

Paper

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How do news entrepreneurs view the future of their profession?

Four theses on tomorrow's journalism

Abstract: In view of fundamental transformations in the media landscape, the future of professional journalism is not only debated among communication scholars but also among journalists and media professionals. Relying on interviews with journalists and founders of German news start-ups, we contribute to this debate and present news entrepreneurs' perceptions on (1) the core functions of journalism in the future and (2) trends regarding journalism concepts, organisational forms, and revenue models of professional journalism. Based on our findings, four trends can be identified: (1) Professional journalism must focus on comprehensively investigated ›good stories‹. (2) The illusion of objective journalism is replaced by journalism with attitude. (3) Collaboration is the future organisational form in journalism. (4) The funding of professional journalism must increasingly come from civil society.

In view of the transformation of journalistic content production, distribution, and reception, the question of how the future of professional journalism can be shaped is not only a matter of communication science research (e.g. Buschow 2018; Van der Haak/Parks/Castells 2012). The challenges for professional journalism are also extensively addressed in the industry itself – as a thematic focus in newspapers^[1], symposia^[2], and opinion pieces^[3] (e.g. Ehl/Urner 2017). Even though

1 For example, the series »Zeitenwechsel« of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/thema/Zukunft_des_Journalismus (02.10.2018)

2 Most recently by Netzwerk Recherche on the subject of »Journalism? Not for nothing«: <https://netzwerk-recherche.org/termine/konferenzen/fachkonferenzen/journalismus-nicht-umsonst/> (02.10.2018)

3 The direct quotations of the interviews were translated and partly syntactically changed in order to facilitate a good reading flow. Larger omissions, however, are marked. All interviewees have agreed to a non-anonymous presentation of the results. Quotations were accepted by the interviewees, if desired

it is generally undisputed that journalism and its functions are indispensable for society (Haas 2010; Jarren 2008, 2015), the current transformations raise the question of whether a future for journalism, as it has been practiced so far (Picard 2014; Weischenberg 2018), still exists and how professional journalism can and will be able to sustainably position itself in hybrid and digital media environments. With a view on digital news journalism, we want to contribute to this debate by describing and condensing perspectives on the future of journalism by news entrepreneurs as ›pioneers of the industry‹ (Hepp/Loosen 2018; Ruotsalainen/Villi 2018) and by contextualising them with regard to current scientific literature. Our analysis focuses on the following questions:

1. According to the news entrepreneurs interviewed, which *functions* of professional news journalism will remain (or become) central in the future?
2. Which (new) *journalism concepts, organisational forms, and revenue models* do news entrepreneurs see as future trends?

In the course of digitalisation and the emergence of what has been called a ›networked public sphere‹ (Benkler 2006: 11) with the possibilities of (direct) digital distribution of content, new journalistic offerings have developed in the form of journalistic start-ups which are testing alternative forms of financing, organisation, and offerings (Achtenhagen 2017). Thus, they consolidate and expand journalistic practices concurrently (Carlson/Usher 2016). In reference to Ruotsalainen and Villi (2018), we understand news entrepreneurs as both journalists and entrepreneurs who

1. are active in a journalistic start-up that reacts to the current challenges of journalism,
2. realise a special form of journalism (whether regarding functions, concepts, or forms of organisation), and
3. test revenue models beyond classical advertising.

In their role as innovators in the industry, news entrepreneurs seem particularly suited to answer questions about the future of professional journalism (Carlson/Usher 2016; Hepp/Loosen 2019).

In approaching the question of future functions, concepts, organisation and financing of journalism, we will first review the research on developments and trends in journalism. After a brief description of our interviews with journalists and founders of 12 ›digital-only‹ journalistic start-ups, we look at how they perceive the role of professional journalism in digital and hybrid media environments, what concepts and organisational forms they use to position themselves in these environments, and what ideas they have about future revenue models for journalism. The assessments and perceptions of these journalists and entrepreneurs are particularly insightful in the current transformation phase of the industry, since, according to Usher (2017), they reveal the nature of future journalism. The aim of this article is to systematise and analyse the opinions of

the practitioners interviewed in this study on the question of the future of journalism and to work out central trends as points of reference for both an academic and a socio-political debate.

The following article is based on the semi-structured, in-depth interviews and document analyses that were undertaken as part of a project that investigates the professional autonomy of news entrepreneurs. The project results regarding the autonomy perceived by founders and journalists on professional norms and values, procedural and organisational self-determination, and independence from external influences are published in Heft und Dogruel (2019).

Challenges for professional journalism

In addition to economic aspects (Buschow 2018; Lobigs 2018), the discourse on current challenges for journalism particularly focuses on questions about the quality of professional journalism and its identity (Neuberger 2018; Papacharissi 2015; Weischenberg 2018). In view of the restructuring of editorial offices and cost-cutting measures (Puppis/Künzler/Jarren 2012) resulting in accelerated work processes and higher workload, the dissolution of boundaries, de-professionalisation, and more precarious working conditions in the journalistic field in Germany are diagnosed (Steindl/Lauerer/Hanitzsch 2017). These developments can be seen as problematic for high-quality and in-depth reporting. How journalism can maintain its identity and, at the same time, develop further in the face of dwindling boundaries between media and formats and between different actors and the logics of different functional systems is described as a »tightrope walk« (Neuberger 2018: 38, own translation).

Especially against the background of an increasing supply of media information and a new »information, communication and mediation industry« (Jarren 2015: 115), a growing need for the provision of classification, context, and background is seen and stressed as a unique selling point of journalism (Novy 2013). Self-observation of society and the provision of reliable information, analyses, and classification for the benefit of all are regarded as central functions of professional journalism and in digital media environments (Van der Haak/Parks/Castells 2012).

Diverse concepts and new forms of organisation are discussed in this regard. Forms of networked journalism in which the necessity of cooperation with other professions, as well as with citizens, is emphasised for the collection, examination, and enrichment of information (Van der Haak/Parks/Castells 2012); here, the figurative tightrope walk becomes particularly vivid. Other concepts include collaborative cross-border journalism, which gets its strength from the cross-border bundling of competencies and resources for the purpose of more diverse

and high-quality reporting (Alfter 2016), especially in cost-intensive areas, such as investigative journalism (Sambrook 2018). In addition, »point of view journalism« (journalism with a distinct perspective) is debated. It is argued that instead of insisting on (unattainable) objectivity, it is more important and expedient to focus on transparency and formats that convey a multitude of perspectives (Van der Haak/Parks/Castells 2012). The concept of constructive journalism as a reporting style is controversially discussed regarding the extent to which it could increase the public value of media (Beiler/Krüger 2018; Mast/Coeseemans/Temmerman 2019). Other approaches emphasise new ways and spaces of collaborative storytelling as the expression of novel forms of news production in hybrid platforms in which affect and subjectivity play a greater role (Papacharissi 2015). In view of this differentiation of professional journalism and with a view to its identity, Jarren (2015: 121) has argued that the various »journalisms«, i.e. the various new forms and concepts of journalism, should be seen as gains to be analysed and understood.

In addition to the struggle for professional quality and the identity of journalism, its financing is a central issue. The long-successful revenue model of journalism, cross-subsidisation from the advertising market in addition to direct revenues from subscriptions and newspaper sales, is in crisis. This is caused by both declining advertising revenues due to the entry of competing online intermediaries, whose business models dominate the advertising markets, and readers' reluctance to pay for online news in conjunction with the early strategy of media brands offering their online content free of charge (Wenzlaff 2013; Lobigs 2018). Here, too, the industry and research expect news entrepreneurs to provide important impulses on how to deal with the challenges of financing journalism (Vos/Singer 2016).

While established online media providers continue to rely predominantly on a combination of advertising and direct revenues in the form of paywalls (Kansky 2015), news entrepreneurs in particular have new revenue concepts that include foundation-financed models, large-scale donations by individual »patrons«, individual donations (crowdfunding), membership fees, or micropayments for individual content (Aitamurto 2011; Wenzlaff 2013). The extent to which such alternative forms of income offer an opportunity for journalism is controversial – as the debate about endowment funds as a »third way« of financing the institution of journalism (Kiefer 2011) shows. Existing analyses indicate that such alternative financing models hardly offer a viable economic basis for journalism (Lobigs 2018) and that there are reservations about public or foundation-based financing of journalism (Russ-Mohl 2011; Stöber 2011; Weischenberg 2018). Particularly with regard to the independence of journalism, it is unclear (Porlezza/Splendore 2016; Vos/Singer 2016) which revenue models will be established and viable alongside the classic model of cross-financing from advertising and user fees.

News Entrepreneurs as new actors in the journalism ecosystem

As a »source of hope« (Vos/Singer 2016: 143) in dealing with these challenges, news entrepreneurs have positioned themselves as pioneers in their industry. They are particularly important because they are often seen as the driving forces that could revitalise journalistic practices online and initiate necessary innovations in the news business (Nee 2013). According to Deuze and Witschge (2018), news entrepreneurs are the consequence of a general shift of expectations where an entrepreneurial spirit is not only demanded on the organisational level (macro level) but also from the individual journalist (micro level). What is meant by »entrepreneurial journalism«, however, has not yet been clearly defined (Ruotsalainen/Villi 2018; Vos/Singer 2016). In response to rather inclusive definitions, Ruotsalainen and Villi therefore try to offer an exclusion criterion as a compromise: entrepreneurial journalism means the discovery of new opportunities and paths for journalism with the attempt to turn them into a business model (2018: 82). At the same time, various studies on entrepreneurial journalism (including Usher 2017; Wagemans/Witschge/Harbers 2019) have shown that it does not reinvent journalism, but rather confirms and links existing concepts, thereby questioning them.

The term »entrepreneurial journalism« already indicates a central ethical challenge: roles and tasks that absolutely had to be separated in traditional media are performed together in the journalistic start-ups, which raises questions about the autonomy of media professionals (Porlezza/Splendore 2016; Vos/Singer 2016). Nevertheless, the potential of entrepreneurial journalism seems largely undisputed: the innovative and disruptive news start-ups are seen as a necessity for survival or renewal of the industry (Vos/Singer 2016; Carlson/Usher 2016).

Method

Owing to these (ascribed) characteristics, news entrepreneurs were interviewed, whereby this study contributes to journalism research »beyond the stable news institutions« (Deuze/Witschge 2018: 176). The analysis of which services and functions news entrepreneurs want to provide (i.e. where they see their unique selling point) and with which organisational forms, journalism concepts, and revenue models they position themselves is based on in-depth interviews with journalists and founders of news start-ups, which were conducted as part of a larger project (Heft/Dogruel 2019). In order to identify relevant companies, we first searched for journalistic start-ups in Germany or with considerable German share. Based on national and international media competitions (e.g. Grimme Online Award, Lead Award, Data Journalism Awards), databases on innovative

journalism projects and funding organisations (e.g. Vocer, Journalismfund.eu, Media Lab Bayern), and supplemented by snowball sampling, we identified around 140 organisations. Based on information given on their websites, the type of company and basic organisational information (such as date of foundation, number of employees, organisational structures, goals and thematic focus, as well as the financing model) were determined in order to allow for a systematic case selection.

According to the principle of theoretical sampling (Corbin/Strauss 2008; Kelle/Kluge 2010), start-ups were selected which vary in their degree of institutionalisation and their financing models and represent different types of journalistic organisations. We have differentiated three types:

1. journalistic networks of collaborative content production, in which journalists, activists, and data managers work together;
2. online journalism platforms, which offer an infrastructure independent of traditional media organisations and publish and monetise journalistic content under a common label; and
3. online media, which are permanent, have been initiated independently of traditional media organisations, offer editorial content, and have a certain rhythm of publication.

Our analysis includes 12 projects:

- *Investigate Europe* and Host-writer's *Agora Project* are examples of network journalism;
- *CamperStyle*, *Das Filter*, *Deine Korrespondentin*, *Perspective Daily*, *Correctly*, *dekoder*, *Krautreporter*, and *Netzpolitik.org* represent strongly institutionalised online media;
- and *The Buzzard* and *piqd* are examples of online platforms.

For all companies, the founders and some journalists were selected on the basis of secondary source analyses. A total of 17 interviews were conducted: five with founders of the various projects, five with journalists working on the projects, and seven with persons representing both levels in our study. The interviews were conducted from January to March 2018 either in person (1), by telephone (9), or online via Skype or the like (7). They lasted between 25 and 64 minutes with an average duration of 48 minutes. In order to understand the underlying perception of journalism, the news entrepreneurs were asked about the backgrounds, occasions, as well as the motivations and goals of the start-up. They were also asked about the fulfilment of their ideas, future goals, special features, and unique selling points of their respective offerings. In addition to questions about the organisational structure, we also asked about the form, scope, and organisation of financing to account for their revenue model. Regarding the future of financing, we also inquired about planned changes in the type or scope of their long-term viable financing models. The founders and journalists were

asked to give their overall assessments and visions of the future of journalism. The interviews were transcribed and all passages were marked in which future plans (of their own enterprise) and future visions (of journalism in general) of the interviewees were expressed. These passages were structured in a multi-stage process, assigned to the categories of *functions, concepts, forms of organisation, and revenue models* and multiple ideas and elements were condensed in order to identify trends (Mayring 2008).

The future of journalism – a journalism for the future: The perspective of news entrepreneurs

Despite the diversity of the start-ups and the variety of answers the participants gave regarding the challenges of journalism in the future, central trends have emerged. The research questions will be answered in the following section by highlighting these four trends: (1) Professional journalism must distinguish itself from increasingly automated news, tweets, and content from social networks with well-written and comprehensively researched stories. (2) The illusion of objective journalism must be replaced with journalism with attitude and personality. (3) The organisational form of journalism of the future is collaborative. (4) Professional journalism cannot be financed without civil society—and possibly only with the involvement of the state. In conclusion, the findings presented in this chapter are contextualised within the scientific debate.

Thesis 1: Reflection on the core business – good stories as a unique selling proposition

Even though the news start-ups in our sample pursue different business models and goals, what they have in common is that they react to the crisis of traditional journalism and seek answers to the challenges of a digitalised media world for journalism. One of these challenges is the increasing complexity of public communicators in the face of new, diverse communication networks and platforms (Blumler/Kavanaugh 1999). The public no longer only learns about world events from newspapers and radio, but also from reports by individuals which are shared via social media or through the professional communication of the most diverse actors, be they company representatives, politicians, or stakeholders. In view of the large number of information channels, respondents therefore refer to the classification of this mass of information and the diversity of circulating perspectives as a central unique selling point of professional journalism. For a

journalist of the online platform *The Buzzard*, it is clear: »Curatorial services will have the future.«^[4]

For the respondents, an important aspect of this curatorial service is to present as many perspectives as possible and make them accessible to the recipients. Journalism then becomes an »opinion navigator«, as the founder of *The Buzzard* explains: »We are the point of contact that brings you to many other voices that are on the Internet«. This aspect of diversity can also be found in other news start-ups, such as *piqd*, *dekoder* or *Perspective Daily*, which deliberately include authors who do not come from journalism.^[5] *Deine Korrespondentin* and the contributors to the *Agora Project* consistently adopt certain perspectives in their stories,^[6] which are intended to supplement mainstream reporting. This focus on diversity is associated with the intention of contextualising information and illuminating the various facets of themes or events in order to come closer to a more comprehensive understanding of reality. The mission of *The Buzzard*, for example, is to »make possible a more differentiated picture of the political debates of our time [...]. What we are really interested in is the variety of arguments.« In order to achieve this, interviewees (e.g. from *piqd*, *Netzpolitik*, *Perspective Daily*, *Investigate Europe*) emphasise that space and time are needed for research, extensive reportage, and background information, so that a »calm view« is possible in which »the grey tones are very well allowed« (*piqd*). The task and unique selling point of journalism is then no longer to provide information, but to present connections and diverse perspectives, background information, and orientation: »The future of journalism should be that we continue to make very well-researched and very well-written stories. No matter on which channel.« (*piqd*)

Thesis 2: Point of view journalism

Objectivity in journalism has always been controversial: objective reporting is regarded as an important value of journalism (Meier 2018; Munoz-Torres 2012), while, at the same time, views vary considerably as to what is to be understood by this principle (ibid.). In addition, there is a fundamental discussion as to whether objective reporting is possible at all (see Neuberger 2017). Against the background of the debate about trust in the institution of journalism, some of the news start-ups surveyed (*Netzpolitik*, *Perspective Daily*, *The Buzzard*, and *piqd*)

4 *piqd*, for example, has a »team of curators« consisting of »130 clever minds«, which includes not only journalists and editors but also writers, politicians, and scientists: www.piqd.de/about (24.02.2019). Experts with an academic background are part of the *dekoder* team: www.dekoder.org/de/hintergrund-materialien (24.02.2019).

5 *The Agora Project* describes itself as a »temporary European Newsroom« (agora.hostwriter.org/, 24.02.2019), while the unique selling point of *Deine Korrespondentin* is stories by women about women (www.deine-korrespondentin.de/ueber-uns/, 24.02.2019).

6 Title of an article by Charles Lewis, founder of the ICIJ, in *The Guardian*: www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2016/apr/18/future-of-journalism-collaboration-panama-papers (18.04.2016).

have found their answer to this question: they pursue a journalism that reports self-confidently and transparently with attitude and opinion instead of (ostensibly) objectivity. For *Netzpolitik*, one respondent describes this understanding as follows: »We have a different picture of journalism [...] because we don't assume that there could be a neutral journalism, but ›journalism with attitude‹ we say. We make clear what we stand for and from what perspective we write.«

This understanding of journalism goes hand in hand with general phenomena such as individualisation in postmodern societies and the personalisation of public communication and politics (Blumler/Kavanaugh 1999; Hans 2017). Journalists as individuals step out of the shadow of the news organisation (e.g. in *Netzpolitik*, *piqd*, *Krautreporter*), which is intensified by the fact that they communicate on social media under their own name, while the employer's brand name recedes into the background (see also Ruotsalainen/Villi 2018). In this vein, *Deine Korrespondentin* is experimenting with podcasts and video formats so that »you can also get to know the person behind the name a little« (*Deine Korrespondentin*). Like journalism with attitude, this personalised journalism is intended to (re) build trust between recipients and journalists: »We often seek personal access to the stories. Our authors are very present, both in the commentary column and in the articles [...], because we believe that trust comes from a personal level and not necessarily from an institutional one, as it used to be.« (*Krautreporter*)

*Thesis 3: The future of journalism in three words: collaboration, collaboration, collaboration*⁷¹

Collaborations of various kinds are seen and lived by some of the news start-ups investigated as a central organisational form of sustainable journalism. Examples of start-ups which institutionalise cooperation between journalists are the *Agora Project*, *Investigate Europe*, and *Perspective Daily*. The first two projects take a decidedly European perspective, for which the exchange and cooperation with colleagues from different countries seems not only advantageous, but indispensable: »We make great stories that you couldn't do on your own, even if you were a brilliant reporter, no one can research in five to six countries at the same time« (*Investigate Europe*). For the co-founder of the *Agora Project*, the collaboration of several journalists also means a rapprochement with the already outlined ideal of a more diverse reporting: »We simply believe in this idea of cooperation, which also brings you to question national stereotypes, and you can only do that if you get together with people with different backgrounds.«

But other forms of cooperation are also practiced. *Krautreporter* and *Correct!*

71 Titel eines Artikels von Charles Lewis, Gründer des ICIJ, in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/18/future-of-journalism-collaboration-panama-papers> (18.04.2016). Eigene Übersetzung.

work together with their readers to enable local, resource-intensive research and to draw on the knowledge of their recipients (e.g. in the form of the *CrowdNewsroom* at *Correctiv*^[8]). Other start-ups, such as *Perspective Daily*, engage in a lively exchange with their subscribers through surveys (information given in interview with Maren Urner), which can thus influence their content. This form of influence is expressly desired, since it is expected that cooperation can also lead to a (regained) relationship of trust between journalists and readers: »It was important to us that a relationship should develop between readers and authors, between audience and journalists, that this gap that exists should be bridged« (*Krautreporter*). Beyond these concrete examples, some of the respondents expressed the wish that cooperation should replace the »competitive logic« (*Investigate Europe*) in the media industry and should shape all phases of production and distribution of journalistic content – be it at the level of the publishing houses (see also Hepp/Loosen 2018), in order to face the challenges of journalism together, or at the level of articles and work routines in the start-ups (e.g. bei *Perspective Daily*, *Agora Project*).

Thesis 4: Society does it: new sources of funding for journalism

How the financing of journalism will and should be organised is a central problem not only for the scientific debate, but also for the news start-ups. The survey showed that the founders of the companies analysed often rely on a financing mix and base their revenue model on different pillars: »Essentially, it is a matter of creating a good mix, not just concentrating on one source of income, but building up different pillars« (*Deine Korrespondentin*). This makes the news start-ups, presumably, more resilient and less dependent on particular interests. In addition, the news entrepreneurs seemed to be open to alternative financing models, such as the provision of their own expertise to other organisations for a fee or the organisation of topic-specific events (e.g. *Deine Korrespondentin*, *decoder*, *Netzpolitik*).

All in all, the interviewees agree that a stronger societal involvement in the financing of journalism is necessary. The existing form of cross-financing journalistic content through advertising is regarded as no longer desirable.^[9] In contrast, two other central revenue models are emerging for tomorrow's journalism. For many of the companies – such as *Perspective Daily*, *The Buzzard*, *Deine Korrespondentin*, and *Krautreporter* – the »silver bullet« is to be financed by their own readers, whether through subscriptions or crowdfunding campaigns. This

8 Website of the *CrowdNewsroom*: crowdnewsroom.org/

9 For example, *Perspective Daily* declares (financial) independence from business to be one of its core values (perspective-daily.de/ueber_uns#/values (24.02.2019)), and *Correctiv* also emphasises independence from economic interests as an important aspect of self-image (correctiv.org/ueber_uns/ (24.02.2019))

form of financing combines several advantages for news entrepreneurs: successful crowdfunding campaigns can be seen as proof of having created a product that meets readers' demands and is found to be good. This form of financing also creates a clear guideline for journalists, which can also affect the quality of journalistic products: »Not all advertising-financed journalism is automatically bad journalism, but the probability that it is worse is higher because the incentives are simply set differently than when you write for your readers« (*Krautreporter*). One interviewee even describes this revenue model as »the most independent form of journalism« (*Perspective Daily*).

At the same time, the interviewees are also aware that financing via the readers alone is not sustainable for all projects or large media houses: the recipients are still too used to receiving free information on the Internet, so payment thresholds are often not accepted (e.g. with *Deine Korrespondentin*). To bring about a change of attitude on this point is a »long-term educational process« for which »support from civil society and people who can afford it« (*Investigate Europe*) is necessary. While the academic debate is critical, foundations are another attractive source of funding for many news start-ups. In rarer cases, such as with *Correctiv*, *decoder*, or *Investigate Europe*, these are the only or most important source of funding; for the other entrepreneurs, however, foundation funds are a possible pillar in the funding mix (as reported by *Perspective Daily* and *Deine Korrespondentin*). However, some entrepreneurs (e.g. from *The Buzzard*, *Deine Korrespondentin*) also point to the problem that there are comparatively few foundations that promote journalism, as this form of financing is not yet widespread in Germany.^[10] Even with non-profit projects – in our sample, this applies to *Correctiv* and *decoder* – entrepreneurs have found that there are obstacles to long-term financing through foundations. However, the principle of public benefit and non-profit status is not only relevant for the revenue model of the projects, but it has also been discussed by the media as a specific understanding of journalism: »Our job is to provide information so that people can form an opinion as well as possible [...] so that democracy works. We have internalised this a little bit more than in a classic editorial office [...]. It's part of our mission, otherwise we wouldn't be able to remain charitable« (*Correctiv*).

Overall, it became clear in the interviews that the entrepreneurs surveyed prefer civil society financing sources to traditional investment – as is usually the case in the start-up sector. According to some respondents, the pressure emanating from this revenue model is too great (e.g. *Das Filter*) and too reminiscent of advertising financing, from which many journalistic companies have deliberately turned away. Entrepreneurs were rather open to government-organised

10 This fact is also discussed and problematised in the industry: www.cartainfo/85466/warum-stiftungen-den-journalismus-staerker-foerdern-sollten/ (25.03.2019).

financing. With regard to the functions of journalism for a democratic society, the managing director of *piqd*, for example, argues that »we need state-organised structures for the distribution of information on the Internet which are democratically controlled and which are not simply on the capital market, i.e. which are not subject to purely quantitative growth constraints« and thus takes a position which has also been discussed and strongly criticised in communications science (see Kiefer 2011; Russ-Mohl 2011; Stöber 2011).

Conclusion

With a view to the function and identity of professional journalism, our study shows some trends that are reflected both in the visions of practitioners and in scientific analyses of the future of journalism: ›good stories‹ and professional research, classification, and analysis are considered to be key unique selling points. Journalism with attitude and collaborative network journalism are perceived as concepts that can increase the public value of and trust in media. The future of professional journalism is therefore optimistic, according to the representatives of digital news start-ups. They are convinced that journalism can defend its significance when the understanding of journalism is adapted to today's media landscape as the orientation that journalism provides is more in demand than ever before. According to the news entrepreneurs, central challenges exist, particularly at the level of organisation and financing. Collaboration must assert itself more strongly against competition, the willingness of recipients to pay must increase, confidence must be regained, and legal and political hurdles in financing must be tackled. The news start-ups are more willing to say goodbye to previous revenue models and break new ground, such as state-organised financing, which is highly controversial in the scientific debate because it touches on central questions of journalistic autonomy.

The trends and challenges presented in our study are generated from interviews with a few selected news entrepreneurs who each represent special journalism concepts and are thus naturally limited. On the one hand, the identified trends cannot be interpreted in isolation from the projects' business models nor their stage of development. On the other hand, the interviews are snapshots of a very dynamic field which, as was pointed out at the beginning, is currently undergoing radical change. Our analysis therefore focuses on those developments leading to a reorientation of journalism that are central and topical from the perspective of the start-ups surveyed. Nevertheless, it is argued (see Carlson/Usher 2016; Hepp/Loosen 2019) that these insights into the understanding and visions for a sustainable journalism of the news entrepreneurs can prove to be revealing, as they are pioneers within the industry.

Overall, the interviewees' visions of the future confirm Carlson and Usher's (2016) and Usher's (2017) assessment that news start-ups modify journalism's forms, ways of organisation, and revenue models while preserving the fundamental understanding of journalism and the assumptions about its functions and role in society. Even though the innovative formats and concepts of news entrepreneurs cannot be transferred one-to-one to traditional media organisations and further debate on normative issues is required, examples (such as the European Investigative Collaboration Network^[11] between the German news weekly Spiegel and other established European media or the initiative of public broadcasters to increasingly establish dialog formats with their readers^[12]) show that entrepreneurs are central idea generators and innovative ›laboratories‹ for the further development of professional journalism in hybrid and digital media environments.

Further research could adopt differentiation into functions, concepts, organisational forms, and revenue models made here in order to analyse which trends are emerging. This research should take into account a greater diversity and number of journalistic start-ups and whether different types of news entrepreneurs systematically differ regarding their understanding of journalism, or whether a common vision of the future of journalism should be developed. Current developments, organisational forms, and the financing of journalism should be critically monitored in relationship with its fundamental values, such as autonomy (Heft/Dogrueel 2019: 694) and—in its position as an intermediary—on other social processes, such as public opinion forming and political decision-making.

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¹¹ eic.network/ (24.02.2019)

¹² Described, for example, by Jan Weyrauch, programme director of Radio Bremen in the article ›Nur zu senden reicht nicht mehr‹ (*Die Zeit*, No. 49/2018, 29 November 2018)

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