the news, which is promoted both in the professional newsroom teams and in journalistic content because without the former, the latter is not possible. Regarding diversity, the first issue that stood out among the interviewees was gender, followed by migration, and, lastly, other issues of equal relevance, such as the visibility of minorities. Diversity as an innovation in news organizations sought both to make other realities visible and to encourage critical thinking among the audience. In the context of diversity, collaborative investigative journalism, and fact-checking, their social impact and the democratic task of journalism were not only a consequence of the innovation but the reason for its introduction.

The traditional role as a “watchdog” in investigative journalism has also experienced a quantum leap due to the possibilities of data exchange and data evaluation. Although investigative journalism is not an innovation, it contributes to making journalism a pillar of democracy and to providing relevant information to citizens so they can make informed decisions. In this case, the innovation lies in the collaboration between national and international outlets that create consortia of investigative journalists capable of analyzing huge amounts of leaked data where the main goal is to scrutinize political and economic powers.

Innovation can reduce social fragmentation as journalists and news companies develop a closer relationship with their users, readers, and viewers. Specific formats, such as podcasting, can also have a social impact because they explain things in a simpler way and thus reach a wider audience. Digital storytelling also plays a key role in promoting journalism’s public service function in society, as it provides elements for dealing with important issues that allow for keeping citizens informed. Format innovation and audience accessibility are the main benefits because they make journalism more accessible and relevant to everyone. Some projects covering social and cultural issues were regarded as a paradigm of public service.

Alternative sources of income to traditional advertising for news organizations could favor media competition, and this, in turn, would strengthen democracy and society. Donations, membership models, and crowdfunding campaigns have so far proven their worth as financing models for media companies. Financial independence is thus intended to increase independence in reporting. In the case of crowdfunding, reliance on flexible structures also generates a constant dialogue with people and increases users’ participation. Some interviewees argued that financing news organizations through donations and crowdfunding democratizes the production process of journalistic offerings because crowdfunding campaigns could only be successful if the donors were involved in the journalistic work process, which in turn guaranteed a higher degree of transparency.

Understanding the needs and values of users is thus essential for the success of any journalistic project. This vision requires journalists to first ask people about their needs and what they want from media, to listen and find the best way to meet those needs. If the media does not consider who the human beings are behind the page views and the traffic they generate, the media miss the opportunity to build a stronger and more lasting relationship with their audiences. Some interviewees mentioned initiatives such as active listening to readers and the opening of communication channels through webinars where users talk to journalists, get to understand the news production process, and ask questions of the practitioners.

However, the empirical case studies raised doubts about the neatly aligned effects of journalistic innovations in the social sphere. In many ways, the greater drive toward innovation could disrupt habits, cross established boundaries, and spread to all spheres of society. The focus on “the new” of

whatever kind, which is preferred over the state of normality and the well-known, affects innovation's influence in contemporary society. Nevertheless, a commitment to new realities does not equate to complete openness or 'anything goes'. By contrast, a larger focus on innovation demands a reflexive examination of its practical consequences in society.

Conclusion: factors that shape the implementation of media innovation

The findings confirm previous studies (Ekdale et al. 2015; García-Avilés 2020; Olsen and Furseth 2023) about the role of innovations as drivers of change in the media industry and reveal the importance of implementing innovation processes to face the challenges of a disruptive market (Pavlik 2021). Most practices and processes of innovation tend to be geared toward the principle of innovation *as such* rather than toward economic success or technological optimization *per se*. The professionals' perception of the diffusion of innovation shows the importance of early adopters in the news market. Many interviewees underlined a shift from an emphasis on innovation guided by a purely economic cost-benefit rationale toward a "strategic innovation" that included other points of reference in news outlets involved in the processes of innovation in areas of product, organization, distribution, and commercialization.

Creating organizational conditions that simultaneously support both the objective of economic profitability and the implementation of innovation requires an understanding of the kind of processes that either promote or constrain innovation in news companies. Many types of innovations demand planning in advance, multidisciplinary work, and execution with wide production margins, far from the immediacy of day-to-day news coverage. As some interviewees emphasized, the process involved several stages, including design, experimentation, testing, development, dissemination, and learning. Of course, tools and technologies played a fundamental role but also management and leadership skills, professional culture, and talent. In short, the "human factor" was essential. Thus, innovation processes in news organizations are largely shaped by journalistic practices and organizational strategy. A relevant challenge is to further spread innovation beyond the media sector to society more effectively, extending its achievements to the institutional environment and to the general population.

Incorporating new practices and experimenting with a range of ideas is crucial in innovation projects. If media professionals experiment frequently, many projects will obviously fail. However, in the early stages, these failures are welcome, as they allow teams to quickly discard anything that does not work and to focus on the most viable projects. Innovating in this context implies a proactive approach that sometimes challenges the normative theories of journalism. For example, the role of social media in disseminating news content and the paradigm change from "advertising-supported" to "audience-supported" journalism often sparks a debate about the conflicts between journalistic criteria and the commercial benefits in the newsroom.

In a highly technological environment, it is necessary to examine the risks generated by using large amounts of data, as well as to consider the ethical challenges. The thoughtless use of data to guide journalistic decisions can lead to inequality, misinformation, bias, and a lack of representation of minorities. Academic and professional experts advocate for the development of data-informed processes that incorporate human knowledge and promote an open media culture that supports a rigorous analysis of information and a better-educated society. Indeed, although the social benefits of increasing engagement usually return in a more informed citizenry, the selective exposure to a single type of content can create “echo chambers” and contribute to a lack of diversity and pluralism.

Our results support previous findings that argue that journalism innovation should not be studied as an object outside of the confines of larger social trends and without considering the role of external actors (Belair-Gagnon and Steinke 2020, 1738). Teamwork and collaboration among professionals across departments are essential to encourage experimentation and creativity, and to achieve the maximum transfer of their innovations to other company areas and, ultimately, to society. Partnerships among news outlets and between journalists and civil society groups have been heralded to leverage digital tools and technologies to produce in-depth reporting. The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed that digital transformation was accelerated, and some news organizations implemented innovations (García-Avilés et al. 2022). Teleworking was adopted overnight, but once the health crisis was over, the media increasingly incorporated hybrid formulas of work. Most journalists do not want to give up the benefits of teleworking some days, as online tools allow news production with the same level of quality.

Despite the variety of fields and case studies, we have identified a series of principles that guide journalism innovation, developing a conceptual matrix of the elements that shape its implementation in news outlets. Innovations are audience oriented, rely on a collaborative culture, and are often based on networks of professionals who share their work and expertise with a concern for news quality and a public service mindset. Innovators need technological competence in the use of tools and the development of new products that provide value to the users and to the news organization that, ultimately, benefits from their implementation. Innovations must be successful in terms of increase in audience, revenue, organizational improvement, brand image, or prestige for the news organization. Besides, interviewees from small digital start-ups tend to cite external factors both supporting and obstructing innovation, while interviewees from larger legacy media more often cite internal factors.

The JoIn-DemoS project considered innovation as a fundamental pillar of democratic societies, implemented by a series of drivers, which allows the achievement of various objectives (see Figure 27.1). At the first level, three fundamental drivers that make innovation possible are visualized: an

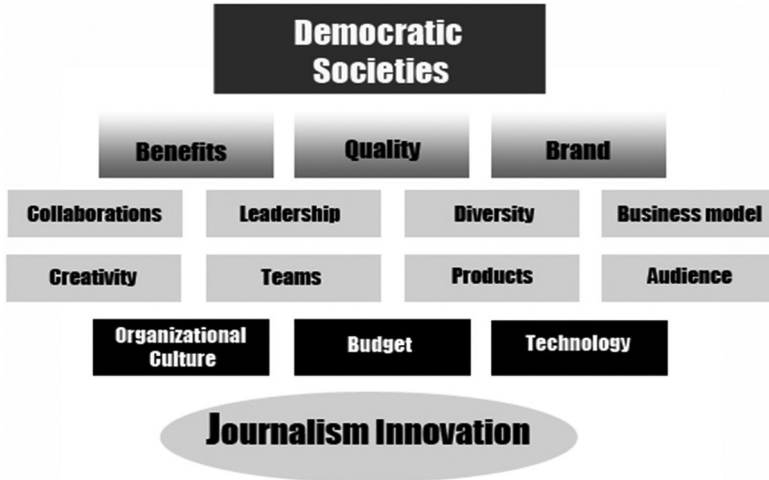


Figure 27.1 How journalism innovation contributes to strengthening democratic societies.

Source: Authors.

organizational culture that supports innovation, economic resources, and the crucial role played by technology. In the next two levels, those factors that shape journalism innovation are included. Some of them are related to the “human factor”: creativity, leadership, and collaborations (on the left), while others (on the right) are related to products and services: audience, business models, and diversity, which also plays an important role in the configuration of teams. Finally, three basic objectives of any innovation process were emphasized: (1) the search for benefits and the sustainability of media companies, (2) journalistic quality that translated into social value, and (3) the configuration of a solid news brand that increased public trust. These fundamental goals might contribute to strengthening democratic societies through the promotion of a robust, independent media system and a wide range of pluralistic sources of information.

This study builds on research suggesting that a gap exists between the discourse emphasizing innovation as a savior of the media’s future and the day-to-day practices of most journalists and newsrooms (Pavlik 2021). This study reflects upon the implications of the adoption of media innovations and their connection to journalism’s mission. While our results cannot be generalized, as they refer to a selected sample of news organizations in just five participating countries, they provide a valuable understanding of the diffusion of innovations. There is a need for further research with a broader sample and more exhaustive quantitative and qualitative methodologies that would more deeply examine other contextual factors, which might also influence the success and failure of media innovations and their social impact.

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28 Opportunities and challenges of innovations for media practice

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Introduction: organization does matter

Three years of research have shown that innovations in journalism do not only manifest themselves on the mesolevel of news organizations, but that socio-political factors of specific countries also have an impact on the innovativeness of the news industry (Meier et al. 2022; see Chapter 3–7). Furthermore, there are also influencing factors on the microlevel, such as the motivation of employees or the willingness to let go of old habits and privileges and to adapt to new processes and technologies. Nevertheless, a central finding of the study is that the dominant supportive and obstructive factors regarding the implementability of innovations are to be found on the mesolevel (Meier et al. 2024). Innovations require the strategic governance of open-minded management, which allows a culture of experimentation without economic pressure, systematically approaches the promotion of journalistic innovations, and implements them permanently within the framework of organizational quality management.

The definitive aspect of the Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS) interviews with the managers and project leaders about the goals of the innovations, as well as the factors that support or obstruct them, is the lack of a systematic view of the successful development of innovations within media organizations. This lack is certainly due to the complex subject matter, as the implementation of innovations in media organizations usually involves the interplay of organizational goals, interpretive patterns, role holders, structures, technologies, processes, and social practices, as well as performances (Evans 2018). Innovation dynamics are not only influenced by business models, organizational structures, predominant processes, and practices but also interact with quality goals and strategies, professional role expectations, and norms (Bélaïr-Gagnon and Steinke 2020).

The omission of systematics by interviewees becomes clear in instances of identifying structures without mentioning the interplay between the rules (of strategic objectives and normative quality goals) and resources (money, organizational structures, personnel, knowledge, and processes). The interviewees did not explicitly see innovation processes as a result of the complex interplay of structural factors related to organizational strategies, available

resources, newsrooms' own professional practices, standards, and culture (Koivula et al. 2023). A notable aspect is that the interviewees perceived many of the influencing factors as both supportive and obstructive without considering the recursiveness between rules and resources as an important condition for the implementability of innovations.

In this chapter, we intend to figure out the implications for media practice based on the empirical findings, and to do so, we are guided by the principle of “organization does matter”: media organizations and newsrooms are places in which social practices take on systemic forms through the continuous, recursive application of rules and resources. Wyss (2016) argues establishment of innovations is an outcome of structure being either a medium or a result. The former occurs when all organizational personnel refer to quality-oriented rules and resources in actions and the latter while simultaneously updating or changing them through their actions (Wyss 2016, 271).

We assume that the sustainable implementation of innovations will only succeed if the related rules and resources are linked to structures of editorial quality management (EQM). The structuration-theoretical perspective understands EQM as a set of formalized and legitimized practices of reflexive governance and control of journalistic organizations, which refer to quality goals supported by corresponding resources. The EQM goes into effect as soon as the goals of the organization's quality strategy are achieved and communicated internally and externally. The organization controls and monitors the ongoing success of the goals through a recursive process according to the organization's rules and resources.

In the remaining sections of the chapter, we start off by describing the structures and principles of EQM that make the implementation of journalistic innovations a matter of organizational quality assurance. We follow on from these theoretical considerations by making 18 elaborated recommendations, which should enable editorial managers to steer the development and implementation of innovations in media organizations.

Managing innovation within a quality management system

Altmppen (2006, 119) uses structuration theory (Giddens 1997 [1984]) to describe journalistic organizations as “systems of organized action,” which are characterized by the interdependence of action and structure, whereby the latter is recursively produced through the application of certain mediation modalities (Wyss 2016). The structure is responsible for ensuring that social practices do not have to be constantly rebuilt in temporal, material, and social terms. Innovations must be planned, implemented, constantly applied and their impact evaluated in the long term to become established. In the context of establishing innovations as new social practices, media organizations should tie their efforts to the organizational structure. We argue that this can only be achieved by integrating innovation management into the structure of a comprehensive EQM system. The function of EQM lies in the

reflexive, quality-oriented further development or change of the organizational structure, of which innovations are to become part. Giddens (1997 [1984], 432) defines structure as “rules and resources recursively involved in the reproduction of social systems.”

Rules

There are, in the context of rules concerning the implementation and ongoing success of innovation, two categories. The first serves the common understanding within an organization, such as the communication of organization-specific quality goals. In newsrooms, these can be expressed through declarative mission statements or guiding principles, journalistic guidelines or department-specific concept documents. The second legitimizes rules. They serve to justify or sanction “correct” behavior and can be found in editorial statutes, codes of ethics, or even in checklists used in annual staff or qualification reviews. Such rules represent potentials that are updated situation-specifically in social practices.

One finding of the study concerning rules as structures of a newsroom made it clear that some innovations are associated with the *changed role expectations* of journalists. This was the case, for example, with projects that promoted *collaborative-investigative journalism* (with the roles of watchdog and controller), *data journalism* (explainer), *new digital storytelling* (storyteller), or innovations that are intended to lead to greater *citizen participation* (enabler) and *entrepreneurial journalism*. These are roles that may conflict with each other, which requires media organizations to regulate their application within the framework of the EQM system. After all, some of these role patterns contradict the widespread postulate of objective reporting. While objectivity is the basis of neutral reportage, the roles of storyteller or citizen journalist, for example, are more involved in both subject matter and outcome. The media organization’s editorial culture must, therefore, resolve this possible conflict.

Rules are also addressed when, for example, organizations make explicit the *goals of the innovations*, such as opening up new markets or increasing market share, reducing labor costs, strengthening manufacturing flexibility and diversity, or simply improving product quality. These goals are both partly economic and journalistic goals, which may well be in conflict with each other. Media organizations must regulate these partial goals internally as to their position in the hierarchy of aims and how to appreciate their achievement. However, this activity is only possible if the organization makes such goals explicit, documented, and, if necessary, even operationalized so that it can measure the level of success.

Individual innovations are also linked to specific goals. For example, the project’s interviewees expected *podcasts* to reach new and primarily young target groups, to strengthen community building, to promote other content of the media company, or simply to enhance its reputation. The initiators of *fact-checking* want to emphasize important journalistic quality criteria, such

as factuality and truth, objectify emotional discourse, and promote the audience's media competence. *Mobile-Live Journalism* projects should promote interactivity, and *newsletters* should promote dialogue with the audience. Projects to promote *new digital storytelling* should contribute to a better understanding of the news, promote participation through interactive elements, and also contribute to the company's image and, finally, even to economic profitability. These are all goals that the Deming cycle of quality control recognizes, enabling organizations to plan, implement, control, and standardize (plan, do, check, act) within the framework of an EQM system that parallels the "kaizen" (continuous improvement) principle.

The interviewees also mentioned normative requirements that are related to certain innovations, i.e., legitimacy rules: the implementation of *collaborative-investigative journalism*, as well as *data journalism*, requires competences in handling data and statistics. *Citizen journalism* requires journalists with a sense of community. The application of artificial intelligence (AI) confronts journalists with ethical norms, challenges transparency rules, and causes a fear of job losses.

Still, the interviewees repeatedly complained about a lack of error culture in the media organizations, which they saw as an obstacle to the implementation of innovation. A lack of intrinsic motivation of employees and mistrust from colleagues, the interviewees also saw as obstacles. They noted that innovations like *automation* and *AI* are threats to journalists because they are often grounded in the traditional understanding of the profession. Organizations must address these conflicts within their human resources policy and management as part of their EQM system with rules that are binding for all personnel.

Social media projects quickly come into conflict with the attributes of the digital environment because the boundaries and norms separating business and state-oriented accounts (e.g., public relations, entertainment, news) and private ones have become blurred. Furthermore, there is increasing skepticism about the market power of platforms and their data protection regulations. The interviewees also noted cultural reservations about data collection in audience *engagement projects* (e.g., restrictive data protection laws) but also the danger of creating echo chambers through personalized content. The solution for media organizations would be to clarify these problems within the framework of a defined data philosophy in the editorial guidelines.

The use of *digital tools*, *teleconference apps*, and *teleworking* has resulted in the dependency of media companies on technological corporations and digital infrastructure providers. This reliance ensures there are many new normative conflicts that organizations must resolve within their EQM systems.

Resources

Rules cannot be implemented without the existence of resources because their use is the expression of the exercise of power. Allocative resources enable control over material aspects (e.g., control over money, goods, personnel,

or technology). Authoritative resources are capabilities and capacities that enable the exercise of power over other organizational role owners. This includes quality-oriented structures and processes, organizational knowledge, competences, and organizational techniques, but also planning, research, control, and feedback or evaluation processes that organizations use to achieve the quality goals communicated as rules in a systematic and controlled way or to check the achievement of those goals. This is where the EQM system can intervene in a steering and controlling manner. The media institution would require all personnel to apply the rules in their daily actions using the pertinent resources. The aim of doing so would be to reproduce or change the organizational structure in a quality-oriented way or even to implement innovations.

In the context of identifying factors that obstructed the implementation of innovations, one of the most frequently mentioned factors by the interviewees was the lack of resources, primarily the lack of a budget. Money is not only a supportive condition (if sufficient funding can be obtained), but also the main obstructive factor, especially when start-ups in particular are unable to secure sufficient funding.

In addition to insufficient funding, the interviewees also complained the lack of time to concentrate on new projects was a major obstacle to innovation. The examples of investigative journalism combined with international or domestic collaboration, as well as data journalism, show the necessity of decoupling these innovations from day-to-day business because the analysis of complex data requires intensive planning. In addition, interviewees also cited the lack of technical equipment and know-how in companies as allocative resources that are primary obstacles to innovation growth. For example, the interviewees mentioned the specialized technical knowledge required of *fact-checkers*, who must also be present on social media platforms and be familiar with various verification and social listing tools to be able to check texts, images, and moving images for their truth content. Another allocative resource consists of staff who are not only willing to experiment and are committed but also have specialist knowledge.

The interviewees also said authoritative resources were both supportive and obstructive factors. On the positive side was cooperation within the organization in multidisciplinary teams (*fact-checking, data journalism, media labs, and engagement on the basis of data*) and collaboration with external experts (*podcasts*). The interviewees viewed knowledge exchange within the industry with colleagues working in the same areas of innovation (e.g., *collaborative-investigative journalism*), as well as with external, non-journalism partners who have technical expertise (*data journalism*), as important drivers of innovation.

The authoritative resources also include new forms of organizing. For example, the experts included the dismantling of old structures and the cooperation of all departments and hierarchies, as well as the inclusion of young colleagues and the need to define new professional roles and responsibilities

in personnel policy. Authoritative resources also include the promotion of employees who persistently push forward their own innovative projects (innovation champions).

The interviewees, in the context of monitoring and management of social media platforms, emphasized that this field would create new responsibilities, coordination, and workflows, with new forms of project management being applied. Hybrid teams would be formed and editorial processes redesigned.

The need to adapt authoritative resources in the establishment of *new organizational forms and teams* is clear. The media industry needs a flexible and collaborative organization in which teamwork is more important than individual work. Synergies between various channels need to be created; the boundaries between departments will be removed; in product development, people with different competences will work together (editorial knowledge, coding, marketing, advertising, and social media).

All these applications of allocative and authoritative resources are structures supportive of the implementation of innovative ideas and are set up in a quality-oriented manner within the framework of an EQM system. However, because various innovation projects may be pursuing conflicting quality goals, management must decide which resources are to be used where and for what reason.

Recursiveness and viability

An important principle of quality management is the principle of recursiveness, which explains the need to design quality management as an iterative process. In this context, organizational actors refer to quality-oriented rules and resources in their routine actions (structure as a medium) and at the same time update or change them through their actions (structure as a result) (Wyss 2016, 271). The principle of recursiveness corresponds to the principle of kaizen, continuous improvement. All core processes repeatedly go through the Plan-Do-Check-Act-phases of the Deming cycle of quality control. In all these phases, reference must be made to the rules, as expressed, for example, in publishing guidelines or checklists. For example, evaluating an innovation only makes sense if it relates to predefined quality goals and if the findings of the evaluation in turn flow into the updating of them.

Recursiveness thus refers to the processual aspect of the reproduction of social practices in action. Hence, structure is a process in which rules and resources are applied in an interactive relationship. Organizational actors, managers as well as journalists, refer to rules and resources through the application of interpretive schemes, norms, and facilities, and thus in reproducing them, structure becomes manifest. The emphasis on the recursive character of structure formation also points to the potential for change and innovation. Structures enter every action as “input,” but at the same time, they are also the “output” (intended or not) result of the actor (Ortmann and Sydow 2001, 426). Thus, references to rules are prerequisites for the use of

resources, and rules should not emerge beyond the availability of resources. The enforceability of innovative social practices thus depends on whether they prove to be “viable” in the order of rules as well as in the order of the structures of resources.

So, an example is needed. The innovative quality goal of diversity and inclusion to prevail within an editorial office must also meet normative requirements (e.g., the willingness to invite female experts). The goal must also be viable in relation to the order of the structures of resources because only the application of authoritative (intercultural composition of the editorial office) and allocative resources (e.g., knowledge about people with a migration background) makes it possible to achieve the aim. However, in the absence of corresponding resources, it would also make little sense to formulate diversity and inclusion as a quality goal in the editorial mission statement.

An organizational application for innovation management

In the sense of recommendations for media practice and media managers, some findings from the study will now be compiled. These findings are examined against the background of structuration theory explanations to enable a more systematic control of innovations within the framework of an EQM system. Media organizations must take appropriate measures within the framework of their own quality assurance systems.

Table 28.1 illustrates the structures of quality assurance that would be the starting point for applying steering instruments at various points in the organization. The table shows an organizational complex in which rules for quality assurance are used and applied. The first type serves the common

Table 28.1 Components of an EQM system for journalism organizations

<i>Rules</i>		<i>Resources</i>	
Quality Goals	Norms	Allocative	Authoritative
diversity and inclusion, community building, citizen participation			
Journalism Concepts, collaborative-investigative journalism, data journalism, citizen participation, new digital storytelling, diversity and inclusion	editorial statutes ethics code checklists autonomy laws rules	personnel knowledge money time infrastructure	organizational structure hierarchy responsibilities processes: planning, fact-checking, evaluation, audience research
Organizational Concepts guiding principles guidelines			

Source: JoIn-DemoS project’s own illustration.

understanding of organization-specific quality goals. The second type comprises normative rules that express correct actions, for example, in ethical guidelines or legal standards.

Rules can be expressed as quality goals, such as diversity and inclusion, community building, or citizen participation in mission statements, journalistic guidelines, or format-specific concepts. Furthermore, certain journalistic concepts such as collaborative-investigative journalism, data journalism, citizen participation, or digital storytelling with their strategic goals should be described here. The description of these concepts, the rules associated with them, and the resources required for them are the only ways to evaluate these innovations.

The associated rules cannot be implemented without reference to resources. Allocative resources enable, for example, personnel development, including recruitment. But they also enable access to knowledge, money, and time, as well as infrastructures. Authoritative resources include organizational structures, hierarchies, responsibilities, and quality assurance processes such as project planning, fact-checking, and evaluation processes, taking into account audience reactions and audience research data. These are processes that refer to the goals and norms set out in the rules.

Finally, 18 recommendations for the corresponding innovation areas are summarized in Table 28.2, which should enable editorial managers to steer the development and implementation of innovations in media organizations.

Table 28.2 JoIn-DemoS project's top innovation categories (ranked alphabetically) and their relation to either or both quality objectives (QO) and resources (R)

Automation (QO) (R)

AI is arguably one of the most important innovations in journalism. It is also clear that AI will become more widespread as companies seek to automate processes and increase efficiency. However, management does have the challenge of countering the fears of change associated with AI.

Tools and remote working (R)

Automated tools, teleconferencing applications, online databases, and access to digital infrastructures have revolutionized the work of journalists, as they can facilitate flexibility in tasks and collaboration between professionals. Teleworking resources and hybrid models (a combination of face-to-face work and teleworking) are expected to improve relations between the actors and increase the efficiency of some processes. However, that face-to-face contact does offer important advantages in solving everyday problems and in creative activities.

Citizen participation (QO)

This innovation offers the opportunity to improve the current relationship between the public and journalism and has the potential to reduce social fragmentation, e.g., of groups hostile to mass media, as people feel represented and included. Moreover, journalists and users are meeting more face-to-face, and audiences are increasingly involved in the journalistic message-making process, from topic identification to research. When management promotes citizen participation initiatives, care should be taken to ensure that this initiative corresponds with the concept of diversity and that it is adequately represented in the audience. There is also the challenge of staying true to the traditional norms regarding autonomy while being more responsive to the audience.

(Continued)

Table 28.2 (Continued)

Collaborative-investigative journalism (QO)

Even though deadline pressure is a recurring problem in all areas of innovation, the use of time as a resource is an essential feature of collaborative-investigative journalism, which relies on the long term as its unique selling point and is thus detached from day-to-day journalism activities. Research and (international) cooperation require intensive planning and organization without distractions. The management must, therefore, be able to provide the necessary time resources. Another prerequisite is the willingness to share the research results with other media organizations and to cooperate with them, so here the conflict with the goal of exclusivity must be resolved. Small investigative start-ups have special expertise and approaches that can be helpful for large media organizations.

Data journalism (QO)

Data journalism is clearly related to new formats and forms of organization. On the resource side, there is an increased need for statistics, measurement methods, and data when implementing this concept. Data journalism has evolved from “nice to have” to “must have” for any media brand of at least medium size. This is, therefore, also associated with professionalization and institutionalization. Here, management may have to reduce reservations and skepticism. Furthermore, data journalism is expensive (software, personnel, training) and should not be developed with the aim of monetarization or profits.

Diversity and inclusion (QO)

The quality goals of diversity and inclusion cannot be implemented in one department or in a single project: all levels of the company are involved. On the resource side, it requires building an editorial team with various skill sets able to produce diverse reporting and adapting editorial structures and processes. Resources enable not only personnel recruitment and development but also access to knowledge. For sustainable implementation, editorial teams should, therefore, include diversity and inclusion as quality goals in mission statements and ensure that they are supported by appropriate human resources policies and format development. This can also draw on existing charters in other branches.

Donations and crowdfunding (QO)

This innovation is designed to give the media organization financial independence from the advertising industry. Donations and crowdfunding should primarily enable investigative journalism and research projects to focus on socially relevant topics. Management must communicate this aim together with the goal of community building because donors want to know how their money is being used.

Engagement on the basis of data (QO)

To successfully collect user data, the media business must first raise brand awareness so that user behavior can be observed. In addition, data specialists need to be recruited to deal with data collection. To promote the data philosophy, data protection can be taken out of the way and documented as rules in appropriate guidelines.

Fact-checking (QO) (R)

This innovation requires a high level of technical competence. Fact-checkers must additionally have a certain degree of stress resistance and resilience because they are often berated for serving the mainstream media with supposedly government-compliant fact-checks. Management should, therefore, make sure that, in addition to setting up technically competent fact-checking teams, it also communicates the need for this innovation to the outside world and counteracts possible external criticism.

(Continued)

Table 28.2 (Continued)

Media labs (QO) (R)

This innovative facility creates flexibility, teamwork, experimentation, and a willingness to share knowledge. Collaboration between the lab team with professionals from other departments in the organization is important. The innovation strategies of media labs are based on the idea that media organizations need to find new ways to improve processes and products and increase the value of the news brand. These strategies can only be brought to fruition if they are met by media organizations that have a robust culture of experimentation and freedom.

Membership models (R)

Introducing a successful membership model takes time and a lot of communication effort. This includes preventing conflicts of norms, such as perceived pressure to engage in clickbait practices. Membership models can be combined with other revenue streams (advertising, micropayments, donations) and are excellent ways to contribute to community building.

Mobile-live journalism

This innovation is valued in the study for its ability to pick up current issues, be where the audience is, and even encourage participation and interactivity. However, this also shows the need to embrace new ways of working and to overcome the inertia characterized by the print press. The motto should be “think vertically, not at a desk.” Build teams that focus on these formats while maintaining journalistic standards, especially for live news. Mobile-live journalism needs a significant cultural change and a new understanding of professional roles.

New digital storytelling (QO)

Digital storytelling projects require forward planning, multidisciplinary work, and execution with large production margins and detached from the immediacy of daily news reporting. There is a need to go beyond the traditional article to convey the important issues narratively through innovative formats. Technologies play an important role in this innovation. So, while developing the concept, the management should also consider the required resources like multidisciplinary teams, time away from day-to-day business, and the appropriate tools, as well as leadership skills.

New organizational forms and teams (QO) (R)

To create products that meet audience needs, media organizations should adopt collaborative practices and workflows in which diverse professional profiles come together in multidisciplinary teams to rethink content, products, processes, and even editorial structures. Furthermore, professional skills, attitudes, and cultures should also change to strive for innovation through leadership and empowerment. The establishment of a newsroom requires the organizational culture to adapt accordingly.

Newsletters (R)

This innovation is an excellent way to create bonds and address the audience in an informal way. Given the tendency of digital media to publish endless feeds, audiences appreciate a product that is briefer and more manageable. Newsletters can also be seen as a marketing tool. However, this can potentially lead to conflicts in how journalists view their roles.

(Continued)

Table 28.2 (Continued)

Paid content (R)

The study has shown that the paid content strategy must be accompanied by clear communication. The marketing and editorial departments should not operate separately but should be in knowledge exchange from the outset. The introduction of pay barriers can help to tear down the dividing walls between marketing and editorial departments and make journalists think more entrepreneurially. However, the management must be concerned that increased interdepartmental cooperation does not at the same time contradict the concept of journalistic independence but remains viable within normative rules.

Audio and podcast (R)

Coined as a word in 2004, podcasts do not require expensive digital equipment to record, upload to the internet, and distribute through RSS feeds. Consequently, podcasts often have the appearance of being produced amateurishly. Despite their popularity (statistics for September 2023 indicate there are globally 3.2 million podcasts) and partially because they are free to consume, no one has yet devised a viable podcast revenue model. Still, as part of staff development, management should work to ensure that journalists are willing to work with experts from outside journalism.

Social media (R)

When media publish news on social media platforms, management is confronted with an innovation dilemma, as the boundaries between PR, entertainment, drama, and the private accounts of journalists become blurred. This can result in conflicts of norms that management must resolve. The examples mentioned in the study have shown that a balance between journalistic self-image and the logic of the platforms is possible.

Source: Authors.

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29 Deepening the theory of innovation in journalism

Impact on the industry, the quality, and the function of journalism in democracy

Michael Graßl and Klaus Meier

Introduction

Communication science and journalism research have given a variety of definitions, concepts, and systematizations of innovation in recent years (Storsul and Krumsvik 2013; Bruns 2014; Dogruel 2014; Pavlik 2021; Meier et al. 2022). Despite an increasing number of studies, research in this field is still, in some areas, fragmented and underexplored. García-Avilés (2021, 15), who has carried out a wide-ranging international literature review on innovations in journalism, states that there “is a need for further research to gain deeper insight into the nature, conceptualization, and effects of journalistic innovation.” There is still a lack of a broad empirical basis about framework conditions, which support or hinder innovation in journalism; about its impact on society; and about it in comparative studies in the context of international systems and markets (García-Avilés 2021; Meier et al. 2022). These research gaps have also been described in depth in Chapter 1 of this book.

The aim of this chapter is to address these identified gaps and to push forward progress in the theory of innovation in journalism via the support of evidence-based results. Therefore, we build on the findings of the research project Journalism Innovations in Democratic Societies (JoIn-DemoS), which were presented in detail in previous chapters (see Chapters 8–25 and Chapter 27). In our JoIn-DemoS project, a three-year international research project, we investigated the nature and the impact of innovations on journalism, and the influence of the socio-political framework in Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The analyses draw on 108 guided expert interviews, 100 case studies, which were examined through 137 interviews, and 239 online questionnaires from the five countries (see Chapter 2).

In evaluating and relating the multifaceted findings, we aim to make theoretical progress in four areas: (a) the interplay between change in the industry and society, the transformation of media organizations, and the innovations in journalism will be illustrated. (b) The character of innovations and their impact on the industry will be illuminated more deeply, in which areas and levels they take place. Finally, we deal with the still largely unanswered questions (c) to what extent innovations influence values and norms as well as the

quality of journalism, and, based on this, (d) to explore the question of the impact of innovations on the function of journalism in democratic societies.

Specifying change, transformation, and innovations in journalism

In the theoretical basis of the project, we have differentiated between change and transformation in the context of innovations in journalism (see Chapter 1): change can be characterized as a merely passive and driven reaction to external environmental influences, transformation concerns actively observing the environment, modifying basic beliefs and long-term behaviors. In other words, transformation is the strategic response to change. This distinction becomes even clearer when we look at the most important areas of innovation that we identified across the five countries studied (see Chapters 8–25). Here, it becomes evident that innovation in journalism is mostly driven by change in the form of external drivers like politics, technological development, or the current zeitgeist in that journalism is usually in the position of the responder, reacting to change in the form of adaptations. This is exemplified by important areas of innovation we found in our studies:

- *News on social media and audio/podcast*: Both areas of innovation are driven primarily by technological change and the resulting alterations in media usage behavior; journalism adopts these external technologies and integrates them as new publication channels.
- *Artificial intelligence (AI)/automation and data journalism*: The same applies to these two innovation areas, which journalism integrates via external technological developments around the processing and networking of data. A further field of innovation closely linked to electronic information is “*engagement on the basis of data.*”
- *Diversity and inclusion*: This area of innovation is also attributable to an external change, which is a response to the social zeitgeist. Journalism, for example, is making newsrooms more diverse or using gender-sensitive language.
- *Fact-checking*: Integrating these departments, journalism has reacted to the change in the political situation, especially around fake news in election campaigns, as in the United States or Brexit, and to the associated fakes spread in social media. But fact-checking also shows that the reaction to change not only means an adaptation of technology but also is an example of a creative response to new socio-political challenges.
- *Remote work*: Home office, more flexible working hours, and locations were mainly triggered in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, innovations in journalism are not necessarily triggered just by external influences. Our findings illustrate that internal transformation processes also initiate innovations (see Figure 29.1). The innovative areas of paywalls, membership models, or citizen participation are examples of innovations that have resulted from such strategic processes. The development of

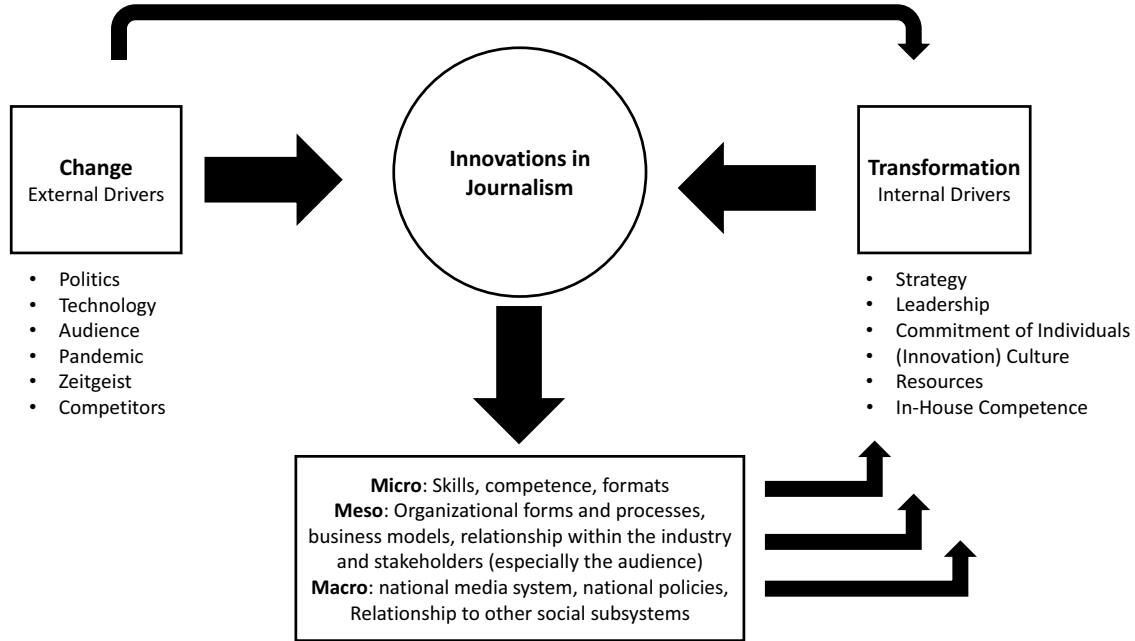


Figure 29.1 Interplays between change, transformation, and innovations in journalism and their impact on the levels micro, meso, and macro.

Source: Authors.

innovation labs was also primarily triggered by internal initiatives (Hogh-Janovsky and Meier 2021). Moreover, innovation labs can be interpreted as an approach from media organizations to break out of the reactive position and to actively develop innovations themselves, or at least to be able to react more dynamically and strategically to change. Identified internal drivers of innovations in journalism are, for example, an existing in-house culture promoting the concept, existing resources (staff, money, time) and competence, and commitment of individuals and employees to it.

Our case studies have shown that innovations, which are first adopted as a reaction to change (e.g., AI/Automation, fact-checking, remote work, newsletter), can later be transferred into a strategic transformation process (e.g., in the form of new organizational teams or departments). As a result, journalistic innovations often follow as a second step at the level of the format, as observed, for example, in the field of podcasts (Klinghardt et al. 2022) and social media (Graßl et al. 2023).

These findings point to a further discussion of the concept of journalism innovation. In Chapter 1, we defined the concept as “the performance of reactions to changes or within transformations in news products, processes, and services in a large or small, radical or incremental way (...).” Although this definition can still be maintained in this form, the strong influence of external factors (and thus of change) suggests a specification of the terminology. We want to argue that the use of the phrase “innovation in journalism” does infer more credit to that concept being externally initiated and subsequently adopted by journalism and adapted.

The impact of innovations on journalism at differing levels

This first part already indicates that innovations have a multifaceted impact on journalism. To make this impact more accessible and to better map it theoretically, it is helpful to differentiate between the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels. This differentiation has only received sporadic attention in the literature on innovation research (Dogruel 2013; García-Avilés 2021).

Microlevel

The microlevel describes how innovations affect individuals who are part of newsrooms, media organizations, and specific units, such as newsrooms, labs, and start-ups, or who are working as freelancers (García-Avilés 2021). Most clearly, innovations have an impact on the skills needed by journalists and over the past decade particularly focused on technology skills for journalists. These skills were generally driven by the transformation process toward digitization (Guo and Volz 2019); the innovation areas of data journalism and AI/automation in particular have made the use of technology and technical tools commonplace in journalistic work (Loosen et al. 2017; Graßl et al. 2022; Bisiani et al. 2023). Inherent to these transformations lies a large challenge for

the realization of innovations in journalism in that the lack of technological competence can be identified as one of the most inhibiting factors for the implementation of innovations across all areas, not only in data-driven fields.

On the other hand, the project's interviewees indicated that factors on the microlevel, such as the intrinsic motivation of individual employees and the integration of new external ones with various competences and perspectives, were mainly supportive of innovation development. Indeed, there is a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds among employees involved in innovations, which the results of the online survey show. Nearly half of the respondents ($N = 239$) indicated that they had completed a degree other than journalism. Furthermore, age, gender, or length of employment do not seem to play a significant role in the development of innovations in journalism, although slight trends can be seen. In terms of age, the most represented age group is between 30 and 45 years, and the employees often have not worked in the respective media organization for more than seven years.

However, innovations do not require a completely new toolbox of competence and skills but rather trigger an ongoing adaptation. The traditional journalistic skills, such as research techniques, remain at the core of the process, as confirmed by the interviewees, but are supplemented by new abilities (e.g., coding) and competences (e.g., knowledge about the logics of social media and how to use it for journalism). Individual competences are reassessed in terms of their importance (e.g., of technological knowledge). In addition, innovations influence not only competence and skills but also the mentality of journalists and editorial teams, which may require a rethinking (e.g., regarding new economic thinking triggered by the introduction of paywalls or membership models).

Mesolevel

The mesolevel focuses on the effects of innovations at the organizational level, thus placing media companies in the center of attention as actors and as affected by innovations. This applies at both intraorganizational and interorganizational levels. Innovations within media organizations can give rise to various impulses and take on a range of forms. They lead to new organizational forms (e.g., newly created project teams, units, and departments) or to new processes (workflows, communication related). In this context, management becomes an important actor in innovations, either as an obstacle or a driver, as it (usually) bears the responsibility for the decision whether or not to develop an innovation, and it also decides on the resources made available (time, money, staff).

Interorganizationally, innovations have an impact on the relationship between media organizations and their stakeholders. New options for exchange are stimulated inside the industry in that editorial teams and media organizations force staff exchanges and networking, and in some fields of innovation, their own communities have formed across organizations (e.g., fact-checking, data journalism, paywalls, collaborative-investigative

journalism). Innovations also have an influence on the relationship with the audience, which they constantly redefine. Through digitization and technological progress, journalism and the audience have moved closer together, as shown by the innovation areas of social media or audio/podcasts, which are very much oriented to the interaction and needs of the audience (e.g., via community management or the support of editorial analytics).

Macrolevel

The macrolevel describes the mutual relationships of the impact of innovations on journalism at the societal level. In the context of innovations, this includes the media system, for example, but also the socioeconomic framework or the effects of innovation policies. In turn, national media systems and national policies themselves have a strong impact on innovations; for example, varying degrees of journalistic start-up scenes in the countries studied can be well explained by such preconditions (Buschow 2018; García-Avilés et al. 2018). It is also striking in the results that the conditions for innovation at the macrolevel are more often described by the interviewees as being unhelpful rather than as supporting. One major difference between the systems results from different national support for technological infrastructure and digital transformation. Other key criteria for innovation development are the recent structure of the dual broadcasting system, the development mandate of public broadcasting, and the quantity and quality of state media subsidies. Even strong, direct economic intervention by the state in favor of an established media system could not (so far) prevent the loss of legacy media and journalistic jobs (Kaltenbrunner et al. 2020) under the conditions of digitization and globalization, as well as more commercialization of journalism. Subsidies can, however, delay the national and regional market entry of innovative projects as competitors. Reaching new audiences with innovative journalistic projects from entrepreneurs in new organizational forms still tends to emerge primarily from journalism in the logic of “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 1942). At the macrolevel of state regulation, new funding models that might focus specifically on such journalistic innovation with democratic political quality goals are only being developed hesitantly.

Links between micro-, meso-, and macrolevels

Although the individual levels do help to systematize the impact of innovations on journalism and to sort them by certain characteristics, they cannot be considered as being completely separate because the results of the project have shown that each level can influence the others in some way. This finding supports the results of García-Avilés (2021), who has so far identified scant cross-level research on media innovation but ideally recommends a combination of all three levels for analyzing its impact. Findings from this project can serve as a starting point for closing this gap.

For example, the relationship between the individual levels can be concretized to the effect that the influence does not run in just one direction, i.e., neither bottom-up (micro to macro) nor vice versa, but crucially in both. In this context, the organizational level (meso) acts as a link between all three (Altmeppen 2008) because it receives the interactions of the other two, coordinates and transmits them. For example, new, politically initiated funding opportunities for journalism (macrolevel) lead to new organizational forms or business models (mesolevel), and these, in turn, to new tasks and competences (microlevel). Conversely, newly acquired competences (microlevel), e.g., through technological change, can develop into new organizational forms or business models at the mesolevel, which in turn lead to overall societal discourses and changes (macrolevel), such as ethical guidelines for AI (Porlezza and Ferri 2022).

The links between the individual levels also become evident in the example of a journalistic innovation culture (Dogruel 2013; Storsul and Krumsvik 2013; Küng 2015). The innovation culture in journalism can be seen as a kind of cross-sectional framework condition that covers all three levels. The interviews show that a supportive innovation culture can be defined as a framework condition that affects all levels individually but only realizes its full innovation potential when combined. The microlevel requires intrinsic motivation, patience, and creativity of the employees; on the mesolevel, open-minded management in the sense of an open culture of error and the willingness to break up existing structures are supportive; and on the macrolevel, innovation-supporting structures in the form of funding or legal framework conditions are needed.

A similar situation applies to journalistic culture in general (Hanusch 2021), which we defined in Chapter 1 as a precondition for innovation in journalism. It is also influenced by innovations on the three levels: new competences and tasks affect the self-perception of journalists (micro), new business models stimulate a cultural change within the whole media industry (meso), and disruptive technologies demand new negotiation processes with other social subsystems (macro). On the other hand, however, journalistic culture also influences the development of innovations at the individual levels, e.g., at the microlevel through the self-image of individual journalists, the identity or newsroom culture of a media organization (meso), or through a national or international journalistic self-perception based on the form of government and on the media system (macro). This makes it obvious that innovations are influenced by values and norms in journalism, but in the other direction, they also have an influence on both.

How innovations influence values and norms and the quality of journalism

According to the definition (see Chapter 1), innovations solve problems and add value for the audience or the news organization. But which values are these? How are they characterized? We apply a theory of journalistic quality to classify the changes in values and norms through innovations. The literature

points out that quality depends on various factors and is relative and dynamic (Meier 2019). Our project operates in pluralistic, open societies; hence, we derive quality from the tasks of journalism in democracy (e.g., McQuail 1992; Scheuer 2008). From this, we deduce the values truth/facticity, relevance/context, and independence (see Chapter 1), and on this basis, we can establish norms as quality criteria in that the truth/facticity dimension contains quality criteria such as accuracy, fairness, diversity, and transparency. The relevance/context dimension includes the significance of topics and facts, originality, timeliness, attractiveness, and usefulness. The independence dimension accentuates organizational independence from economic and political influences and impartiality as balance and the separation of news/facts and comment/opinion.

Research on quality in journalism points out that these quality criteria “compete against one another and cannot all be achieved at the same time” (Meier 2019, 3). The question, therefore, arises not only as to which standards are strengthened by innovations but also which are weakened and whether new ones are added.

Truth/facticity: Undoubtedly, *fact-checking* has strengthened this quality dimension as a reaction of innovative journalism to the rapid spread of fake news, especially in social media. In a complex world, the *diversity* of an editorial offering strengthens the goal of coming as close as possible to a complex truth through a greater plurality of opinions, backgrounds, and knowledge to generate new perspectives and, e.g., address also the issues of marginalized groups. Certain new *storytelling formats* place the narrator/reporter at the center, who explains the ways of their reporting: The editorial approach is authentically disclosed, thereby strengthening transparency. However, when reporters bring their own position into the story, the norm of the separation of news/facts and comment/opinion could be violated. Within the umbrella term of objectivity, norms such as accuracy, diversity, impartiality, significance, and transparency traditionally merge and strengthen each other. Transparency has even been seen as “the new objectivity” (Weinberger 2009). But it is not only transparency that has been enhanced, and the question of whether objectivity is strengthened or weakened by innovations must remain open because it depends on how strongly individual norms as elements of objectivity are weighted.

Relevance/context: Strengthening *investigative journalism* through cross-border collaboration pays definitive dividends on this quality dimension. Complex *storytelling* allows in-depth coverage with individual ways of use with emotional and user-friendly entry points; a (young) audience is reached, which is rather discouraged by the classic presentation of news. *New organizational forms and teams* aim at identifying more relevant topics and bringing them quickly to different target groups via different channels. However, when restructuring is seen as a purely cost-cutting program, it is aimed only at economic value and not a journalistic one, and the quality of reporting is jeopardized.

Independence: In a time of economic pressure on media companies, several innovations aim to achieve greater (financial) independence. Subscriptions and other payment models (*membership, donations, and crowdfunding, etc.*) help to maintain journalism in economically difficult times and support more independence from advertising influence. In traditional business models, the influence of advertisers was seen as a threat to independence in that the audience was an anonymous mass, and increasing attention to the audience was often seen as clickbait journalism with sensational and misleading headlines. The innovations reverse this because complex editorial metrics perceive the audience as individuals with distinctive desires and needs. Indeed, membership models give the audience opportunities to have their say, and, consequently, they are editorially empowered. The audience is no longer sold as a mass to the advertiser. But this raises the question of new dependencies: if topics and access to news are structured according to audience wishes and their cooperation, suggestions, statements, and feedback, does not a danger for impartiality arise with a loss of balance? The louder audience voices would say where things are going if newsrooms follow them. In addition, some risk to independence exists for newsrooms that use *social media* to reach a wider audience. Journalism must follow the rules and standards of the platforms and adapt its own quality criteria to them.

In conclusion, we can say that innovations in journalism have not developed fundamentally new quality criteria, but they meet, expand, and shift several existing criteria (see Figure 29.2). The theoretical assumption that quality criteria compete against each other (Meier 2019) proves to be right for some innovations: strengthening certain norms may weaken others. The innovations selected for our study primarily strengthen norms that target the unique selling point of journalism in the digital media world with a multiplication of voices and the loss of the journalistic monopoly. In the days of gatekeeping journalism, the question was less about why society needed journalism, but today, journalism must repeatedly justify what makes journalism so special and distinguishes it from other forms of (public) communication. Obviously, this is done by boosting certain qualities through innovation: investigation, transparency, diversity, in-depth coverage, and a fostered relationship with the audience. However, this enhancing may lead to a redefinition of the umbrella term objectivity: transparency gains more weight in the achievement of objectivity, while balance and the separation of news and opinion may decrease in weight.

In our study, we were able to assess which quality criteria the people responsible for innovation projects might consider to be strengthened, and we collected numerous indications of this. To find out *to what extent* these were strengthened would require a different methodological design. Here, the field is wide open for future studies.

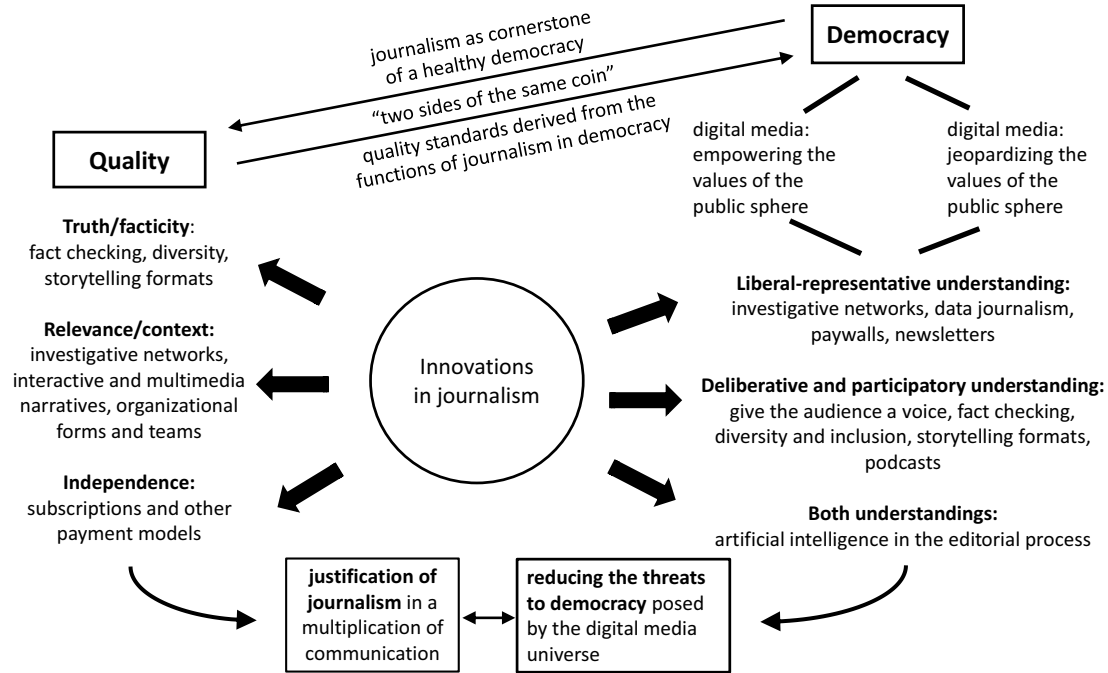


Figure 29.2 Interplays between democracy, journalistic quality, and innovations in journalism.

Source: Authors.

Innovation in journalism and democracy

Chapter 27 already summarized the societal impact of innovations in journalism from the perspective of the interviewees in the research project and the benefits of innovations for the democratic function of journalism mentioned by the interviewees. In this section, the aim is to classify the mentions in a theory-based manner and thus expand the theory of the interplay between journalism and democracy. For decades, a large body of literature has pointed out that journalism and democracy are two sides of the same coin (see Chapter 1). In recent years, it has often been stated that the ambivalence of the digital public sphere, on the one hand, fruitfully expands this interplay and, on the other hand, severely disturbs it. International research activities show that debates still range from optimistic views to skeptical or even dystopian perspectives. For example, one of the biggest problems is the division of society because of the increasing drifting apart of the different political factions. Indeed, political compromises can only be achieved with great difficulty in the public sphere if the divergent demands and interests are not accepted, or even known, and the will to reach agreement is lacking (Bennett and Pfetsch 2018; Palau-Sampio and López-García 2022).

Against this background, journalism is challenged to reposition itself. The question is to what extent innovations contribute to this repositioning and, from the perspective of a normative theory (Christians et al. 2009), whether they add to strengthening democracy or at least mitigating its weakening. In answering this complex question, however, we must keep in mind that there are varying conceptions of democracy, each of which leads to disparate concepts of the public sphere (Ferree et al. 2002). This theoretical approach to the political public sphere has been applied more often to the functions of journalism in democracy, for example, in elaborating the public value of journalism (Meier 2016) or analyzing news content diversity (Magin et al. 2023).

This theoretical approach essentially comprises two positions (Meier 2016, 68):

- The *liberal-representative model of democracy* sees journalism as a two-way intermediary between the political system and the citizens. High-quality reporting is required to be independent, fact-oriented, impartial, balanced, and diverse in relevant positions with almost exclusively voices from the government, parliament, and political parties. Solutions to social problems come predominantly from the executive and legislative powers; their decisions are to be made transparent by journalism, which at the same time must monitor and scrutinize the elites. Citizens are assigned a largely passive public role: they are informed so that they can make informed decisions in their essential active role, namely voting at the ballot box in the elections (“informed citizens”).

- A *deliberative and participatory understanding of democracy* follows the idea of involving as many citizens and civil society actors as possible in public discourse. The essential aspects, however, are not so much the participative, but the deliberative as “hearing of the other side” (Mutz 2006), and participation in a deliberative and not in a destructive sense. High-quality reporting is, therefore, additionally required to be dialogue-oriented and fundamentally open to voices that do not come from the pool of political professions, i.e., primarily from civil society. Political decisions should be grounded in rationality and not because of social power structures. Since, according to this model, alternative options should always be weighed and justified, journalism must present more contextual knowledge about problems, possible causes, assessments, and solutions. There is greater confidence in citizens that they can assemble a comprehensive communications repertoire for themselves and they also have greater accountability (“orienting and participating citizens”).

The areas of innovation of our study will now be sorted according to whether they are more likely to strengthen one or the other model:

A **liberal-representative understanding of democracy** is more likely to be strengthened by the following innovations: in monitoring elites through *investigative networks*, journalism acts on a mandate from citizens without involving them unless crowdsourcing models would intensively integrate citizens in the research. The same applies to *data journalism* in that if data from official sources of the state are used, it brings transparency into the relationship between the state and citizens. Only if citizens are involved in data collection (for example, through data donations) would this correspond to a participatory understanding of democracy. *Paywalls* tie citizens to the journalistic brand and can thus improve their information behavior; *newsletters* perform the same function. However, paywalls and fee-based newsletters exclude citizens who do not want or cannot afford the costs and thus limit an understanding of democracy that relies on the participation of many.

The following areas aim to strengthen a **deliberative and participatory understanding of democracy**: above all, innovations that give the audience a voice and step back from a sender-receiver mentality, in particular *fostering engagement*, *management of communities*, *membership models*, and *crowdfunding*. *Diversity and inclusion* in newsrooms and reporting force the input of civil society into the public sphere. *Social media*, as a challenging innovation for journalism, is fundamentally suited to acting at eye level with citizens and offering a wide range of rights, but it also represents the aforementioned ambivalence with its considerable downsides. *Fact-checking* attempts to minimize these downsides of a participatory public sphere and thus strengthens rational discourse in the deliberative sense. The innovative *podcast* format has the potential to include a range of voices as actors because the format is more open and flexible than classic radio news formats, which traditionally

focus on voices from the executive and legislative powers. *New digital storytelling* formats offer similar advantages in that they can go into greater depth to include more voices and actors than traditional presentation formats, whose space is limited.

The use of *AI in the editorial process* has the potential to strengthen the democratic functions of journalism in **both models**. On the one hand, it can support investigative research and data analysis and thus help to control the elites in a liberal-representative way and bring transparency into society. On the other hand, it can help make voices from civil society and the public in general more perceptible to editorial teams and thus strengthen diversity and a participatory public sphere.

Conclusion

The theoretical advance of our study lies in a deeper characterization of innovation, change, and transformation at various levels and an improved understanding of the interrelationships between innovation, quality, and democracy. We can show that it is primarily external drivers that push innovations in journalism at a triggering stage. That is why it makes more sense to speak of “innovations in journalism” rather than “journalism innovation,” and we were able to show the connections and impacts between the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels, which, for example, brings more insight into the journalistic innovation culture.

Journalistic practitioners and scholars quite often fear that innovations could damage the quality and normative function of journalism in democracy, especially if they are predominantly market-driven (Ferrucci and Perreault 2021). For example, studies have argued for “*normative failure* as a framework for understanding journalistic responses to change in their field” (Siegelbaum and Thomas 2016, 387). In our study, we were able to supplement and correct these observations. We prioritized innovations if they had a presumed social impact (in addition to other criteria like the degree of “innovativeness”), and we found a lot of evidence that innovations, in fact, can strengthen the democratic function of journalism. The analysis of the results has shown that, in some innovations, such as fact-checking, changes in the public sphere that could harm democracy have even been explicit triggers for the innovation to help heal the damage. Some innovations bring depth and variety instead of accelerating the insane speed of news; they emphasize original reporting instead of pushing the often-criticized churnalism (van Leuven, 2019) that only rehashes prepackaged material; new financing models focus on a stronger relationship with the audience instead of clickbait and also strengthen independent reporting.

The extent to which certain innovations in journalism affect its democratic function, however, depends on the model of democracy: In a liberal-representative understanding of democracy, the strengths lie in those innovations that monitor and scrutinize the powers and shed more light on social

affairs, enhancing the performance of the intermediary between the political system and citizens. In a deliberative and participatory understanding of democracy, the innovations that are particularly valuable are those that allow diverse voices from civil society to have their say in reporting and to bring in rational and checked facts, arguments, and moderation in public debate, which is otherwise characterized by increasing polarization and the growth of ideological filter bubbles. Overall, it can be concluded, regardless of which model is used as a basis, that the democratic value of innovations in journalism lies in that they occasionally take advantage of the benefits that digital media have brought, but more often, they aim to reduce the threats to democracy posed by the digital media universe. This, in turn, is related to what we summarized earlier: innovations primarily strengthen those quality factors that make journalism so special and distinguish it from other multiple forms of public communication.

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