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Edited by Bernhard Debatin, Gabriele Hooffacker, Horst Pöttker,
Tanjev Schultz and Martina Thiele

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Editorial

Crisis management

It was not planned, but an undoubted consequence of the precarious situation in which the profession of journalism now finds itself: The papers in this edition revolve more or less directly around questions of how to tackle the economic and professional hazards caused by digitalization and how to boost journalistic quality and diversity.

Taking Austria as their example, Konstantin Schätz and Susanne Kirchoff examine how professional journalism training is reacting to the digital transformation. Their analysis of the increasing number of advanced training programs at traditional universities, universities of applied sciences, and private academies shows that the vast majority of courses at all types of institution are highly application based. Professional journalistic training today emphasizes its links to practice and has arrived in the digital media age. Yet the teaching staff surveyed also warned that teaching technical skills must not come at the expense of the foundations of the profession. Teaching understanding of the role of journalism in society, sensitizing students to the rules of professional ethics, and communicating basic knowledge of working methods such as research and forms of presentation, are all part of the role of promoting the development of a professional attitude. The fact that only a handful of those responsible for professional journalism training have hit upon the idea that their activities could provide inspiration for journalism is a cause for concern, however. One possible reason for this hesitance could be that acceptance of academic initial and advanced training is still too low at media companies. There is untapped potential for innovation here, which could be vital for the transformation of the profession that has become necessary as a result of the crisis.

Hendrik Michael's historic paper on the muckraker Lincoln Steffens and the New York paper Commercial Advertiser at the turn of the 20th Century shows how even endangered media can produce creative journalistic work. Then, as now, strengthening local reporting and deliberately focusing on audiences with limited access to information – e.g. migrants both then in the USA and today in Europe – promises success from both a journalistic and an economic point of view. However, it also

demands a sufficient number of staff from these groups in editorial offices. Other options include immersive research methods in which reporters become fully involved in day-to-day lives, and literary-inspired storytelling as a way to approach the feelings and interests of the audience. Literature on American journalism often overlooks this tradition – but it is well worth remembering given the flood of extremely brief and urgent news stories that unavoidably rains down on recipients in the digital media world and from which it is increasingly difficult for the journalism profession to live. This paper is an excellent demonstration of how the past can provide inspiration for the present.

The clearest example of this issue's aforementioned key questions is Christian-Mathias Wellbrock's analysis of potential ways to organize a shared streaming service for journalistic products online. He prescribes a structure under public law, with equal access for everyone, especially local and regional media, in the same way as the German press wholesaler – preferring this to digital platforms run by consortia of publishing houses and certainly to globally active technology giants along the lines of Spotify for music. Although, this preference is based on economic factors, a concern for journalistic quality and the associated greater good can be seen. A digital press wholesaler would protect diversity of information – a virtue that was already under threat before digitalization. After all, the clutter of unprofessional and semiprofessional information available on the internet merely masks the ongoing process of press concentration. With the interested parties behind the less-suitable alternatives already chomping at the bit, however, the political decision needed is somewhat urgent.

Much of this edition is about dangers and how they can be dealt with. Both the essay and the debate are linked to a very topical subject: journalism during the corona crisis. Nina Horaczek provides an international overview of right-wing populist activity, much of it online, against which professional independence and objectivity needed to be defended even before corona. Global platforms simply offer unprecedented opportunities for dishonest and brutal propaganda.

It will only be possible to answer the question debated by Timo Rieg and Tanjev Schultz on the quality of reporting on coronavirus academically once there has been sufficient time for thorough data collection and theory-based analysis. (The spontaneous, fierce criticism from numerous media scholars has done nothing to increase acceptance of the subject in its field of application, as the reaction of the former FAZ publisher and *Journalism Research* author Werner D'Inka shows.)¹ Even today, however, we already know that sustainable media critique including from outside the sector is important if journalism as a profession is to overcome this crisis. After all, it needs to work through the consequences of the media transformation in a wide

1 Cf. D'Inka, Werner: Corona und die Medien: Sind alle Journalisten Versager? In: *faz.net*, 18.4.2020. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/wie-medienforschung-sich-laecherlich-macht-16729555.html> (19.7.2020)

range of social, economic, and cultural fields, without losing sight of its core role of providing transparency.

Perhaps you have a different opinion? Something to add? You can leave a comment directly under the papers, the essay, and the debate pieces. Or send us an email at redaktion@journalistik.online. We would also be delighted to receive suggestions for topics and, of course, offers of manuscripts.

P.S. Why not follow Journalistik on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/journalistik.online>.

Horst Pöttker, July 2020

Translation: Sophie Costella

Research Paper

Konstantin Schätz / Susanne Kirchhoff

New paths in journalism, a crossroads for education

Abstract: The professional field of journalism is changing rapidly – and so is journalism education. This study takes the Austrian educational institutions as an example to show which challenges journalism education currently faces and how it responds to them. In addition, the analysis of the course programs and guided interviews with program developers give insight into how the digitalization of journalism has been integrated in the curricula and how the status quo fits into current international debates about an adequate journalism education.

»There are very few professions for which no training is required: They include publicans, advisors, journalists, and politicians« (Kocher 2006: 10). If one believes this quote from political theorist and health economist Gerhard Kocher, one could gain the impression that there is no need to analyze the status of journalism training in Austria. And in principle he is not wrong: »Journalist« is not a legally protected professional title in Germany or Austria: »Anyone who wants to« (Hoeffacker/Meier 2017: 1) can call themselves a journalist. Yet this is not the whole story. On the one hand, journalism has always expected certain skills, which are taught in schools of journalism, university courses, and traineeships. On the other, the demands of this increasingly complex professional field are rising all the time, driven by digitalization, technologization, interconnectedness, and economization (cf. Otto/Köhler 2017: 18).

There are numerous examples: Production and distribution processes are becoming ever faster. Interaction with the audience via social networks is becoming more important. The boundaries between different professional fields such as journalism, public relations, marketing, advertising, film production, and media design are becoming blurred. New technologies in communication and media are changing working processes and making the relevant technical and

journalistic skills a necessity. At the same time, new business fields that do not depend on advertising revenue are growing up, each demanding further adaptation from journalists. There is good reason why the *Tagesspiegel* journalist Sonja Pohlmann described journalism in relation to the convergence of text, video, and sound as an »egg-laying woolly dairy sow« (cf. Pohlmann 2012: no page number).

Media companies are not the only ones having to deal with these changes. Journalism education also needs to readjust, given that it sees its role as preparing the next generation of journalists for the professional field. In today's world, that means »a lifelong journey of adaptation in a relentlessly changing media landscape« (Pavlik 2013: 215).

In Austria, the situation is exacerbated by the fact that the market for initial and advanced journalism training has become increasingly fragmented over the last two decades (cf. Dorer et al. 2009; Hooffacker/Meier 2017). Unlike in Germany, there is no distinct degree in journalism or school of journalism in Austria, although journalism studies has been integrated into the academic education provided by the degree programs in Communication Studies at the Universities of Vienna and Salzburg (and later Klagenfurt) since the late 1960s. These university programs were joined in 1974 by the foundation (as a social partnership) of the Kuratorium für Journalistenausbildung, a college offering regular courses for young journalists. The Katholische Medienakademie also began offering journalism training in 1977.

In a second phase beginning in the second half of the 1990s, the education on offer was broadened significantly by structural changes as part of the Bologna process, the expansion of options for initial and advanced training outside universities (e.g. from *fjum/forum journalismus und medien*; APA-Campus), and the foundation of universities of applied sciences. From a content point of view, this change was driven particularly by the establishment of new studies such as journalism, media design, media and informatics, marketing, and PR at the universities of applied science (cf. Dorer et al. 2009). In terms of structure, although the media sector has had a strong focus on the Austrian capital, Vienna, the range of training on offer has become increasingly regionalized as universities of applied sciences offering degrees related to journalism have been set up in the federal states Burgenland, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, and Tyrol. This trend was continued in 2012, for example, with the foundation of the *Tiroler Journalismusakademie*.

In view of the developments in journalism and the diversification of journalism education, the research project *Die österreichische Journalistenausbildung im Kontext einer veränderten Berufswelt* [Journalism training in Austria in the context of a changed professional world] (Kirchhoff 2019), funded by KommAustria/RTR, looked to chart this landscape by recording what is on offer and discussing the challenges faced. As well as noting the structure and the didactic and content-related design of the courses on offer, it also looked at the objectives of an appropri-

ate journalism education and recorded the specific skills that curricula for modern initial and advanced training for journalists need to teach today. In addition, it investigated which challenges the education institutions face and which ideas and concepts they use to tackle them.

Method

The research project was conducted based on a three-level investigation. In the first stage, the course programs of all the institutions offering initial or advanced training for journalists in Austria were subjected to a content analysis. Totalling 31 institutions, they included universities and universities of applied sciences, journalism academies, and advanced training courses offered by private, political, and church-based providers, as well as three examples each of teaching editorial offices of large media houses and citizen media, known as free radio/TV broadcasters. As there is no journalism studies program in Austria, the university sector was covered by looking at all communication studies and other media-related programs whose curricula include journalistic content. When it came to academies and training courses, however, only institutions who themselves stated that they are aimed explicitly at journalists and those interested in journalism were included.

In total, the 31 institutions offer 67 programs, in which aspects including structural factors (such as target audience and registration requirements) and content-related, didactic factors (such as skills taught, application and course topics) were recorded for $n=1818$ courses in the period September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2019.

Building on these findings, 29 qualitative interviews were conducted with people who either led the facilities or were responsible for planning and implementing the courses. The topics covered in these interviews included what forms the core of contemporary initial and further training, what role it plays or should play in relation to the media sector, which challenges it faces due to the digital transformation, and how these challenges can be addressed. The interviewees played a dual role in the survey, both giving an insight into their respective institutions as interview subjects and, in their positions as experts, asked to give their estimation of developments in initial and further training.

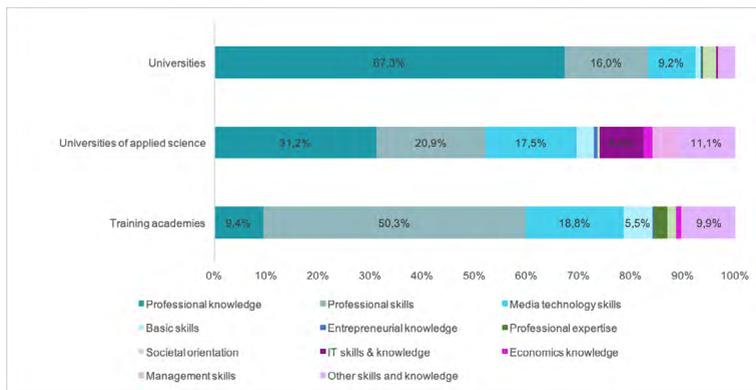
Content and practical application of the courses

There is a huge range of initial and further training on offer for journalists in Austria. The differences between courses generally correspond to the different fundamental focuses of universities, universities of applied sciences, and non-university facilities.

This is clearly demonstrated by the competencies taught, which were defined in the study as professional knowledge, professional skills, media technology skills, professional expertise, entrepreneurial knowledge, basic skills, and societal orientation based on Gossel (2015) and Nowak (2007)¹¹. Courses at universities (n=489) teach professional knowledge in particular (67.3% of the courses), followed by professional skills (16.0%), and media technology skills (9.2%). The same order applies to the universities of applied sciences (n=947), albeit with a greater balance (specialist skills: 31.2%, ability to act: 20.9%, media technology skills: 17.5%). Within the programs of the non-academic training facilities (n=382), the professional skills make up the largest part (50.3%), followed by media technology skills (18.8%), and professional knowledge (9.4%). There are also differences in the further competencies recorded here, which include skills and knowledge from IT, economics and management, and »others« from political and social science, law, foreign languages etc. However, they play a less important role than the »big three,« with none being taught in more than 5% of the courses except for the comparatively large share of IT-skills and knowledge, which is owed to the interdisciplinary orientation of according studies at the universities of applied science (cf. Fig. 1).

Figure 1:

Skills taught in the various types of institution (n=1818, %)

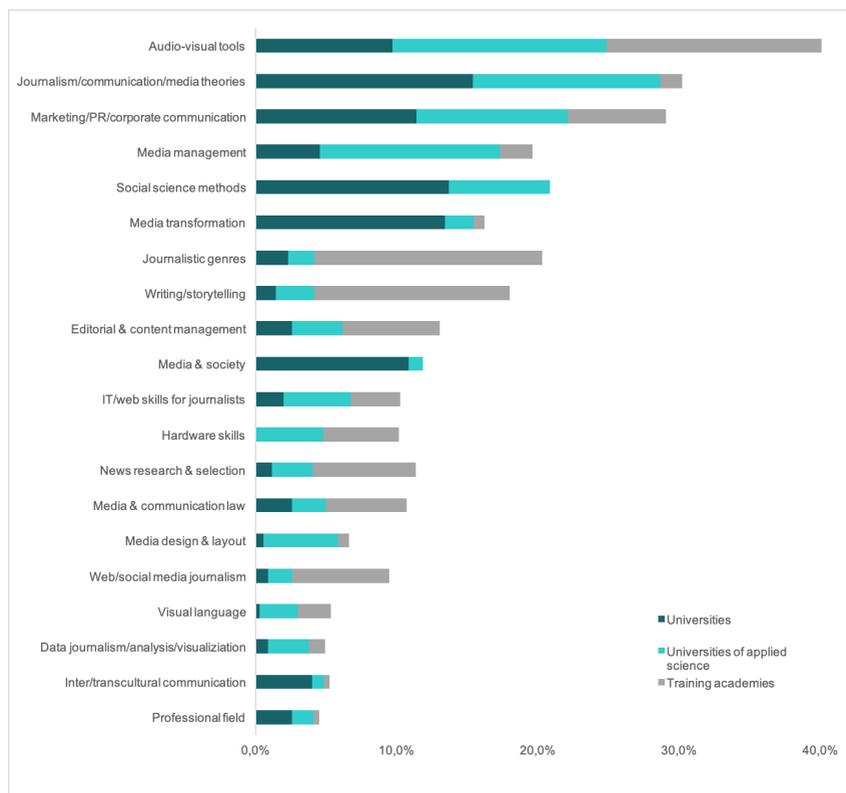


11 While Gossel (2015) and Nowak (2015) follow the German research tradition and summarily speak of »competencies,« the English translation in this article distinguishes between »knowledge« and »skills«, following the European Qualifications Framework, where knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual and skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments), cp. <https://europa.eu/europass/en>.

Regarding the specific course topics, it can be noted that the universities generally value scientific theories and methods. At universities, the way media are embedded in society and the changes instigated by the media transformation are more likely to form the central content of the courses. Universities of applied sciences, on the other hand, prefer to focus their content on the direct practical application. There is therefore a slight difference in the »top five« topics (cf. Fig. 2):

Figure 2

Most common course topics linked to media/communications/journalism (n=1199, %)



The most common course topics at universities (n=465) are theories of journalism, media, and communication (11.6%); social science methods, statistics, and scientific working methods (10.3%); the media transformation (10.1%); media and society (8.6%); and marketing/PR/corporate communication (8.2%). At the uni-

versities of applied sciences (n=663), on the other hand, the most common topics are audio-visual tools (13.4%), ahead of theories of journalism, media, and communication sciences (11.8%); media management (11.3%); marketing/PR/corporate communication (9.5%); and social science methods (6.3%).

It can come as little surprise that non-academic training facilities orientate their courses on the practical needs of potential participants. Their focus is on teaching the »craftsmanship« that forms the core of journalistic work (research, selection, reporting). There is much less focus on IT and data skills. The course content most commonly offered here (n=317) relates to audio-visual tools (14.5%), journalistic genres and forms of presentation (13.3%); text work/writing /storytelling (11.6%); research and news selection (6.0%); and marketing/PR/corporate communication; IT and web skills for journalists; and editorial and content management (5.7% each).

The *digitalization of journalism* has found its way into every aspect of the Austrian landscape of journalism education. Courses whose title or description includes the terms »online« and/or »social media« make up 73% of courses at traditional universities, 59% at universities of applied sciences, and 74% at non-academic facilities.

When it comes to the question of whether the programs also reflects *current trends and developments* in journalism, the result is mixed. Media management, editorial and content management, media design/layout, online and social media journalism, IT and web skills, and data journalism are all among the twenty most common course topics – but other topics that are considered relevant in the international discussion on contemporary education (e.g. Betels-Schwabbauer et al. 2018; Drok 2019) are only offered in a few cases. For example, a maximum of just 1.5% of the courses – regardless of the type of institution – offer a focus on mobile reporting, multimedia storytelling, entrepreneurial skills for journalists, media ethics, the function of journalism in society, interaction with users, or media effects.

The term *application-oriented* refers to courses that meet at least one of the following three criteria: explicit mention of application/practice in the course description, taught by practitioners, or concluded with a practical thesis. Two things are important to note here: Firstly, as expected, the practical application regardless of content is highest in the non-academic training facilities (83%), followed by universities of applied sciences (68%) and universities (39%). On the other hand, specifically the journalism courses at all three types of institution are dominated by practical application (university: 67%, university of applied sciences: 90%; training academies: 88%). The requirements for practical journalist education (e.g. Dernbach/Loosen 2012) are thus largely met.

The role of basic journalism principles

One of the aspects looked at in the interviews conducted with those responsible in the facilities investigated was the question of what should form the core of the journalism education programs. The answer was unanimous: Given the constantly growing number of potentially relevant skills, journalism education needs to concentrate on fundamental knowledge (such as in the fields of media law and media economics) and fundamental skills (such as research, interviews, and presentation). The respondents also emphasized the importance of teaching ethics, responsibility, critical faculties, independence, and the ability to reflect – aspects that they often combined under the heading of ›attitude‹:

»I am convinced that we need to refocus on two things in the future. One is to say: it's certain fundamental knowledge, we will definitely teach that. What are stories? How do I tell a story? ... I think it is becoming ever more important to say what my democratic and political role as a journalist is... Otherwise, we have got to a point where we get completely bogged down and training could take years given the enormous number of things there are to cover.« (Interview with initial and advanced training academy)

Most of those surveyed also agreed that this primary focus on teaching the basics should also apply to media technology – regardless of the growing importance of data, visualizations etc. Because technology is changing so quickly, the respondents felt that it is too difficult and not at all necessary to include the latest developments in basic journalism training. Instead, they believe that in targeted advanced training courses. On the other hand, many were critical of the view that journalists should be able to do everything, ideally equally well. One interviewee, for example, noted that teams of experts with different competencies are best suited to ensure quality in journalism – although this would demand an entirely different skill set:

»The most important skill is the ability to work in a team on the one hand, and a certain level of overall knowledge on the other. ... Not everyone necessarily needs to be able to create an interactive map. There are others who can do it better, faster, and more attractively. But you do at least need to understand a.) why we need a map, b.) where one is needed and c.) how I can tell the colleague who is able to create the map what I want. It is essentially about an understanding – not that ›I'll do it myself‹, but that ›I understand the important points and can talk to my colleagues in the team about how it can be done.« (Interview with training academy)

The didactics of journalism education

Yet, as the results of the content analysis show, it would be wrong to assume that journalism training on both basic and advanced levels neglects media technology knowledge and skill. The interviews with the heads and planning officers of the affected institutions also clearly showed that these institutions see keeping up with technological developments as both an obligation and a challenge. However, many make the point that this needs to be done in a reflective and considered way:

»One needs to have an understanding of the transformation of journalism and know what is important. That is the obvious part, of course – to say ›One needs to know what is important!‹ I think what I mean is that one needs to know which developments one is following and when, but not follow them simply for the sake of it.« (Interview with university)

Curricula and courses are thus planned in a way that builds on basic journalism training such as research and storytelling, while new topics and skills alike data visualization are placed in modules that allow them to be flexibly integrated and re-moved again if necessary should a trend turn out to be short-lived. When asked how important up-to-date developments in journalism can be spotted so that education programs can react to them, the interviewees usually recommend remaining in constant discussion with practicing professional journalists. However obvious and logical this approach may be, it presents some questions: Could over-emphasizing the experiences and perceptions of persons established in the sector not tempt people into simply perpetuating well-established practices? Can developments in the near future – developments that are already emerging in other countries – be recognized if one focusses solely on short term needs? That would take thinking outside the box of the immediate media environment and labor market. It is thus even more surprising that competition analyses, scientific research findings, observation of international trends, and holding discussions at specialist conferences are named much less frequently as means of spotting developments and integrating them into the journalism curricula.

Didactics, too, tends to focus on tried-and-tested methods. Most interview partners recommend that teaching journalistic skills should be associated with a large practical section, in which teaching staff provide feedback on the work of participants. Didactic methods such as design thinking, inverted classroom, peer group learning, and community-oriented learning are known and/or applied in only a few cases. This could be because didactic training for teachers is offered in only a few isolated cases and predominantly for academic staff at the universities and universities of applied science. Practical learning on concrete

projects is seen by most as the gold standard. That students and program participants may use their own creativity in class in order to, for example, develop and test journalistic products, was rarely mentioned (the preceding study by Medienhaus Wien also indicated this situation; cf. Kaltenbrunner et al. 2015: 24). Although “future labs” and other forms of experimenting with journalistic formats and work processes are occasionally described as best practice examples of courses, the Austrian journalism education landscape is in a »follower mode« rather than an »innovator mode« (Deuze 2006: 25). Few have yet latched on to the idea that journalism training and education can do more than just meet the needs of media companies: It can also act as an initiator, able to shape the journalism sector and the professional profile in a way that goes beyond quality assurance and teaching ethics and responsibility.

Journalism training in Austria in the context of the international discussion

Finally, the project was also interested to find out whether and to what extent topics that are currently considered particularly important in the international education discourse are integrated in Austrian journalism programs (e.g. Drok 2019, Bettels-Schwabbauer et al. 2018, Goodman/Steyn 2017, Zelizer 2017, Mensing 2010, Deuze 2006). To put it briefly: Digitalization has arrived in the Austrian education landscape, but some phenomena more than others. Courses on the media transformation, web and social media skills, data journalism, visualization, and media management are among the twenty most common topics of course content in 2018/19 (albeit particularly in the university sector). However, there is still some way to go when it comes to the role of journalism in democratic policy, the need to position oneself in an increasingly precarious labor market, the latest trends in reporting, and, last but not least, shaping the relationship with the audience.

The interviews conducted with the heads and planning officers of the programs did, however, clearly show that some of these topics are important to them. One key trend that was repeatedly mentioned in the conversations is the growing importance of entrepreneurial thinking and self-marketing. Several of the interview partners either made positive reference to corresponding courses in their institutions or were critical of the lack of such teaching subjects.

Another, more fundamental position that reflects the European trend, as shown for example in the survey of EJTA members (cf. Drok 2019), is the repeated emphasis on the relevance of »attitude« (ethical consciousness, the ability to reflect, responsibility) in journalism. The Austrian journalism education dis-

course is thus picking up on the unease expressed in societal discourse on targeted disinformation and fake news on social media, filter bubbles, echo chambers, and the loss of trust in established media, and reacting positively in attempting to (further) raise awareness of journalistic responsibility and quality.

There is also potential to build internationally on the emphasis on teaching the fundamentals of journalistic work over technical skills (cf. Bettels-Schwabauer 2018: 90). The interview partners believe that, given the constantly growing number of skills that could be of professional relevance and the changing technological skills, a selection needs to be made – an opinion that reflects the general trend. This selection must be made by (re?)focusing on what forms the core of good journalistic work: research, handling information responsibly, and good storytelling. Yet despite this, a dual challenge remains for the stakeholders in this study. On the one hand, journalistic work – and the way it is taught in initial and advanced training – must adapt to the changed communication processes in digital environments in such a way that journalism can uphold its standards and remain relevant to society; on the other, it is vital to keep up with the technological developments, meet the expectations of media companies and participants regarding appropriate journalism training, and even anticipate the requirements of the near future.

Conclusion

The range of initial and advanced programs for journalists has become more diverse in terms of both content and regions over the last two decades, although the vast majority of the programs are still based in Vienna. This diversification of the education landscape has occurred at the same time as the wide range of changes triggered by digitalization in terms of the media's business models, working processes in the editorial offices, journalistic products, media usage behavior, and, last but not least, the skills journalists need to have. Although these changes have been less disruptive in Austria than in many other countries, they still present journalism training and education in Austria with various challenges, for example regarding the question of how to deal with the growing number of potentially relevant skills and make a useful selection.

Regardless of how this and other challenges are tackled, in contrast to the idea posited by Gerhard Kocher, journalism should not be one of the professions »for which no training is required.« Teaching fundamental skills and providing orientation to both current and the next generation of journalists remains important in ensuring the quality of journalism.

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Translation: Sophie Costella

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Research Papers

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***The Commercial Advertiser* in America's New Journalism around 1900**

Journalistic entrepreneurial spirit between the press' commercialization and its role in society

Abstract: *The Commercial Advertiser* between 1897 and 1901 is considered a journalistic experiment in New Journalism. Under chief local editor Lincoln Steffens, the idea was to produce a local paper that was able to meet the need for information and entertainment among the educated middle classes and a new generation of immigrants through stylistic quality and unusual forms of address. This study attempts to reconstruct the situational contexts behind the project and examines the entrepreneurial spirit in the editorial office of the *Commercial Advertiser* in relation to a commercial media logic of New Journalism and its established routines of research and presentation. In this context, there is a discussion to be had about how the reinterpretation of professional conventions, the dismantling of editorial hierarchies and routines, and the integration of marginalized actors as journalistic perspectives in reporting can affect the success and quality of innovative journalistic projects.[1]

It was at the turn of the Twentieth Century that the popular mass press had the greatest impact. Habbo Knoch and Daniel Morat (Knoch/Morat 2003: 20) speak of this period as the »saddle period of the mass media.« In New York, for example, there were more than 50 daily newspapers fighting for the audience's favor (cf. Smythe 2002). One of these publications was the *Commercial Advertiser* – then the oldest daily newspaper in New York (Emery/Emery 1996: 65). Unlike some

1 Some passages of this paper are taken from the author's doctoral dissertation. The full work was published by edition lumière under the title »Die Sozialreportage als Genre der Massenpresse. Erzählen im Journalismus und die Vermittlung städtischer Armut in Deutschland und den USA, 1880-1910«.

of the flagships of New Journalism (Emery/Emery 1996: 192ff), such as Joseph Pulitzer's *World* or William Randolph Hearst's *Journal*, the paper covered more of a niche of the press market, printing just a few thousand copies each day.

Yet the *Commercial Advertiser* was in no way in danger of slipping into journalistic insignificance, in fact, the newspaper retains an almost legendary reputation in American journalism history to this day. John Hartsock (Hartsock 2000: 21) argues that the *Commercial Advertiser* emanated »a critical consciousness.« Peter Parisi (Parisi 1992: 104) accredits the newspaper with having the ability to overcome »stereotypical journalistic categories,« while Joseph Campbell (Campbell 2006: 99) pays tribute to it as »an eccentric if stimulating experiment.« These assessments are irrevocably linked with the name Lincoln Steffens, who is particularly famous for his achievements as a muckraker (cf. Miraldi 2000), but was also the chief local editor of the paper for almost four years, from 1897 to 1901.

Steffens oversaw the development of one of the most unusual editorial offices in New York journalism, whose experimental style and way of working were a source of irritation for the city's larger newspapers. The *Commercial Advertiser's* local reporting in particular broke with journalistic practices that had originally been established at Charles Dana's *Sun* and ultimately perfected at Joseph Pulitzer's *World*. According to Michael Schudson (Schudson 1978: 83), Steffen's entrepreneurial spirit was spurred on by »a love of New York,« which spilled over into his newspaper work to some extent and motivated his journalistic experiment.

Now, a historical analysis that provides context aims to disprove this myth of journalism history, at least in part. It can be shown that the particular features of the *Commercial Advertiser* around the turn of the century were not only the result of the headstrong motives and interests of a journalistic personality, but that the entrepreneurial spirit of the newspaper can largely be reconstructed in relation to the commercial »organizational purpose« (Saxer 1999: 117) of New Journalism and thus must be seen in light of institutional structures and the constraints of the media system.

In order to demonstrate this hypothesis, the first step is to develop a theoretical basis that provides structure for the source work and builds on interpretation of the findings. This preliminary work allows the dominance of creative forms of presentation and of innovative journalistic processes in the editorial office of the *Commercial Advertiser* between 1897 and 1901 to be established systematically in a concrete context of origin. Ultimately, in examining the historical case, it is also possible to discuss how reinterpreting professional conventions, breaking through hierarchies and routines in editorial offices, and integrating marginalized actors can impact the success and quality of innovative journalistic projects as a journalistic perspective in reporting.

Theoretical foundation

The chosen theoretical basis is Thomas Luckmann's theory of communicative categories (2007), which has already been picked up by communication science as part of the constructivist theory of media categories. Media categories and genres (for differentiation, see Lünenborg 2017) lie »at the intersection between production, product, and reception, i.e. at the point at which processes of product design and production, properties of a designed product, and processes of attention towards such products, their perception and intellectual processing meet« (Hasebrink 2004: 75).

The theoretical framework presented here argues that the *Commercial Advertiser* must be considered as part of a specific media category, namely the popular mass press. This is not only marked by an *internal structure* that can be determined formally and thematically, i.e. with its own topics and a specific aesthetic, but is significantly reshaped by the condition of the respective media environment. The environment forms the *external structure* of media categories, »the level on which the socio-structural features of society have an impact on the communicative categories« (Ayaß 2010: 280f).

The external structure thus constitutes an analytical macro-level and concludes phenomena that can be considered media logic in terms of an overall concept. Based on the work of David Altheide and Robert Snow (1979), a media logic can be considered as a fundamental way of operating in journalism. This can be understood as an overlap of diverse (not only economically determined) actor-structure dynamics within a media system, which reshapes the interpretation, expectation, and constellation structures of all media actors (cf. Neuberger 2016).

When working with historical case studies, media category theory thus acts as a bridging concept and enables additions to the findings of research into the history of journalism that is based on macroanalytics and system theory (cf. Birkner 2012; Blöbaum 1994).

Source work

Attempts were made to achieve the greatest possible diversity of sources for the reconstructive historical analysis. This was done by analyzing different categories of sources. As well as analyzing ego-sources and biographical work by the editorial office staff of the time, in particular Lincoln Steffens, Hutchins Hapgood, Neith Boye, and Abraham Cahan, and contemporary practice literature from industry journals, working with press sources also played a central role in the context analysis. Not only was a random search conducted for source mate-

rial – available secondary references were also consulted for orientation and formed the starting point for further research (cf. Connery 1992a; Rischin 1985).

The *Commercial Advertiser* as a product of New Journalism

New Journalism developed within an area of journalistic conflict that played a major role in shaping the external and internal structure of the media category – as is clearly demonstrated by a look at the constellation and expectation structures of the profession, which is shaped by economic constraints and changing social demands. In addition, the period saw the emergence of new structures of interpretation, expressed in alternative patterns of attention and presentation. Below, this paper examines the extent to which, as a product between commercialization and creativity, the *Commercial Advertiser* was a result of this changed actor-structure dynamic and how this environment influenced both the newspaper's unusual editorial work and its experimental forms of presentation.

The commercial media logic of the American press around 1900

Sounding out more efficient production and sales mechanisms and testing more effective communication services are both typical of New Journalism. Both increased its audience exponentially and allowed it to achieve higher profit margins (cf. Baldasty 1992). In order to ensure the »varied constant production« (Saxer 1999: 118) of the popular mass newspapers in urban centers, the new newspaper projects led by Pulitzer's *World* were characterized by an optimized cooperative business model and greater willingness to take journalistic risks. Ted Curtis Smythe (Smythe 2003: 9f) recognized »a fundamental shift in business practices that paid for enterprising journalism.« This was in line with the conventional media logic that loss-making newspapers were purchased by investors at low prices before being completely redesigned. Often, the only thing that remained was the newspaper's title, which had a certain value as a brand name, allowing the product to remain recognizable and retaining the core of regular readers. For Alan Trachtenberg (Trachtenberg 2007: 82), the benefits of the business model are clear: »the advantages of incorporation were manifold, for it permitted a number of people to pool their capital and their efforts under one name, as a single entity.« Another possible reason behind this practice, however, was the fact that growth in the newspaper market had begun to slow by the early 1890s. As Randall Sumpter's analysis of census data shows, a certain level of market saturation had been reached (Sumpter 2013: 50).

These changed constellation structures had an impact on Lincoln Steffen's project with the *Commercial Advertiser*. The paper was a speculation object par

excellence. Various actors, including the former *World* chief editor John Cockerill, had invested in it over the years, trying to breathe new life into the paper, profit from its rich tradition, and turn it into a profitable journalistic undertaking. Despite its low circulation of just under 2,500 copies (Steffens 1931: 311; Lipsky 2013: 72), the renowned publication still generated income from advertising (Rischin 1952: 12). In addition, the *Commercial Advertiser* was valued for its conservative editorial policy and received financial support from railway magnate Collis Huntington, who had taken on the newspaper »for its influence, the resultant prestige accruing to the family name, and as a hobby« (Lipsky 2013: 72).

The *Commercial Advertiser* as an investment project

It is plausible that Steffens, who had worked in New York journalism since the mid-1880s, could have internalized a commercial media logic. This is evidenced by his detailed assessment of the business structures in American journalism, which appeared as a long article in *Scribner's Magazine* in October 1897 (cf. Steffens 1897). On the one hand, it expresses his appreciation of the possibilities of modern journalistic corporate management; on the other, the article clearly demonstrates how Steffens assessed the success of his own investments. It looks as though Steffens tried not only to imitate the tried-and-tested newspaper principle, but, at least in his estimation, to improve it.

It would probably be going too far to say that the former reporter invested in the *Commercial Advertiser* purely for economic reasons, although it cannot be denied that there was a capitalistic logic to his actions. Steffens himself freely admits it in letters to his father (Winter/Hicks 1974: 126, 130). After all, thanks to money left to him by a former classmate in Germany (Steffens 1931: 302-310), Steffens had a certain financial independence that allowed him to enter the market and shape a newspaper editorial office largely as he wished.

The newspaper concept expressed with the *Commercial Advertiser* under Lincoln Steffens' editorship thus reflected a larger-scale trend in the American press: that the value of a newspaper could be determined not only as a cultural asset, but much more as a marketable consumer good whose price could be calculated based on supply and demand. The following passage from the *Scribner's* article, which paints a very pragmatic picture of the needs of a journalistic audience, makes this concept of a newspaper more tangible:

»When a man opens his paper on his way down-town after breakfast, or on his way home after a day's work, he wants a surprise - shocks, laughter, tears. If it were something to think about that he wanted, the best commodity to offer for sale might be editorials, essays, and important facts. But the commercial journalist, after studying and testing his market, is

convinced that his customers prefer something to talk about. There are some who do not, but they are quickly disposed of« (Steffens 1897: 458).

The idea was to design informative services while also serving the very basal need for entertainment – offering something to talk about. These expectation structures formed the foundation for redesigning the *Commercial Advertiser*, at least ideally, as a high-quality tabloid newspaper whose content would appeal to the largest possible audience.

Market saturation and the economization of the profession

Investing in newspapers that had been run into the ground could generate enormous income, but of course also came with significant costs (Baldasty 1992: 85). Publishers and editors who invested in projects like this thus tried to keep staffing costs as low as possible (Smythe 1980: 3). Like other industrial segments, journalism saw the rise of a new class of wage workers (Solomon 1995: 118). They were judged even by their contemporaries: »The newspaper-worker is simply a wage-earner, a hired man« (Keller 1893: 694).

Yet it is clear that, despite this, newspapers like Pulitzer's *World* still needed an extensive staff in order to create the desired content. Industry journals of the time estimated that, remarkably, up to 100,000 people were looking for a career in journalism in the late 1880s (Sumpter 2013: 45). The high number of applicants for positions allowed newspaper owners to replace staff almost at will (Wright 1898: 614) – a practice that had a particular impact on older reporters (Keller 1893: 693f.). From the owners' point of view, staff fluctuation was useful for two reasons: Those new to the profession were paid less and willing to take on more. The pressure of competition shaped the constellation structures of the popular mass press. It was therefore an integral part of the professional culture in New Journalism »to exhibit ›enterprise‹ – that is, [to] be aggressively resourceful in getting interesting stories« (Dicken-Garcia 1989: 198).

The Commercial Advertiser as a career springboard

As indicated above, more and more men (and a few women) were aspiring to a career in journalism in the big cities. That meant that journalism became significantly younger over the course of the 1890s. Perhaps this was one of the reasons behind the high innovation potential and certain willingness to experiment seen at newspapers like the *Commercial Advertiser* at the time. As at many other newspapers, those responsible at the paper profited from the changed conditions guarding entry to the field of journalism. While other editorial offices tended to be skeptical of young graduates entering the profession (Fedler 2000: 18f.), however,

the editorial office at the *Commercial Advertiser* made a conscious decision in favor of those with an academic education (Steffens 1931: 315ff.).

It would not be entirely accurate, however, to say that Steffens' editorial office was staffed largely by Ivy League graduates with no professional experience of journalism. Comprising 20 people, the editorial office staff also included practiced journalists like Henry J. Wright and J. S. Seymour (Kaplan 1974: 83). Wright had worked with Steffens as a local deskman at the *Evening Post* and had joined with him to invest in the *Commercial Advertiser*; Seymour had already worked as a deskman »on the wreck,« as Steffens (Steffens 1931: 311) called the newspaper before it was taken over. Their role was predominantly to shore up the paper's foundation from a business point of view (Steffens 1931: 338). His adherence to experienced deskmen is clear evidence of Steffens' belief that editorial competence and journalistic orientation were essential in order to make a newspaper with largely inexperienced staff.

At the same time, this pattern of recruitment was also based on the expectation structures that had formed among journalistic actors and the public. Larzer Ziff (Ziff 1967: 146-165) described the attraction of the journalism profession for young men of the post-Civil War generation extensively as a kind of »school in the cemetery.« What he means is that journalism in large cities made it possible to start a literary career, even if the profession ultimately turned out to be a dead end for many. As a leading editor, Steffens was able to exploit this attraction to entice talented authors to join his paper. Hutchins Hapgood, Carl Hovey, Guy Scull, and Robert Dunn came straight from literature seminars at Harvard to Steffens' editorial office (Steffens 1931: 316). These young men were employed in the editorial office on a trial basis over the summer, when the staff reporters were on vacation. If they managed to prove themselves, they were offered a permanent position in the fall. The stated intention of this method was to bring non-journalistic skills and expertise into the editorial office staff (Steffens 1931: 311-315). In addition, as many of these university graduates employed by Steffens had no professional experience of journalism, they were also useful cheap labor for the local deskman, who paid them a weekly wage of just \$12 to \$15 (Steffens 1931: 317). The focus was thus not only on a creative newspaper project, but also on return on investment – corresponding in the broadest sense to the constellation structures of the commercial mass press discussed above.

Specifications and freedoms in editorial work

These structures in editorial offices, however, are also proof of a strategy to roll back strict working routines in favor of greater freedom for individuals to make decisions. Instead of forcing staff into a corset of rules and behaviors, attempts were made to diversify points of view and methods of working. The heterogene-

ous composition of the editorial office and the promotion of younger staff led to editorial rules being reduced to a minimum. In his autobiography, Steffens emphasizes:

»There was to be no *Commercial Advertiser* style, no *Commercial Advertiser* men. So also there were no rules about promptitude, sobriety, accuracy; no lists of friends or enemies of the paper; no editorial policy; no ›beats‹ and best of all, there was no insistence even upon these rules, which were broken at any one's convenience« (Steffens 1931: 315).

This admittedly produced different opportunities for action in the (local) editorial office of the *Commercial Advertiser* than probably in any other New York newspaper: »We all had a freer hand in our work than men on the other papers,« highlights Hutchins Hapgood (Hapgood 1972: 141) in his memoirs.

Another autobiographical anecdote illustrates the personnel management of the editorial office leadership:

»One day [Steffens] came in with a story just turned in by a member of the staff and said, ›Look at this! He writes a story and in the middle of it he buries an item of real news! He doesn't know news from a hole in the ground, calls himself a reporter! Fix that up.‹ He went away chuckling with enjoyment« (Boyce/DeBoer-Langworthy 2003: 166).

Editorial specifications were thus sometimes asserted in an adapted form in order to fit the reporters' abilities and the audience's expectations. Steffens' energetic, jovial way of dealing with his staff can certainly be interpreted as a deliberate strategy to ensure a pleasant working environment in the editorial office. After all, it was a way for him to keep his staff happy even though they could not expect a large salary. The jobs were thus completed depending on the sparse means of the editorial office: The office itself was only well-lit in places, and there was a shortage of basic material resources such as furniture and typewriters (Boyce/DeBoer-Langworthy 2003: 151). The lack of resources also goes some way to explaining why, unlike other newspapers, the *Commercial Advertiser* chose not to use particularly prominent headlines or extensive leads. That saved funds in both processing and printing. All in all, the presentation was extremely sober, using almost no illustrations at all. In contrast, random samples from 1894 show that there had been an established layout before Steffens' takeover, corresponding to the style of other New York newspapers like *The World*. Under Steffens, cost-intensive typographic aspects were reduced, to be replaced by local reporting with a more creative style.

Research practices

The editorial structures and Steffens' guidance of the staff as local deskmen allowed the young journalists to implement alternative research practices. Routines were not developed in the editorial office of the *Commercial Advertiser* to the extent that they were in other local editorial offices. The newspaper's reporters were not forcibly parked at the police station at Mulberry Bend, for example, to wait for stories, nor did newer information media such as the telephone appear to play a significant role in research. Steffens writes, »Young writers were expected to beat the other papers only in the way they presented the news« (Steffens 1931: 317).

Compared to products published by large companies, such as the »True Stories of the News«^[2] in *The World* (Michael 2017) or Jacob Riis' extensive magazine reportage »How the Other Half Lives« (1889), the articles in the *Commercial Advertiser* testify to different journalistic approaches when it comes to ways to gain information, especially in terms of techniques like observation and questioning. Particularly striking is the lack of secondary research, such as the incorporation of statistical material or the use of statements from the police and other authorities. While experienced reporters often supplemented their material with such sources, or even built whole articles around them, such proximity to institutional sources is almost entirely lacking from the *Commercial Advertiser* articles examined here. Instead, the reportage-style local articles are characterized by a high level of immersion, which demanded more time-intensive (and unbiased) on-site research and finer techniques of participative observation.

The cultivation of these research methods is made possible by the editorial environment: Steffens asked his staff to reduce common journalistic strategies for collecting information, such as by frequenting common news environments at court, in hospitals etc. and instead to use the cultural technique of »strolling,« which was much more strongly embedded in the European press. However, in contrast to how a stroller would work (cf. Neumeyer 1999), frequent temporal determinations in these texts also bear witness to the fact that the established topicality criteria of the daily mass press were more relevant to journalistic work at the *Commercial Advertiser* and with regard to the expectations of its audience. There was a latent compulsion to produce topical stories. Yet the deskmen responsible in the local editorial office also considered it legitimate for a member of staff to spend extended periods standing at a crossroads and making notes on what was happening in the hope that they brought forward a story, or to sit in cafés on the Lower East Side and document the conversations that took place (Parisi 1992: 102ff.; Connery 1992b: 122f.).

2 A Shatchen's work. In: *The World* dated 05.12.1890, p. 9; The Witch Doctress of Baxter Street. In: *The World* dated 11.12.1890, p. 9.

These techniques, however, were not developed and trialed exclusively in the editorial environment of the *Commercial Advertiser* as a principle of authentic journalistic storytelling. Around 1900, such immersive practices in local journalism in large cities also brought forward extensive innovations elsewhere in the USA. Focusing topics on criminal and social reporting and immersing oneself in the world of workers and immigrants in large cities thus provided fertile ground for empirical social sciences and urban sociology in particular to develop as a scientific discipline. The Chicago School of Sociology led by Robert E. Park, who learned his trade as a local reporter, is proof of this (cf. Lindner 1990, 2004; Haas 1999).

Topics and forms of presentation in New Journalism

The media environment in the USA not only shaped the organization forms of the media category, but also brought forth new journalistic forms of address. Interpretation structures developed, within which the understanding of what should find space in the newspaper as news content was expanded. Human interest stories in particular combined an educational and socialization function of the press with entertainment value, making it also possible to read articles as »social parables« (Kerrane 1997: 17). The growing relevance of genres like reportage clearly demonstrates that journalistic patterns of attention and selection criteria were changing due to social conditions, thus attempting to both meet an urban audience's need for information and reflect their emotional world. Local news in particular became a symbol of a cultural character and an expression of the growing uncertainty and social fissuring of American society just before the turn of the 20th Century.

The concept of a modern newspaper requires the ability not only to appeal to a bourgeois American audience, but equally to attract the various immigrant nationalities as readers. Campbell (Campbell 2001: 60ff.) has shown that one of the features of New Journalism was its formation of a readership that crossed the boundaries between classes and social backgrounds. After all, in order to find their feet in New York and learn the language, immigrants first used the easily consumable content of the mass press in large cities. Yet publications in foreign language were also successful as journalistic services. The market for Yiddish newspapers in particular boomed (Rischin 1978: 122ff.). It is therefore little wonder that the mass press in New York also turned its attention to the life of the Jewish population in its reporting, as multiple reportages in the *World* series »True Stories of the News«^[3] and the reportages by Jacob Riis (cf. Yochel-

3 Commercial Advertiser Stock. In: *New York Times* dated 30.05.1886; Newspaper politics. In: *Newark Sunday Call* dated 07.08.1892, p. 16.

son/Czitrom 2007) show. While articles like this often remained reactionary in their presentation and thus tended to reflect the unease of a bourgeois audience, the *Commercial Advertiser* under Steffens also attempted to question such points of view. This orientation is clear to see in the period investigated. On the one hand, the content was very conventional and – in contrast to Steffens' claim (Steffens 1931: 339) – oriented on current events and the topic agenda of other press organs.^[4] On the other, it also offered quirky, stylistically unusual reports with a strong local flavor by young reporters like Hutchins Hapgood, or journalists of unusual sociality like Abraham Cahan, a Jew who had immigrated from Eastern Europe.

Alternative strategies of thematization and presentation in the Commercial Advertiser

The experiment was to be a success for both Steffens and his young reporters. After all, the staff at the *Commercial Advertiser* allowed the exploration of unconventional ways of accessing themes, not stunted by years of police reporting and pack journalism, for example (Hapgood 1972: 138). They succeeded in experimenting with a writing style based on a realistic narrative technique. Abraham Cahan played a key role in the constellation of experienced and inexperienced employees. Thanks to his biography as a Jewish immigrant, with professional experience as a journalist in the Yiddish press and as an aspiring author (Lipsky 2013), Cahan was essential to the project of a newspaper whose unique selling points were »personal styles« and local color (Kaplan 1974: 83f.). »He brought the spirit of the East Side into our shop,« writes Steffens (Steffens 1931: 317) of Cahan's key position in the editorial office.

Cahan's help allowed the paper to appeal both to bourgeois readers with high literary standards and to (Jewish) immigrants, both of whom felt that the content reflected them (Rischin 1953: 24ff.). With his design of the newspaper, Steffens thus succeeded in developing a unique selling point for the newspaper compared to the established New Journalism. Almost every issue in the period examined contains articles that take an unusual look at the lives of immigrants.^[5]

- 4 One example of this is the reporting on the Spanish-American War, which dominated coverage for example on June 8, 1898; all articles on »Page 9« – otherwise reserved for local news – on May 28, 1898 were also based on this key event, including: America's Mulvaney. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 28.05.1898, p. 9; Madrid in war time. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 28.05.1898, p. 9; Spanish War talk. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 28.05.1898, p. 9
- 5 In a Jewish school. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 30.10.1897; Women's tailors on the East Side. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 11.12.1897; Paying the rent. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 18.12.1897, p. 11; East Side small shops. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 31.12.1897; Boyce, Neith: Beau, Major Sah. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 15.01.1898, S. 9; Shofar blows tomorrow. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 04.09.1899, p. 2; Hark, the shofar. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 17.09.1898, p. 8; B.J.: Diogenes up to date. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 28.10.1899, p. 11; Venus in Grand Street. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 28.10.1899, p. 11; The boys in the ghetto. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 04.11.1899, p. 9.

When it comes to the settings that the local articles capture, it is noticeable that reporters frequently attended the synagogues of the Lower East Side. The newspaper based its reporting on the holidays of the Jewish calendar, thus taking into account the importance of these events for its audience.

The editorial office also tried to provide content targeted at readers from the working classes on the Lower East Side, whose confrontational style may also have been of interest to a middle and upper class audience in the suburbs. There is increased reporting on the labor disputes of the immigrants, in particular in the textiles industry.^[6] However, the way the labor dispute was interpreted differed from the depiction in other newspapers, with the articles frequently giving space to the interests of industrial workers (Rischin 1985: 369-389). Unsurprisingly, reporting in the *Commercial Advertiser* was thus also shaped by coverage of the political and cultural possibilities of socialism. The articles looked at the ideological conflict that became apparent in the cultural life of New York as Eastern European immigrants brought this philosophy into the United States.

All this was based on a news concept that was able to create the greatest possible social proximity between journalists and their audience in a different way: »to get the news so completely and to report it so humanly that the reader will see himself in the other fellow's place« (Steffens 1931: 317). An anecdote about Steffens asking the reporter Cahan to report on a gruesome murder provides an example of this way of handling topics.

»Here, Cahan, is a report that a man has murdered his wife, a rather bloody, hacked-up crime. We don't care about that. But there's a story in it. That man loved that woman well enough once to marry her, and now he has hated her enough to cut her all to pieces. If you can find out just what happened between that wedding and this murder, you will have a novel for yourself and a short story for me. Go on now, take your time, and get this tragedy as a tragedy« (Steffens 1931: 317).

What this passage clearly demonstrates is that, although the editorial office of course did not ignore such a key topic of local reporting, Steffens' instruction to conduct background research – rather than simply recreating the course of events in the crime itself – gives insight into the processing routines that were so atypical of this topic and that strengthened literary social reportage as part of both editorial and reportorial work at the *Commercial Advertiser* (Hapgood 1972: 139).

One feature of this presentation strategy in the *Commercial Advertiser* is the immersive research into social backgrounds, which painted human portraits

6 Strikers victorious. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 02.08.1898, p. 3; Serial strikers. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 09.08.1898, p. 3; Gloomy strikers. In: *The Commercial Advertiser* dated 20.06.1899, p. 8.

of even delinquent subjects and thus succeeded in gaining the empathy of the audience. This alternative form of participation is ensured by the authentic presentation of life in poor and immigrant communities and meets the benchmark of »optimum authenticity« (Pöttker 2000: 44). The focus was not on the remote or foreign aspects of these people, but on descriptive features that created familiarity, such as the immigrants' clothing and their friendly, albeit exhausted, faces (Rischin 1985: 113-117, 118-120).

In contrast to other reporting patterns, this method thus succeeded in articulating people's diverse voices and illuminating phenomena of foreignness, such as immigration and poverty, from an unexpected, multilayered perspective. The pronounced figural characterization gives the action dialog-like quality, making the people concerned more tangible outside their distorted images in the media, and creating a sense of familiarity.

In the *Commercial Advertiser*, the behavior of the people on the Lower East Side is essentially separated from the conventional dramatization seen in New Journalism, in order to establish new structures of expectation and interpretation within the media category. The form of presentation also achieves this by attempting to communicate the locations of the action through apparently counter-factual details. The description of the settings in Cahan's reportage »Pillelu, Pillelu« is a good example of this.

»To those who stood on the corner Hester Street and Ludlow last night the two intersecting marketplaces looked like a vast cross of flaring gold. [...] The sidewalks and the asphalt pavements were crowded with pushcarts, each with a torch dangling and flickering over it, and the hundreds of quivering flames stretched east and west, north and south, two restless bands of fire crossing each other in a blaze and losing themselves in a medley of fire, smoke, many-colored piles of fish and glimmering human faces« (Rischin 1985: 56).

Instead of sketching the streets as the scenery of misery, as »How the Other Half Lives« (cf. Riis 1889) does, for example, the article uses sometimes polyvalent imagery to allow a different view of areas often considered social trouble spots. The evening procession of the immigrants' torch-lit pushcarts at the corner of Hester Street and Ludlow Street – a place that tended to be populated with criminals, prostitutes, and beggars in articles in the urban mass press – is certainly not held up as a portent of the disintegration of society, but instead reframed positively as »a vast cross of flaring gold.« The description of the scene has a certain symbolism, allowing harmonious coexistence in poor communities to be highlighted, rather than focusing on social conflict there. Instead of threatening, alien creatures, the reporter sees only »glimmering human faces«.

Summary

In the contextualizing historical analysis, it was possible to discuss why the *Commercial Advertiser* plays such an important role in the history of journalism between 1897 and 1901. Systematic source work forms the basis for a more precise definition of this assessment. The case study shows what a strong influence an unusual editorial organization can have on the implementation of journalistic approaches and forms of presentation.

The circumstances of the newspaper experiment were first outlined with a view to macrofactors. On the one hand, the formation of a disperse urban audience led to the development of new structures of expectation, which influenced the journalistic work and encouraged creative forms of address. On the other, the fight for the audience's attention is emblematic of constellation structures that were based on a decidedly commercial media logic of New Journalism and showed itself in the tough competition within the professional field. In this media environment, the *Commercial Advertiser* was really a marginal product, albeit one that became an investment for business-oriented journalists due to certain features. It is proof of the entrepreneurial spirit at the saddle point of the modern press boom that the newspaper developed creative communication offers and designed them for a readership that covered the entire social spectrum of urban audiences. In order to attract and retain the loyalty of proletarian classes of readers or an audience with an immigrant background, the local editorial office in particular experimented with presentation strategies that differed from the constant production of the market leaders by deliberately aggravating expectations with regard to the relevance and topicality criteria of journalism. Given this market concentration and saturation in American journalism in the late 19th Century, it is remarkable that the investment in the ailing *Commercial Advertiser* was considered an economic success overall (Kaplan 1974: 95).

As a historical example, the *Commercial Advertiser* shows that phenomena that are now discussed as ›entrepreneurial journalism‹ have essentially always occurred within a precarious and turbulent media environment (cf. Cohen 2015). The newspaper was made by actors who promised themselves journalistic independence and a way out of the wage earner trap at other newspapers. This logic of action appears like the prototype of an »entrepreneurial journalist [...] who does not rely on traditional media organizations and who can chart her own path to success« (Cohen 2015: 517). Steffens and his colleagues succeeded in producing a local paper that realized its literary and journalistic ambitions with innovative forms of address and quality of style. The *Commercial Advertiser* thus balanced the »inbuilt schizophrenia« (Weischenberg 1994: 451) of journalism between market orientation and social responsibility and, at least in an ideal world, embodied a popular mass press that consolidates the capitalist entrepreneurial spirit with the societal task of the press.

With a tendency to provide context for anecdotal case descriptions of local events, the deskmen and reporters of the *Commercial Advertiser* succeeded in highlighting contradictions in conventional reporting in the mass press and challenging socially accepted interpretations of topics such as poverty and immigration. The opportunity to do this was provided by research methods that used immersion and more complex observation and questioning techniques than other newspapers. It was the style-defining prerequisites for the credible dialogs and rounded character profiles that made the *Commercial Advertiser's* local reporting so unique and met the standard of journalistic authenticity in another entirely unique way.

The historical example thus produces two further points of reference to the present. Firstly, producing innovative and high-quality local reporting appears to depend on journalistic actors' opportunities to establish alternative routines for collecting and processing information – which in turn relies on media organizations allowing them greater freedom to do so. Secondly, it can be beneficial from a journalistic point of view to generate greater social diversity in the editorial offices, as this encourages differing points of view on various topics and the articulation of marginalized voices. This can then have a positive impact on the attractiveness and informational content of the reporting (cf. Pöttker/Kiesewetter/Lofink 2016).

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Research Papers

Christian-Mathias Wellbrock

›Spotify for journalism,‹ ›publishing house platform,‹ or ›digital press wholesaler‹

Three scenarios for a cross-publisher journalism platform

Abstract: Information technology is enabling the spread of digital platforms in numerous sectors of the economy – and the media sector is no exception. Key parts of content distribution in film, music and games is already happening in this way. Digital journalism, however, is yet to see this development. The explanation often given is various reservations towards such a platform on the part of publishing houses, usually based on the assumption that this platform would be operated by a third company and have the corresponding disadvantages. In addition, most believe that access to the content of the various providers would be via a central point, thus ripping the content out of the brand environment of the respective provider. This paper discusses three scenarios for a cross-publisher, subscription-based journalism platform. The scenarios differ in terms of platform operator (technology companies, a collaboration between German publishing houses, and a public service provider) and address the arguments described above. The paper argues that regional newspaper publishers have a strong incentive to collaborate to establish such a platform as an alternative to a platform controlled by a global technology company, since regional publishing houses – unlike many national media – are usually not in direct competition with one another. In terms of the social welfare, on the other hand, a public service platform that guarantees non-discriminatory access on the provider side (a kind of ›digital press wholesaler‹) appears preferable. This could halt the trend towards concentration at the distribution level, enable journalistic competition and diversity at the production level, helping to ensure a diversity of media and opinions and prevent ›news deserts‹.

The economic theory behind the bundling of goods and services identifies substantial advantages of large bundles of digital goods. For example, as the size of the bundle increases, the dispersion in willingness to pay across consumers decreases – allowing providers both to achieve a relatively high price for the bundle and to cover a large portion of the demand. This principle of the »predictive value of bundling« (cf. Bakos/Brynjolfsson 1999: 1613) also applies to content in digital journalism and to a potential multi-provider platform.

Platforms like this, with flat rates for paid content, have become established forms of distribution with relevant market shares in many media markets – such as in music, film and gaming. But digital journalism is yet to see such »platformization.« Although there have been some attempts – such as Readly and RiffReporter – these are yet to play a significant role in relation to the market as a whole.

Consumers themselves also appear to prefer a platform solution, as surveys suggest (cf. Buschow/Wellbrock 2019). So why exactly has a model like this still failed to become established on the market?

Certain groups of media practitioners in particular take a highly critical view of platforms like this. They quote numerous arguments based on the assumption that the content providers (in particular the established publishing houses) would have to become dependent on a third-party provider (usually large technology companies). This is a scenario that has already occurred in music (Spotify) and film (Netflix) and appears not unlikely for journalistic content, too.

However, this is of course not the only possible concept for a platform of this kind. A conceivable alternative would be a platform operated by established publishing houses, or a public service model that could also be called a »digital press wholesaler.«

After a brief explanation of the trends towards concentration on markets for digital media content, this paper will discuss these three options for a digital journalism platform (technology giants, publishing house platform, digital press wholesaler) and their effects on providers, consumers, and society.

The paper argues that regional newspaper publishers in particular have great incentives to collaborate at the distribution level of journalistic content and to establish a shared platform, in which the sale of the content remains in the respective market environment of the individual providers, but the registration and payment processes are centralized through single sign-on. From the perspective of both society as a whole and smaller journalistic production units, however, a multi-provider platform that guarantees non-discriminatory access for journalistic organizations holds the greatest potential. After all, this could also contribute to media diversity and counteract the emergence of news deserts (i.e. areas in which professional journalistic publications are no longer available).

The paper argues that there is an indisputable need for a systematic response to the market structures that have changed as a result of digitalization – be it

from a private or a public source. This is the only way to prevent the probable scenario of quasi-monopolistic capitalist structures in the field of journalistic content distribution.

Time is of the essence – Trends towards concentration on information asset markets

The markets for music and video streaming are currently highly competitive. A whole series of large companies (Apple, Amazon, Disney) – many from the tech industry – are attempting to establish platforms that dominate the market. The USA even already have a service like this in the field of digital journalism, with Apple News+ (although it currently shows no sign of market dominance; cf. Sherman 2019). Facebook and Google are working on similar products.

It is relatively likely that media companies will have to deal with quasi-monopolistic market structures in future, because multi-sided markets with platforms are often markets in which demand is concentrated on a few ›winners.‹

Apart from advantages from economies of scale and scope, the most important aspects for such winner-takes-all dynamics are 1.) single homing among consumers, 2.) the strength of the positive network effects, and 3.) homogeneity of consumer preferences (cf. Eisenmann/Parker/Van Alstyne 2006).

(1.) Single homing means that consumers have strong incentives to concentrate on just one (platform) provider, rather than using several at the same time. This can be due to high costs of switching or because the services are easy to substitute.

(2.) Positive network effects mean, in one sense, that the users of a product or application benefit greatly from the size of the user group (direct networking effects), such as is the case for telephones and social networks. The more participants there are that use the telephone or a social network, the greater the benefit for each individual. In addition, the user groups connected via the platform, e.g. buyers and sellers on ebay, can also benefit from one another (indirect network effects). If this is the case, it becomes more probable that, once a critical mass has been achieved, other platforms have little opportunity to catch up.

This is also linked to the advantages from economies of scale and scope on the distribution side. The more users a platform has, the more data is available for the platform to better understand consumer preferences and improve the product accordingly. The corresponding costs for data analysis and the optimized user experience (speed, design, functionality, recommendation systems) are fixed costs that, as the reach and output quantity rise, lead to classic fixed cost depression effects and thus size benefits.

(3.) The final criterion named by Eisenmann et al. (2006), homogeneous consumer preferences, applies where large groups of consumers have similar needs

from the service, i.e. it is difficult to distinguish consumer segments. The more this applies, the more difficult it is to soften the competition by differentiating one's product and therefore the less likely it is that multiple providers will be able to act profitably on the market.

If we apply these criteria to a multi-provider journalistic platform, we gain the following picture: The average consumer has only limited incentives to use multiple platforms in parallel – a process known as multi-homing. Even in the age of print, few people subscribed to more than one newspaper, and this trend appears to be continuing in the digital age. Only a small percentage of those consumers generally willing to pay currently pay for more than one digital journalistic service (cf. Reuters Institute 2019). This may in part be due to the relatively high prices, and to the high cost of switching: Someone who has got used to one platform is loath to switch to another. In relation to paid journalistic content, it thus appears highly likely that only a few platform providers will be able to succeed on the market – in an extreme case, perhaps only one.

The positive networking effects in relation to journalism providers funded (at least partially) through advertising are clear: The more consumers are active on the relevant website or app, the higher the value of the advertising space. But there are also positive direct networking effects for advertising-free services. The more consumers use a platform, the greater the quantity of data that can then be used to improve the product, for example. All in all, however, the key point is that both the provider and the consumer side of a digital journalism platform benefit from one another to a high degree, i.e. there are strong indirect networking effects: The more providers and therefore content are available on the platform, the more attractive the product becomes for the users. And the more users are active on the platform, the more attractive it is for providers to make their content available there. This makes it more likely that only few »winning platforms« will prevail.

The picture is not so clear when it comes to the homogeneity of consumer preferences. Newspapers that provide general interest content for their audience usually cater to a high level of preference homogeneity. The information itself in particular, e.g. on current events and up-to-the-minute reporting, is presumably of similar value to most consumers, regardless of the provider. At the same time, however, there are opportunities to distinguish a product outside the pure information, for example through the political and ideological orientation of the content. This aspect is less relevant for other media goods, such as music and film.

The discussion makes it evident that the markets for music, video, and journalism tend towards a high market concentration at the distribution level. This does not necessarily mean that there will be only one platform for each sub-market, as these market segments also offer options to differentiate products in order to prevent direct substitutability (as is being attempted by Amazon, Net-

flix, Apple, and Disney, for example). However, substantial competition is very unlikely on these markets in the long term.

Scenario 1: The tech giant

If the American tech giants were to occupy these markets, it is highly likely that content providers would be faced with quasi-monopolistic structures at the distribution level – a situation with which the established publishing houses are already familiar in the distribution of (often free) digital content via Google or Facebook and that has led to significant political, legal, and regulatory disputes with platform companies in recent years (as is seen in the debate regarding ancillary copyright for press publishers, cf. Buschow 2012).

There is no question that a platform for journalistic content operated by a third-party provider would have numerous disadvantages for publishing houses (cf. Peters-Kim 2019).

There is an understandable fear of 1.) *a loss of the direct customer relationship*. This is clearly the case for the content producers with Spotify, Netflix, and even Apple News+.

A multi-publisher solution would also bring with it 2.) *technological problems*, in particular the integration of various content management systems (CMS). Offering all content on a central technological platform that is also easy enough for consumers to use appears to present significant challenges in terms of information technology. This reservation is further advanced by the example of Apple News+. Following years of development, Apple chose to use a solution from Texture, acquiring the company for around half a billion US dollars in 2018 (Müller 2018) in order to use it as a basis for Apple News+.

A further disadvantage of a central platform like this would be that 3.) the content would be ripped out of the corresponding *brand environments*. Brands play a key role in consumer behavior. The reputation of a brand tells people about the quality they can expect – including awards (cf. Wolfram/Wellbrock 2019) and rankings (cf. Wellbrock 2011), which can in turn pay back into the brand. A brand serves consumers as a heuristic and creates trust. Classic media brands play an even greater role in journalism than in other segments of the media market, such as the film or music industry, where the publisher of the content (e.g. Warner Bros or Sony) is less important. The human brands (e.g. the artists and actors) are more relevant. In journalism, on the other hand, media brands can provide important information about the journalistic quality, the political orientation, the journalistic style, and the forms of presentation offered by the individual products.

There is also the disadvantage of 4.) *losing price sovereignty and control of the mechanism for revenue distribution*. Elementary strategic instruments of price policy and

incentivization for content production would thus be subject to significant limitations for the providers of this content. In addition, if a third-party company with significant market power were to be in the position of content distributor, it would be able to organize revenue distribution to the disadvantage of the content producers – a phenomenon that has been talked about a great deal in relation to both Apple News+ and other media segments (music, film).

A ›Netflix or Spotify for journalism‹ also carries 5.) the risk for society that the press could lose its *function as a gatekeeper and curator*. There is a threat of phenomena such as filter bubbles and echo chambers, as the algorithms used would be focused more on the interests of the advertisers than on democratic interests (cf. Peters-Kim 2019).

As an alternative to a platform operated by tech giants, the idea of a collaborative platform by established publishing houses is examined below. In particular, the paper looks at the extent to which the core arguments presented against a journalism platform also apply to a platform operated by publishing houses.

Scenario 2: A platform by the publishing houses

The reservations are essentially based on two core assumptions regarding how the platform is organized: firstly, that it is operated by a third-party provider (e.g. a tech company) and, secondly, that it is centrally organized, meaning that all key functions (such as access to content, account management and payment) are processed via a central body. It is easy to forget that this idea is an extreme case – there is of course plenty of room to maneuver in terms of how a specific platform would actually be designed. Most of the disadvantages described for a ›Spotify of journalism‹ can namely be eliminated or at least strongly mitigated in the case of a solution by the publishing houses.

The disadvantages caused by 1.) the feared *loss of the direct customer relationship*, 2.) *technological problems* and 3.) the loss of one's own *brand environments* are partly, or indeed entirely, based on the assumption that a platform serves as a central one-stop shop for access to journalistic content online (cf. Buschow/Wellbrock 2019). But this does not have to be the case. Technological solutions that act as single sign-on solutions already exist: Contentpass and Laterpay, for example. This means that, although consumers log in and pay via a central point, they then access the pages of the individual media providers and the content within their brand worlds by being ›waved through‹ the various paywalls. Payment and access are thus separate: Payment processing and access rights management are central, access to content local.

In a setting like this, data can be collected both centrally and locally, while the customer relationship remains with the content producer. Products and services

can thus be tailored to the consumer preferences gathered, while it would also be possible to address consumers directly. A broader data basis would also enable better recommendation systems.^[1]

In addition, there would be no need to integrate different CMS, allowing consumers to remain within their relevant brand environments. Even if a single sign-on solution like this were chosen instead of a central one-stop shop for access to journalistic content, questions remain regarding 4.) *price sovereignty and revenue distribution*. In the case of a platform operated by publishing houses, solutions would have to be negotiated between the publishing houses and providers.

The example of RiffReporter shows that price sovereignty does not have to be relinquished entirely. RiffReporter is a platform that brings together science journalists and users. Each provider has the option of choosing between different pricing options. For example, they can offer individual articles, a subscription to their own product, or a flat rate across all providers. The revenue from the flat rate income is also distributed based on multiple parameters. One option would even be for consumers themselves to decide which providers should receive relevant portions of their flat rate payment.

Alongside classic distribution formulae based on duration or intensity of usage, it is therefore also possible to include the consumer in the decision. Other systems could also be conceivable. In local journalism, for example, it could make sense to distribute some of the revenue based on where the user lives, in order to account for the relevance of local journalism in keeping local democracy working.

As well as the familiar revenue distribution systems such as click rates and dwell times, there are also other, more flexible mechanisms that could counteract the feared »commodification trap« (Peters-Kim 2019). Despite the possible solutions described, however, some of the price sovereignty is still located centrally, and the way revenue distribution is organized will be more complex than it would if each provider had their own solution. Yet a collaborative platform solution does have the advantage that the publishing houses remain essentially in the driver's seat. Albeit in conjunction with others, they can at least decide for themselves what the solution should look like and do not run the risk in the near future of simply having to swallow whatever a third party puts in front of them.

A platform solution operated by publishing houses would also mitigate the risk of the press losing its 5.) *function as gatekeeper and curator*. This argument relies on the idea that the behavior of »the press« is morally superior to that of the tech giants and that the publishing houses have more of a focus on goals that are desirable for society than technology companies, both now and in the future. Whether this is true or not, there is no question that, were the publishing houses

1 This intended »data sharing« would appear to comply with the GDPR under certain conditions.

to operate a platform like this and determine the algorithms themselves, they would be able to maintain their original gatekeeper function and continue to shape it independently.

In any case, the question appears to be not whether recommendation systems using algorithms are generally desirable, but how they are designed. The proportion of data traffic that accesses the publishing house pages via social media and search engines was around 50 percent even back in 2018 (within the Parse.ly network, cf. Radogna 2018). Consumers would also appreciate fully functional and useful recommendation systems from paid for services (cf. Buschow/Wellbrock 2019). The publishing houses would not be alone in developing these technologies – approaches to designing recommendation algorithms that promote democracy already exist, for example from the start-up MediaRecSys (cf. Schäfers 2019).

Ultimately, a fundamental question often asked is whether consumers actually want a platform like this. The counterargument is that there have already been several attempts to establish products and services like this, none of which were able to break through onto the mass market. Examples include Blendle, iKiosk, Readly, Inkl and Pocketstory. All these products are considered to have failed or are yet to succeed in achieving relevant market shares.

At the same time, the results of empirical studies (e.g. Buschow/Wellbrock 2019) suggest that consumers generally have a strong preference for a platform solution using flat rates. This would suggest that other factors are responsible for the lack of success of Blendle, Readly etc.

Firstly, comparisons between these existing products and a platform solution with a flat rate are unfair. The examples listed above, for example, covered only a few of the functions of a complete platform such as Spotify, Netflix, RiffReporter, or Apple News+. Blendle, for example, allows users only to purchase individual articles, not flat rates. Readly is the only provider on the German market to look anything like a 'Spotify for journalism,' bringing together a wide range of publications on its platform and offering the content at flat rate conditions. Titles from Axel Springer SE (BILD and WELT) were included in the bundle for a few months in summer 2019, but have since disappeared again. As a result, Readly currently has no daily news content.

However, the crucial factor seems to be another: Readly and the other providers simply do not have the customer base or the financial means to establish direct contact with the mass of potential customers. This applies both to Readly and to Blendle, as well as multi-provider payment systems such as Steady or Laterpay, all of which have trouble being noticed by consumers at all.

Unlike Spotify and Netflix, which have received significant sums from venture capital companies in recent years, German start-ups have found it difficult to grow quickly enough to become relevant for the mass market. This is not a problem faced by Apple, Facebook, or Google, of course – all of them have an

enormous customer base in Germany, allowing them in principle to »force« new products onto the market. Although this may not always be successful (such as in the case of Google+), existing reach or the ability to purchase it is still a key requirement for fast market growth.

However, in particular the regional newspaper publishers on the German market (still) have millions of direct customer contacts, which could be used to establish a new platform product. In 2019, they counted a total of 9.5 million subscribers to their print newspapers (cf. IVW 2020), in addition to a growing number of digital subscriptions – all in all more than a good basis for high-quality, direct customer contacts.

All these arguments suggest that many of the platforms mentioned have struggled primarily due to a lack of basic reach and not a lack of demand on the user side.

The reservations against a platform operated by publishing houses described here and often voiced by media practitioners can thus largely be addressed. However, there are further arguments that could prevent a platform solution like this and potentially go further towards explaining this than the arguments above.

One is that media companies – and publishing houses in particular – are often said to suffer from a *lack of organizational innovation capabilities*. Innovations push out existing technologies, products, and services, thus altering business models sometimes fundamentally (cf. Christensen 1997). There is no doubt that this applies particularly strongly to the media industry. Here, the key innovations of recent times – some of them disruptive – can be attributed to actors from outside the sector (cf. Christensen/Froomkin/Jones 2012). One of the effects has been to question large parts of the business model of funding through advertising.

At the same time, the established actors in the media economy appear to have trouble accepting these changes and being proactive in converting the new market conditions into their own innovations for products and business models (cf. Krumsvik/Storsul 2013; Wang 2016). This is particularly true of large media organizations with a more conservative corporate culture, such as publishing houses.

The fundamental phenomenon of a lack of innovative capabilities has been described in the relevant literature under a wide range of terms and concepts. These include (a lack of) dynamic capabilities (cf. Teece/Pisano/Shuen 1997), path dependencies, i.e. potential actions being limited by decisions made in the past (Sydow/Schreyögg/Koch 2009), and (a lack of) organizational ambidexterity, i.e. the ability of organizations to achieve a balance between exploration and exploitation within the organization (cf. O'Reilly/Tushman 2004).

At established media companies in particular, these dynamic capabilities have tended to be poor and path dependencies more pronounced (cf. Koch 2008;

Rothmann 2013), while a stronger focus has been placed on exploitation, at the expense of exploration. The result is a lack of innovation capabilities and thus difficulties in adapting to sometimes deep-seated changes in the market.

Personal animosity at management level between the organizations called upon to collaborate may also play a role here, and is even more likely in companies run on patriarchal structures. To put it bluntly, such media companies often display little inclination or ability to allow innovations from outside the organization (i.e. to engage in open innovation).

In addition, although the print sector is generally aware of how serious the situation is, it remains possible to generate *high margins with print products* (cf. Lobigs 2013; Edge et al. 2020). As long as this continues, there is of course little absolute need to break through old patterns and permit radical changes. On the other hand, this success does generate a certain cash flow, which could be usefully invested in business models for the future.

Scenario 2a: A platform operated by regional publishing houses

Another stumbling block to collaboration between publishing houses appears to be the ever stronger *cut-throat competition between the (national) publishing houses*. The content of the media outlets is highly substitutable, especially when it comes to the pure information it contains. Anyone who needs supra-regional information is likely to be able to find it free of charge somewhere.

The only way to break through the competition in markets like this is through product differentiation, be it in the form of political tone, journalistic standards, design, user friendliness etc. – an always difficult and often expensive thing to do. Although it eliminates perfect substitutes, there is still a substantial level of competition in the form of time allocation, budget restrictions, the fulfillment of similar needs, and the increasing number of domestic and international competitors. This indicates a cut-throat competition, at least for those organizations that can offer a full range, and – as a consequence – a high likelihood of a decrease in the number of large journalism brands on the market in the future. There will be a consolidation. *Der SPIEGEL*, for example, will therefore have no interest in pushing its valuable paying customers towards the products of its direct competitors on a shared distribution platform.

The situation is very different for regional newspaper publishers. These generally hold regional monopolies, with few or no direct competitors. >One-newspaper districts< – districts in which only one daily newspaper is available – accounted for almost 60 percent of all districts in Germany in 2012 (cf. Schütz 2012).

The only way for these monopolists to gain collectively would be if they were to combine their products – for example if a EUR 25 subscription provided access

to the digital content of not just one local newspaper, but all local newspapers in Germany. This would certainly not lead to lower overall demand, but probably to growth.

Consumers could benefit from this solution in a multitude of ways. Those commuting between two districts would no longer have to choose just one local newspaper (which most currently do), but would be able to access content about both where they live and where they work. People who have moved away from their home district for work or family reasons would presumably still gain some benefit from content from their old home – not to the extent that they would take out a second subscription, but they would be willing to pay more for the entire bundle. When regional issues of national interest arise (e.g. Hambach Forest, Stuttgart railway station, Berlin airport, Pegida etc.), editorial offices with local or regional roots could also be the best, quickest and most sustainable way to serve this national interest.

In terms of cost, the difference from the current fragmented situation would also be minimal. After all, the content already exists – it is merely hidden behind a series of different paywalls. Here the criticism is often raised that a scenario like this would be technically almost impossible to implement. However, single sign-on solutions such as Contentpass and Laterpay, in which only the registration and payment process is organized centrally while access to content remains local, could counteract this.

Last but not least, many at a management level simply have a problem with the sense of ›giving away‹ content that can be expensive to produce. Yet if giving it away does not cost anything, while also promising increased revenue, it would still be advisable to do so.

In conclusion, it is important to note that a cross-publisher journalism platform would promise enormous potential at relatively low cost and risk, especially for regional publishing houses. In the long term, combining the strength of the publishing houses could also lead to the establishment of competitive national content. All in all, – especially given the economic challenges they face – collaboration between regional newspaper publishers appears advisable.

Scenario 3: A public service platform – or a digital press wholesaler

It goes without saying that a publishing house's own platform would have potential disadvantages, particularly from the point of view of society. For example, profit-oriented publishing houses have an incentive to behave in a way that does not necessarily optimize social welfare or correspond to the interests of society as a whole. This could lead to the development of recommendation systems that are based on opaque algorithms, are designed (at least in part) to serve the interests

of advertisers or political actors, or correspond to the human need for confirmation of one's own views (known as confirmation bias) (Wellbrock 2016). They would therefore be incompatible with the interests of a democratic society and, in some cases, of the audience (cf. Allcott et al. 2020).

In addition, the possibility of a platform operated by publishing houses discriminating against certain (especially smaller) providers for strategic reasons cannot be ruled out. This would not be desirable from the point of view of society, as it would prevent the potential for a great deal of diversity from being exploited. Developments in information technology mean that essentially any individual can today produce and publish high-quality journalistic content, independently of editorial offices and large organizations. This opens up enormous potential for diversity. However, the economic feasibility of these models is highly dependent on a certain basic reach, which is difficult for individual smaller providers to achieve. Instead, they run the risk of disappearing in the long tail of products.

One idea here would therefore be a digital journalism platform with non-discriminatory access for providers and a ›fair‹ recommendation algorithm that could create the potential reach needed for competent media professionals and their high-quality content.

A platform like this cannot be expected to exist permanently in the free economy. This is largely because of substantial size advantages and other aspects, such as a tendency towards single homing, indicating a high likelihood of monopolization at this level of value creation. Profit-oriented actors would then have an incentive to limit the quantity and diversity to less than the optimum level for public benefit, while raising prices to a sub-optimal level from a social welfare perspective.

An obvious alternative would be for this critical and tendentially monopolistic distribution level to be provided for and by society as a whole, as is the case in road and rail transport or the energy sector. At the same time, however, it is important for journalism to remain independent from political influence. This requires independent, monitored organizations with pluralistic staffing independent from political influence.

The vision of a pan-European platform for media and culture is nothing new, having been suggested among others by the Director of Bayerischer Rundfunk, Ulrich Wilhelm, in 2018 (cf. Hein 2018). It should therefore be possible to reconcile this project with the public service mandate, in particular when it comes to the mandate to guarantee universal distribution.

However, a platform like this would not necessarily have to be provided by public service broadcasters. What matters is that economic competition on the distribution side is eliminated, as this is shaped by enormous economies of scale and thus tends to give the respective actors greater market power – regardless of which form of organization ultimately acts as the provider. This uneven distri-

bution of market power between content distributors and producers also makes it easier to discriminate against individual providers, promote particular content at the expense of diversity, or negotiate contractual conditions that disadvantage content producers. A »sovereign platform« could prevent the concentration of market power at the distribution stage and help significantly to enable journalistic competition and both content-related and economic diversity at the stages before this. A scenario like this was recently described extensively and with great precision in the *Jahrbuch Qualität der Medien 2019* [Quality of the Media Annual] published by the Forschungszentrum Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft [Research Center for Society and Public Life] at the University of Zürich (Eisenegger 2019: 23).

This approach largely corresponds to the classic German press wholesaler system (cf. Brinkmann 2018). Large parts of the central objective of this system – to ensure diversity in the press – can be applied to a digital context, given that, in both market environments, the tendencies towards concentration and the opportunities for discrimination at the distribution stage, especially towards content producers with more limited funds, appear problematic in terms of journalistic and economic diversity. Protecting titles with low circulation, guaranteeing spatially inclusive and comprehensive distribution, and preventing discrimination against individual publications – all specific goals of the press wholesaler system – are also desirable for the digital sale of democracy-related content and could potentially be achieved with a distribution platform like this.

Conclusion

The direction in which markets for journalistic content are developing has long been well documented and conceptualized in theories. All in all, it has become very challenging to conduct economically successful journalism, especially in the regional segment. Society must therefore consider how to tackle the not-unlikely scenario that »news deserts« – districts in which no professional journalistic publications are available – will emerge. As has been shown both in theory and in empirical studies, this would have negative consequences for democracy (cf. Adsera/Boix/Payne 2003, Snyder/Strömberg, 2010). News deserts are already a reality in the USA, while Germany also has some districts in which delivery of journalistic content is no longer profitable, with too few consumers willing to pay coupled with excessive distribution costs or insufficient internet penetration.

This development is not predominantly driven by ungrateful or penny-pinching consumers, changed consumer preferences, or unscrupulous publishing houses. Instead, the key driver is the changed market structures in the digital sector, in particular the cost structures.

Countering the threat of news deserts will take a systematic approach. There is a lot to suggest that large technology corporations will take (even more) control of the distribution of digital content, meeting consumer demand through multi-provider platforms.

At the same time, precisely here there is plenty of potential for other actors to promote and maintain media diversity. In the private economy, regional publishing houses in particular could work together to create a shared sales platform. This would allow them to save sales and marketing costs, determine prices, bundle content, and gain and maintain both the direct link to their readers and their data and sovereignty over advertising. There are also technological solutions that allow any publishing house to maintain its brand environment, its look and feel, and its CMS.

Imagine that subscribers could pay EUR 25 and gain access to the digital content not only of their own local newspaper, but of all local newspapers in Germany. This would undoubtedly lead not to fewer subscribers, but to more. It would cost not a cent more to produce, as the content already exists – it is just currently behind countless paywalls. A solution like this would almost certainly push more money into the system – money that would not have to be shared with technology companies that until recently had nothing to do with the sector. But it would require the local newspapers to work together. This is something they currently do only to an extremely limited extent, probably primarily due to conservative corporate cultures.

Regardless of whether publishing houses can or want to set up their own platform, a possible alternative would be the establishment of a kind of public service platform, offering non-discriminatory access for all providers of digital journalistic content – essentially a kind of digital press wholesaler. This would also significantly improve access opportunities for smaller – perhaps even non-profit – journalism providers and do a great deal to boost diversity and an ecosystem of freelance journalists and journalistic start-ups that is economically sustainable. However, unfortunately, neither policymakers nor public service broadcasters currently appear determined or able to implement a project like this.

If nothing systematic is undertaken, however, the fear remains that news deserts will emerge and tech giants like Apple, Google, and Amazon will take over large parts of the sale of journalistic content. This is the alternative that the media sector and society need to consider – not the healthy world of print media from twenty years ago.

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Essay

Nina Horaczek

Will coronavirus harm right-wing populists?

Hopes that the pandemic will also destroy political populism may be premature

Abstract: Numerous political commentators see the end of political populism approaching in view of the Corona epidemic. Indeed, the popularity ratings of populist parties have been in decline since the outbreak of the corona crisis. But the virus offers populists also great opportunities for their media discourse. They frame Corona, the invisible, stateless virus, into a tangible scapegoat. Not without reason US-President Donald Trump speaks of a »Chinese virus«. To spread their message, populists on both sides of the Atlantic can rely on a media network that they and their confidants have very cleverly built up in recent years.

It would be an interesting form of collateral damage: Is coronavirus killing the political disease that is populism? Is political propaganda of the »us against the others« kind obsolete in a pandemic? Does corona mean that objective information counts more than populist conspiracy theories?

Yes, say many commentators. »The populists are missing a bogeyman,« was the analysis of the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* at the end of June. In the current crisis, »obviously constructive political approaches [are being] rewarded – and destructive ones punished.«^[1] News magazine *Der Spiegel* recently made the following comment on acceptance of the coronavirus policies of Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, and Jair Bolsonaro in its online edition: »The politics of lies no

1 Mark Schieritz: Den Populisten fehlt das Feindbild. In: *Zeit Online* dated 24.6.2020, <https://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2020-06/corona-krise-folgen-staerkung-demokratie-populismus-liberale-welt-hoffnung>, accessed on 29.6.2020.

longer works when people are dying.«^[2] In the forum of left-wing weekly *der Freitag*, blogger »alge93« saw the end of populism coming as early as the start of May: »But, as always in life, crises also bring opportunity: Perhaps the end of populism is very close.«^[3]

These voices may be right. Or perhaps the optimism of those predicting the end of right-wing populism is no more than wishful thinking. The popularity of populists is currently falling – albeit not everywhere, as the example of Hungary shows. But coronavirus also offers huge opportunities for the populists' media discourse. After all, on both sides of the Atlantic, from US President Donald Trump to former Austrian Vice Chancellor and FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache^[4] and Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán, populists can draw on a media network that they and their allies have established very cleverly over the last few years.

As the journalistic research network »Europe's Far Right,«^[5] a collaboration between journalists from seven different countries (Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, and Hungary) specializing in right-wing populism, we have been able to analyze^[6] how right-wing populists want to shape the media discourse and create a media hegemony for their political content. The individual steps range from setting up their own media empire to looking for scapegoats, from defaming critics to generating fear with fake news. Of course, not all of these steps are or have been seen at the same time or in all the countries examined – but all the right-wing populist movements examined used the same mechanisms, albeit in different ways based on their different levels of political strength.

Framing and fake news

If coronavirus is to be an opportunity for populists, rather than their downfall, the invisible, stateless virus first has to be framed as a tangible scapegoat. In the USA, for example, it has been named the »Chinese virus« – a term used by US President Donald Trump more than twenty times between March 16 and March

- 2 Christian Stöcker: Stunde der Wahrheit für die Populisten der Lüge. In: *Spiegel Online* dated 28.6.2020, <https://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/corona-und-populismus-stunde-der-wahrheit-fuer-die-politik-der-luege-a-2211f3b9-c30d-4f4c-9810-7cfc8648ef1>, accessed on 29.6.2020.
- 3 alge93: Corona und das Ende des Populismus. In: *der Freitag* dated 1.5.2020, <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/alge93/corona-und-das-ende-des-populismus>, accessed on 29.6.2020
- 4 Heinz-Christian Strache was leader of the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) from 2005 and Vice Chancellor of the Republic of Austria from December 2017. He resigned from both roles in May 2019 after *Der Spiegel* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* revealed that he had been secretly filmed promising someone he believed to be an oligarch's niece government contracts if she first bought a share in the biggest selling daily newspaper Kronen Zeitung and published positive reports on Strache and his party.
- 5 You can find information and research by the network »Europe's Far Right« at <https://europesfarright.eu/>
- 6 See Nina Horaczek: Propagandakrieg in Europa. Die Medien der Rechten. In: *Falter* 42/2018 dated 17.10.2018.

30, 2020.^[7] A photo taken of Trump's speaking notes by a *Washington Post* photographer shows that »Chinese virus« is not a slip of the tongue, but a deliberate provocation: In Trump's manuscript, »corona« has been crossed out and replaced with »Chinese«.^[8]

In Austria, the Vienna Chair of the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ), Dominik Nepp, also referred to corona as an »asylum seekers' virus,«^[9] thus associating the feared virus with that group in the minds of his followers. The FPÖ calls asylum seekers »corona asylum seekers,« turning a group of people who have fled to us in the hope of escaping war and torture into a threat, and a disease that does not distinguish between nationalities and skin colors into a visible danger. It is the perfect scapegoat.

The effect is reinforced with fake news positioned in a targeted way. In Austria, the FPÖ claims that asylum seekers are prioritized above native Austrians in corona tests.^[10] In Germany, AfD Member of the Bundestag Hansjörg Müller claims that 88 percent of those who have died of coronavirus in Italy are not actually corona deaths at all. And Bavarian State Chair of the AfD Corinna Miazga issued her own online video warning against »forced vaccination« – without providing any evidence at all to back up the claim.^[11]

The media of right-wing extremists in Switzerland, Austria, and Germany

The next step is for the message to get out into the world. A successful populist needs a media network. One option is to repurpose the traditional media as a propaganda instrument – as has been done with the Swiss weekly *Weltwoche*, which was a left-wing liberal paper for many years before Chief Editor Roger Köppel, who is also a member of parliament for the right-wing populist party SVP in Switzerland, switched to a strictly right-wing, conservative course.

7 See Jérôme Viala-Gaudefroy/Dana Lindaman: Donald Trump's Chinese virus: The politics of naming. In: *The Conversation* dated 21.4.2020, <https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796>, accessed on 29.6.2020. All Trump's mentions of the »Chinese virus« can be accessed here: <https://factba.se/search#%22chinese%22Bvirus%22>, accessed on 29.6.2020.

8 See Mary Papenfuss: Photographer Captures Trump's Handwritten »Chinese« Virus Revision On Speech Script. In: *Huffington Post* dated 19.3.2020, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trump-coronavirus-chinese-virus-photograph-racism_n_5e73eaac5b6f5b7c54130a5?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHRocHM6Ly93d-3cuZ29vZ2xlImNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAKpu8UTlkRJAgrEMlKE5Sy9_BrZJueqyS6dLFqgH-jz5NRU8Yij7RhjhcjQRD-j3Ozrmmi9TrVEM7UZQo-ERlyZhYemKzeNEXJtqUSmEgHUWmKpUUFrUamqVGckG-7IwhMfDJSjSCMDIZD4Fbdrr9Agh7Vg8tLmMt4Pj4Q88kg6 (29.6.2020).

9 Press release by FPÖ Vienna dated 17.5.2020.

10 Press release by the FPÖ dated 5.5.2020.

11 N.N.: AfD verbreitet Fake News zu Corona. In: *BR24* dated 4.4.2020, <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/afd-verbietet-fake-news-zu-corona.Rv7jler> (29.6.2020).

For example, *Weltwoche* writes that the battle against coronavirus is »also a battle of cultures,« namely a battle between authoritarian China and free America.^[12] In addition, *Weltwoche* gives plenty of media space to those who see the governments' Covid-19 measures as hysterical – for instance an emeritus immunologist who states that, »the virus has gone for now. It will probably come back in winter, but it will not be a second wave, just a cold. Those healthy young people walking around in masks at the moment would do better to wear a helmet, as the risk of something falling on their heads is greater than that of becoming seriously ill with Covid-19.«^[13]

Although *Weltwoche* clearly positions itself on the side of the right-wing populist SVP, in contrast to other media on this political spectrum it does not repeat the conspiracy theory that US billionaire Bill Gates is behind coronavirus as he wants to increase his wealth at the cost of the world's health.

This claim is made by other media, such as the German far-right *Compact-Magazin*. The cover of its June 2020 edition shows Gates under the headline »The vaccination dictator.«^[14] *Compact-Magazin* even published an 80-page *Compact Aktuell* special edition with the sub-heading »What the state is keeping from us.« The thrust of this special edition is that the German federal government's coronavirus measures are »alarmism« and the »hysterical hygiene state« is leading the German population into a dictatorship.^[15] *Compact-Magazin* is not an AfD magazine, but maintains good contacts with the right-wing populists of that party.^[16] For example, the then State Chair of the AfD Schleswig-Holstein, Doris von Sayn-Wittgenstein, was a speaker at the »Our history, our heritage, our pride« conference organized by *Compact-Magazin* in 2019.^[17] It was also AfD politicians Uwe Schulz, Udo Hemmelgarn, Petr Bystron, and Nicole Höchst who organized the »1st Conference of the Free Media« in Germany, indeed at the very heart of the Republic, in the German Bundestag. According to the program flyer, the aim of this conference was to explore »synergy effects and opportunities for cooperation« for the parliamentary party and »freelance journalists.«^[18]

12 Peter Keller: Das chinesische Virus. In: *Weltwoche* 13 dated 25.3.2020.

13 Beda M. Stadler: Warum alle falsch lagen. In: *Weltwoche* 24 dated 10.6.2020.

14 The cover of the June edition of *Compact-Magazin* can be accessed at <https://www.kopp-verlag.at/a/compact-magazin-ausgabe-juni-2020?d=1&emcso=2&emcs1=Kategorieseite&emcs2=132489&emcs3=132571>

15 See *Compact Aktuell*, <https://www.kopp-verlag.at/a/compact-aktuell%3a-corona?d=1&emcso=2&emcs1=Kategorieseite&emcs2=&emcs3=132489> (29.6.2020)

16 The research network *Correktiv* has published a seven-part series on the media of the New Right, offering interesting further information on this topic: <https://correctiv.org/aktuelles/neue-rechte/2016/12/27/futter-fuer-afd-waehler> (29.6.2020)

17 See: Andreas Speit: Einsatz für Rechtsextreme. In: *die tageszeitung* dated 23.8.2019, <https://taz.de/AfDler-in-Doris-von-Sayn-Wittgenstein/!5618808&s=compact+magazin/> (29.6.2020)

18 Quoted in Tilman Steffen: Weiterbildung für rechtskonservative Blogger. In: *Zeit online* dated 8.5.2019, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-05/afd-bundestag-konferenz-freie-medien-blogger>

The right-wing populist FPÖ has been targeting investment into media linked to the party for ten years now. »We have tried to turn a certain communicative emergency into a virtue,« said then FPÖ General Secretary and now leader of the FPÖ in the Austrian parliament, Herbert Kickl.¹⁹¹ Although the FPÖ has recently been weakened by the resignation of its long-standing party leader Heinz-Christian Strache, the party has successfully and silently built up an impressive propaganda network over the years. Examples include long-standing FPÖ media like *Zur Zeit*, a weekly paper founded in 1997 by then FPÖ politician Andreas Mölzer. The paper published racist insults against footballer David Alaba and called for »groups with »anti-autochthonous views« to be stripped of the right to vote and the »workhouse to be reintroduced.« The online platform *unzensuriert.at*, which has close links to the FPÖ and whose managing director Walter Asperl is employed by the group FP-Parlamentsklub, agitates against Muslims, refugees, and homosexuals. The *Info-Direkt* magazine published in Upper Austria, on the other hand, forms an interface between the FPÖ and Identitäre, a far-right youth splinter group whose active members include a few former Neo-Nazis. Now, in the time of corona, the *Info-Direkt* website is claiming that Austria is »on the way to becoming a surveillance state with corona.«

Some of the funding for these far-right newspaper publishers comes from the FPÖ, which regularly advertises in *Info-Direkt*. It is unclear who the other financiers behind this glossy magazine are, although the paper's extremely pro-Russian line is striking. The cover of the first edition of *Info-Direkt* showed Russian President Vladimir Putin wearing sunglasses, under the headline: »We want someone like Putin.«^[20]

There is lively exchange between far-right media in Austria and Germany. The online editor of the Upper Austrian magazine *Wochenblick*, another far-right paper with close links to the FPÖ, previously worked at *Blaue Narzisse* and *Sezession*, two New Right media close to the AfD. Chris Ares, a nationalist rapper from Germany (»Du mein Deutschland – Lied für Chemnitz«), also writes for both *Info-Direkt* and the German Identitäre.

One of the speakers at the »Verteidiger Europas« [Defenders of Europe] congress organized by the Identitäre in Linz in 2016 was Jürgen Elsässer, who was formerly a journalist for left-wing media and is now Chief Editor of the German *Compact-Magazin*. There were also information stands from *Zur Zeit*, *Compact*, *unzensuriert.at*, *Alles roger?*, and the New Right *Sezession*, whose publisher Götz Kubitschek personally attended the congress with ten cases full of magazines in the trunk of his car. Later, *Info-Direkt* interviewed the former ARD journalist

(29.6.2020)

19 Unless otherwise stated, the quotes refer to Nina Horaczek: Propagandakrieg in Europa: Die Medien der Rechten. In: *Falter* 42/2018 dated 17.10.2018.

20 *Info-Direkt* 1/2015.

Armin-Paul Hampel, who is now the Foreign Affairs Spokesman for the AfD. Manuel Ochsreiter, a subversive far-right journalist from Germany and listed as »Middle East Expert,« wrote in *Wochenblick* why Syria is safe enough for people to be deported there. In an interview with the Austrian weekly *Falter*, *Wochenblick* Chief Editor Christian Seibert denied the accusation that his magazine is far right, claiming that, in reporting on migration, »mainstream journalism distorts the truth, and we want to set a counterpoint.« In the time of corona, this counterpoint takes the form of *Wochenblick's* claim that Italy is now in the grip of a »corona Stasi«^[21] and Islamization in Germany is »advancing thanks to corona.«^[22]

The media of right-wing extremists in the USA and Europe

This kind of media in the populist environment is not a phenomenon that is limited to German-speaking countries. In the USA, President Donald Trump uses not only Twitter, but also TV channel Fox News in particular as his very own broadcaster. In France, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN), as the Front National has called itself for the last few years, has been building up its own media from opposition for some years. The press spokesman of Le Pen's niece, former RN politician Marion Maréchal, set up the glossy magazine *L'Incorrect*^[23] to appeal to a young audience in 2017. The paper's role is clear: to deliver arguments for the New Right and »to keep the others quiet« (»faites-les taire«).

L'Incorrect is not the only medium with close ideological links to RN. The range of far-right media available in France, especially online, is now so great that a new term has been coined: the »Fachosphère« – a sphere of fascists online. One example is *Fdesouche*, an abbreviation of François Desouche. Like *unzensuriert.at*, *Fdesouche* openly agitates against migrants and other minorities, and has become one of the most popular platforms in the French fachosphère. Figures from analysis site Alexa show that seven of the ten most-read political websites in France in 2016 were from the radical right wing. And their influence in France has long since extended into conservative traditional media. The conservative daily newspaper *Le Figaro* made the career of Éric Zemmour – a star of the right wing whom Le Pen would like to see as Minister of Culture – as a columnist. Zemmour openly argues that employers should have the right to reject Arab or black applicants and told French television presenter Hapsatou Sy, whose mother comes from Senegal, that her first name was »an insult to France.«

21 Kornelia Kirchweiger: Italien setzt auf Corona-Stasi. In: *Wochenblick* dated 26.5.2020, <https://www.wochenblick.at/italien-setzt-auf-corona-stasi/> (29.6.2020)

22 N.n.: Islamisierung Deutschlands schreitet Dank Corona voran. In: *Wochenblick* dated 26.5.2020, <https://www.wochenblick.at/islamisierung-deutschlands-schreitet-dank-corona-voran/> (29.6.2020).

23 <https://lincorrect.org/>

In countries such as Hungary and Poland, where right-wing populists are in government, they use their power to bring the public service broadcasters into line with the government's views. When Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán lost the election – unexpectedly in his view – in 2002, he was quick to find who was at fault: the independent media, who had reported critically on his party Fidesz. As a result, Orbán built up his own media power from opposition, with a key role played by oligarchs with close links to Fidesz, who invested in newspapers and private broadcasters. Today, they control the media market in Hungary. Critical journalists are sacked and loyal party followers put in positions of power. Careers are offered to people like Daniel Papp, the former press spokesman of the far-right Jobbik who has recently been named Director of the Hungarian state broadcaster. He made headlines in 2011 when he faked a news piece about Green politician and Orbán critic Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Papp's piece described how Cohn-Bendit was confronted at a press conference with the question of whether he thought that sexually harassing children was one of the European basic rights, upon which he left the room without saying a word. In fact, the Green politician had given a detailed answer.

Following Orbán's restructuring of the state media, all news reports for public service broadcasters now originate from the state news agency MTI. Pluralism of content is impossible from the start. MTI also provides its reports to Hungarian private broadcasters free of charge. It is a win-win situation: Private commercial broadcasters do not need to maintain their own news editorial offices, and the government can spread its propaganda even better throughout the country.

In Austria, the FPÖ was forced to return to the opposition benches following the Ibiza scandal in 2019, giving it less influence over public service broadcasters than politicians like Orbán and the right-wing populist PiS party in Poland. Instead, it makes more use of the party's YouTube channel FPÖ TV, in part to stir up opinion against the corona measures taken by the turquoise-green government. »Are you fed up with the government's scaremongering and alarmism?« the FPÖ asks the video's viewers.¹²⁴¹ There is no doubt that those who have no access to public service broadcasters, nor have their own private broadcaster like Italian right-wing populist Silvio Berlusconi in the 1990s, today use social media as an amplifier.

Social media platforms for spreading fake news and far-right propaganda

The French RN leader Marine Le Pen currently has 1.5 million followers on Facebook; Matteo Salvini, leader of Italy's far-right party Lega, has 4.2 million fans.

24 The video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjACXjyTtzQ>

Salvini has long focused the online strategy of his Lega party fully on Facebook: The party's former daily newspaper, *La Padania*, ceased publication in 2014; the Lega radio station Padania broadcasts online only. Everything now runs via the leader's Facebook profile.

On it, Salvini holds political speeches while his four-year-old daughter dances across the screen; the Lega Interior Minister, dressed in swimming trunks, jumps into the pool of a mafia villa that has been confiscated by the police, or tells his three million fans in a video message: »You pay my wages. I answer only to you.« The Lega leader is not so pleasant towards journalists – the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* quoted him in 2013 as saying that his party would »give one or another sleazy, groveling journalist a kick up the ass.«

Again on Facebook, Salvini is now running a campaign for those who Lega claims have been financially ruined by the Italian government's measures to combat coronavirus – of course not forgetting to link the issue to the party's favorite topic: migration. The Italian far-right politician calculates on Facebook that, since he has no longer been represented in the government as Interior Minister and the country has gone through lockdown, the number of refugees reaching Italy by sea has increased by 162 percent.^[25]

Coronavirus also gives those right-wing populists who are in government the opportunity to further limit press freedom in their own countries. This was already happening before corona, but the crisis has seen Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán, for example, go a step further. In late March, the Hungarian Enabling Act gained a new clause: Anyone who publicly spreads fake news or distorted facts in their reporting, thus impeding the success of the measures to protect against coronavirus, can now be punished with up to five years' imprisonment. Of course there is nothing wrong with fighting fake news – but in a country in which Hungarian state television (these broadcasters have long since ceased to count as public service broadcasters) deliberately spreads fake news, there is a fear that this law could be used to criminalize critical reporting. After all, just before the Hungarian elections in March 2018, Hungarian state television itself broadcast reports from Germany in which a man on the street complained that he had had to give up his home because migrants had been settled in the neighborhood. A woman told the reporter that Hamburg was now so dangerous that she only left her house armed with pepper spray. Yet those shown as passers-by were actually AfD politicians. The deception was uncovered by Márta Orosz, a journalist from Hungary who works at the investigative research center *Correctiv* in Germany. Orosz demonstrated at least seven cases in which AfD politicians had spoken on Hungarian state television without their party affiliation being mentioned. At the start of 2016, Hungarian state TV even presented images of

25 Matteo Salvini: Facebook post dated 29.6.2020, <https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/> (29.6.2020)

sexual violence from Tahir Square in Egypt in 2012 as images taken on New Year's Eve in Cologne. And at Whitsun 2018, Hungarians learned on state news that the German city of Essen [also the German word for »eat«] had been forced to change its name to »Fasten« due to Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. This story really had been shown on German television – on a satire show.

A virus that frightens people and for which it is easy to find a scapegoat. Fake news that populists like to spread about coronavirus. And a media network that, combined with social media, provides the ideal means of transport for populist propaganda. The poll ratings of right-wing populists may well have fallen since the start of the coronavirus crisis, but it is certainly too early to celebrate their demise.

About the author

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Debate

Timo Rieg

Disinfection journalism

Reporting on coronavirus has not been a beacon of orientation

Abstract: The journalistic reporting on the coronavirus pandemic displayed many essentially familiar deficits. Research and diversity of opinion came up particularly short. Journalism failed to ask crucial questions or look for critical voices. At the same time, policymakers were implementing measures that will have effects and side-effects for many years to come and for which, given its lack of involvement, the democratic sovereign cannot bear responsibility.

At the start of the coronavirus pandemic, demand for journalistic media boomed (B5). And indeed, people were largely satisfied with the media on offer (B20). However, neither demand nor customer satisfaction say anything about the quality of the reporting, nor especially about individual deficits. Journalism studies will undoubtedly take an intensive look at the sector's performance in the future and, as any journalistic plumber should, will spend more time examining the dripping, sticking, limescale-encrusted taps than those that work perfectly. Aside from various niggles, the criticism that has been heard so far has focused on two key perceptions: firstly, »almost spookily uniform reporting« (Meier/Wyss 2020)¹ that carries »the Federal Government's crisis strategy largely without critique« (Linß 2020) and thus puts itself in the position of »system journalism« (Jarren 2020); and, secondly, the dominance of the topic in itself. »Agenda setting always means agenda cutting: The broadcast time [...] given over to the coronavirus pandemic pushes other situations and events out of sight« (Haarkötter 2020).

1 This and the following quotes were translated from German.

There is plenty of evidence of both points, some of which I will highlight in this paper. Numerous reactions to the media critique made certainly illustrate one of the core problems of journalism, namely confusion between facts and the associated points of view. But let's start from the very beginning: Why is ›corona reporting‹ there in the first place?

1. Democracy demands well-informed citizens

We will never know for sure how useful, or how harmful, the journalism that exists in a democracy is, as conducting the experiments this would demand is simply not feasible. The idea is that general elections demand well-informed voters, both for their own good and in order to protect others. Scrutinizing governments and their countless official bodies demands conversation within society. No-one had a specific mandate for the executive decisions made on coronavirus policy. No election manifesto offered the option of a shutdown or lockdown, while the political synchronization between the German federal and 16 state governments alone (B₁) made it more than clear that voters had no say – even the parliaments were of no importance. Instead, journalism raised politicians, who have already long called themselves »heads of government« (B₁), to the status of »heads of state« (B₁₄) or princes (B₁₅). Even if one adheres to a minimalistic model of democracy, such as that advocated by Joseph Schumpeter, and is in favor of a »democracy of elites,« this still needs to remain modifiable. After all, the right to self-determination forms the heart of democracy (cf. Abromeit 2002: 165). The focus is never on making the best decisions, but on acting as a (compulsory) community in such a way that the greatest possible satisfaction and the lowest possible dissatisfaction is created: My freedom becomes the subject of negotiation only and exactly at the point where it impedes on the freedom of others (for more detail, see Rieg 2020a).

But what did the media broadcast, print, post around the clock? What the executive – from the federal government to local health authorities – recommends, prescribes, and enforces can always be reported within five minutes; with background information (›What is a virus?‹ etc.) perhaps fifteen. And then? Anything vaguely related. Here a new coronavirus case, there a travel ban; frustrated non-holidaymakers here, ›stranded‹ holidaymakers there; here a study, there a chaotic mess of rules. Surely we should have known, should have been able to act? Wasn't this or that done too late? Where are the checks, penalties, why such a soft touch? Appeals for people to stay strong: ways to slow down their lives, tips on home schooling, ›What's your favorite mask?‹ And of course, there are scandals: The media have been harping on about »conspiracy myths« for months – single incidents such as Ischgl, Rheda-Wiedenbrück, and a banned visit to someone's parents (B₂) are chewed over for days or weeks on end.

2. Well-informed citizens demand journalistic research

Today, policymakers and the bodies that work for them are more than capable of keeping citizens up to date on the rules they pass themselves (B8). This is not »bypassing the media« (B17), but democratic progress made possible by technology. Indeed, for economic reasons alone, it should force journalism to up its own game: to conduct their own research before commenting rather than seeing PR as competition for journalism (B7).

Instead, journalism dutifully reported on what policymakers said (cf. Reisin 2020a) and reduced all options for action to the prescribed »flatten the curve« policy, meaning that anyone who does not stay at home puts their own life and those of others in danger. Most journalists appeared to find this so logical, so without alternative (cf. Ruß-Mohl 2020a), so factually accurate, that they did not even pursue the first and most obvious research question, namely: What consequences might this have? There are no effects without side effects. How much will a lockdown cost and who will pay for it? What will be made impossible by it? Which social consequences of a lockdown can be expected or are even conceivable? What suffering will it cause, from animal transports stuck at closed borders and bankrupt businesses to deaths caused by untreated illnesses? What will the changes in hospitals mean? What about the interruption to the global movement of goods and people? This list of side effects is so long and wide-ranging that only those who are familiar with every aspect could take democratic responsibility for the planned effects. The role of journalism was to provide information on this (Rieg 2020c). But it did not take on this role – perhaps not due to a lack of ability to do so, nor for reasons of comfort or personal fear, but because of the sheer scale of the issue: »The initial phase of reporting on coronavirus in Germany can be justified in terms of the ethics of responsibility. It can be argued that the hesitance that defined it, even to the extreme of a kind of court reporting, could have served the purpose of eschewing responsibility for the consequences (more infections!) that could have been triggered by, for example, sowing doubt on social distancing measures« (Prinzing 2020).

This attitude did certainly exist, but I find it impossible to imagine a situation that would justify a »kind of court reporting.« If journalism has nothing to contribute, it should keep silent, rather than mutating into a »kind of service journalism« (Linß 2020). Those who want to report must first conduct research (cf. Section 2 of the German Press Code) – even more so when we know that the government's attitude is »the population does not need to know everything« (B19). Only those who know what does not appear worthy of reporting can take responsibility for not reporting it. There can be no refusal to research for reasons of the ethics of responsibility. Yes, journalists can keep a kidnapping quiet (Schicha 2019: 38; cf. Pöttker 2019), but only when they know the situation (confidential

information from the police, their own findings) and where informing the public does not appear necessary for their orientation (at this point in time). Would any of the ›court reporters‹ claim to have researched every consequence of the state's actions and, given this well-founded background, have kept all his knowledge quiet? Would any journalist claim to have decided instead of the sovereign how many deaths, injuries, and destroyed lives can be accepted without question in the cause of protection against coronavirus; how many trillions of euros need to be spent without alternative (B4) in this brief moment?

It was not about some small details, nor about investigative questions (who knew what when?). It was about fundamental information for a democratic society. How many resources can those living today take from those living in the future for their own lives or survival (according to the government, »all available,« B3)? Questions like this were not addressed (Rieg 2020b). Instead, the media presented protecting the lives of the German population as the non-negotiable top priority, above all else. Although journalists made no protest against Wolfgang Schäuble's small contradiction (B23), the media got plenty of mileage out of Mayor of Tübingen Boris Palmer (B25). A well-known poltergeist went right ahead and called Palmer »stupid« (B26); a quality newspaper called his statement »unacceptable« (B27); and a continuum so popular in journalism was created: ›it is not the first time that XY has made negative headlines‹ (B24). Palmer had dared to ask what journalism refused to: What about the side effects of the lockdown, which according to the UN could lead to numerous deaths through poverty (B28; Rieg 2020b)? But instead of conducting research into this question, the media came up against Palmer's statement that the issues need to be weighed up, and his reaction to the scandalization in the media (B21, B22).

So many questions were not asked, so many rules not analyzed, so many illogical decisions not named, that it is impossible to imagine that different journalism would not also have led to the development of different public opinion.

3. Journalistic research demands the ability to recognize and distinguish between opinions and facts

The »separation of facts from comment« (B11) in publications has been the subject of discussion time and again. It is certainly essential in research. However banal this may sound, empirical observation shows how rarely it is adhered to (B12). For example, every coronavirus status report we read states that Covid-19 patients »*have to be* put on ventilators« (B38). But the fact is merely that they are put on ventilators. Journalism cannot decide whether or not this is necessary – the treatment is based on the opinion of the doctors. Someone who does not understand that the decision to ventilate is an opinion, rather than a law of

nature, will fail to pose elementary research questions. The same goes for all the measures used to fight the pandemic: Pneumologists, intensive care doctors, and palliative care experts have fundamentally different ideas about what to do, because they are pursuing different goals and may be following different philosophies (B30).

Another example: A dpa fact check stated, »Government not planning compulsory app for restaurant guests« (B37). Of course, no evidence for this apparent fact can be found in the text. After all, no-one outside ›the government‹ knows what ›the government‹ is planning. No informer, no minutes, not even an illegally hacked conversation could help. It is the old familiar story of incorrectly claimed facts: »Schmidt does not want to be Chancellor« (Esslinger/Schneider 2015: 24).

Numerous opinions are sold as facts. What about the widespread claim that someone who insists on his personal freedom is automatically putting the lives of others on the line (B16)? Is it possible that one's own opinion is mistaken for a fact here? In his motivational podcast »Wir gegen Corona« (Us against corona), Hajo Schumacher gives his view on the »distortion of reality« by »noisy troublemakers.« More than 70 percent found »the course charted by ›them up there‹ good. »But the 20 percent who are against it are those who are always against things. They are the same people who think climate change is a lie, who say that migrants should all drown in the Mediterranean, who argue that the Earth is flat, and who vote for a certain party – I would say« (B18, from 11:07). This world view is in no way different from the belief that the Earth is flat. But why conduct research if one considers one's own opinion to be fact?

Brost and Pörksen (2020) write: »In the first phase of the crisis, it may have been right to listen predominantly to virologists and to discuss medical measures.« No, that is where the »Politics chief of the ZEIT« and »the Christian Drosen among media researchers« (Ruß-Mohl 2020a) are wrong. In order to judge what may or may not have been right, one first has to clarify what the issue is in the first place, and then find every researchable viewpoint on it. Listening to virologists is always supposed to mean listening to the »professionals« (B35) – to those who know what to do. That sounds reasonable if I want to know something about viruses, but a virus professional cannot decide which goals our society pursues. Many problems are all down to the words and deeds of experts: straightened rivers, car-friendly cities, aseptic childhoods, a large-scale animal processing industry like at Tönnies, tree plantations replacing forests, and a railway system that cannot cope with rail travel (B33). These professionals did, or advised others to do, what they believed right in their expert view. »Not only politics, but also science, is based on prerequisites, interests, values, assumptions, models, and prognoses – in short, interpretations that need to be fought over« (Dotzauer 2020).

The greatest obstacle to journalism that provides orientation is journalists who believe they have understood a topic. After all, someone who has understood everything considers his substantiated opinion a fact, the truth (B13), the correct explanation of the world – every other viewpoint must of course be fake news.

4. Facts demand diversity of opinion

The role of journalism is to look for answers to questions that would not otherwise be available. This will always include delivering different interpretations of the facts researched, assuming that these opinions are not the entire research work in themselves, given that the facts are already known.

Because so many journalists fail to separate fact from opinion, the necessity of diversity of opinion is repeatedly countered with cries like: »No platform for climate deniers« (B36). But of course, the name alone reveals that climate change deniers are not representing an opinion, but ignoring facts. The greenhouse effect of CO₂ can be measured and recreated in experiments – there is nothing to discuss. On the other hand, even the greatest experts cannot say how humanity should react to the very complex side effects of climate change's effects, as interests and values are not facts, but opinions. Whether people should throw a huge goodbye party, immediately start living climate-neutrally for the benefit of future generations, or choose a path somewhere in between is not a question of right or wrong, but merely a democratic decision-making process. This means that »climate change deniers« should of course not be given a platform, but proponents of the view »après moi, le deluge« definitely should. Every opinion must face a counter-opinion, otherwise it is not an opinion, but a claimed fact or belief that cannot be discussed, voted on, negotiated, or commented. Those who do not want diversity of opinion do not need journalism, and journalism without diversity of opinion is propaganda.

In order to enable diversity of opinion, journalism needs to wave goodbye to its »good versus evil« narrative. »Everything is exclusively judged in the categories of the friend-foe dichotomy. Every argument turns into an ideological killer-phrase demanding confession instead of reasoning« (Lübberding 2020).

It is absolutely fine for Christian Drosten to respond to a statement by French virologist Luc Montagnier (who won a Nobel Prize in 2008 for his research into HIV) with: »It is difficult for a scientist active in virology to say that a Nobel Laureate is spreading nonsense. But that is absolute nonsense« (B29), but it also means that another virologist needs to be allowed to contribute to the media discussion with a view on a Drosten opinion that is just as strong (cf. Meyen 2020). When criticism was voiced of a preprint by Drosten, the media defended the virologist like a pack of hounds, accusing the message-bearer (B34) of cam-

paigning (B32) and scandalization (B31). Unlike in the case of bad virologist Hendrik Streeck (or the virologist who let a bad ex-BILD man close to him, B10): his ›Heinsberg study‹ was »accompanied by the highest skepticism from scientists and the media from the very beginning« and he himself »torn to pieces in the media air« (Reisin 2020b). In both cases, journalism had little time for diversity of opinion – exactly the thing that is revered as science’s power of self-regulation. Referring to Rezo’s criticism of the press, Marion Kuchenny saw »colleagues from the large print media« in particular as having a certain »tendency to consider themselves as the measure of all things and to claim journalistic prerogative of interpretation on topics and how they are evaluated for themselves in an almost arrogant way« (B9).

5. Diversity of opinion demands media critique

There is a need for continuous, up-to-the-minute discussion of the quality of journalistic reporting, for accuracy and correction of errors, completeness, relevance, representativity, objectivity, transparency, independence, and diversity. Public critique of media and journalism is a necessary corrective – and as such journalism itself should conduct research in line with it, scrutinize it, and make it public. But »journalism journalism« (Malik 2004) is rare, or stuck at the level of ›journalists were spotted somewhere not wearing face masks‹ (B6). In the press, »the media side is a television program side or culture side,« a »meta-level for reflecting self-critically on one’s own work« (Schicha 2020) is merely attempted at best. To my knowledge, a first comprehensive study on the quality of corona reporting in Switzerland (cf. Eisenegger et al. 2020) has not received any attention in media magazines so far. Yet as an essential service for orientation, media critique should be found within the media itself. However, journalists clearly perceive even mere questions on their work as pretension – I at least know of no other professional group that responds so rarely and in such a cagey way.

»Those who, like Claus Eurich, sees the reporting on coronavirus as nothing other than a ›systematic failure of journalism,‹ eliminate themselves from the debate,« commented Werner D’Inka (2020) on the »interjection« of the Dortmund emeritus professor (B39), instead of passing on even a single point of criticism to the FAZ readers. D’Inka countered the critical remarks from Meier and Wyss (2020) with the question: »Does he (Meier) not read a newspaper?« and gave his diagnosis that »it would have helped the two of them« to read a specific article in the FAZ and one in the SZ. Unfortunately, both appeared after the critique of Meier and Wyss was published. A focus on being right, rather than acknowledging a different perception of the world.

But it is almost a tradition for media research to attract little interest, as Noelle-Neumann complained all of forty years ago (1977: 8). Ruß-Mohl (2020b) recently commented: »Journalism must be the only profession that is not taken seriously by the science associated with it. I ask myself if one would continue to go to a doctor who told one to one's face that he was not at all interested in medical research.« This does not even mean that journalism would have to attend journalism studies seminars, for example – instead, it should make more effort in this regard within its core business, such as in the cases of Drosten, Streeck, Kekulé & Co. After all, virology and epidemiology are not the only fields in which »science is always fallible; errors and examination of positions are the most frequent sources of progress« (Prinzing 2020).

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würde, um jedes Menschenleben zu kämpfen. [...]«

Palmer: »So konnten es aber nur Leute verstehen, die entweder nicht zugehört haben, den Kontext nicht sehen wollten oder halt böswillig sind. [...]«

Holderried: »Für die Aussagen über die Corona-Maßnahmen haben Sie sich aber hinterher entschuldigt. Also können Sie auch ein Stück weit nachvollziehen, dass Sie mit solchen Aussagen anecken?«

Palmer: »Sie sollten exakt bleiben. Ich habe mich nicht für die Aussagen entschuldigt, sondern für die ungewollten Wirkungen. [...]«

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Debate

Tanjev Schultz

Unjustified media critique

The coronavirus crisis has demonstrated not the failure, but the value of journalism

We are living in strange times. Few other countries have (so far) dealt with the coronavirus crisis as well as Germany, yet there are many who would have you think that the country and its institutions are on the brink of ruin. Arrogant media critique is not satisfied with merely highlighting the errors and mistakes that the press has undoubtedly made – it clamors to diagnose systemic failure of the media. This type of media critique noticeably suffers from exactly the distortions that it claims to see in journalism itself: negativity, one-sidedness, and exaggeration.

In his paper »Disinfection journalism« in this edition of *Journalism Research*, Timo Rieg strikes a sweeping blow against the media (cf. Rieg 2020). He sees fundamental deficiencies in the reporting on corona. It is amazing how widely perceptions can differ – my impression is totally different (cf. Schultz 2020a). To me, the image drawn by the media of the pandemic and its consequences seems entirely diverse and multi-faceted. This is in line with one of the first content analyses on the coronavirus reporting (cf. Quandt et al. 2020), although its methods are a little controversial. Of course there are examples of poor journalism, but all in all the media have done an impressive job.

In next to no time, many people have undergone basic training in scientific thinking and learned a huge amount about virology and epidemiology – as well as about the uncertainties in studies and the difficulties faced by policymakers in having to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Many now have an understanding of phenomena like »exponential growth« and »excess mortality.« Without the work of the media, it is doubtful whether people in Germany would have behaved so carefully. Of course, people are welcome to believe that this behavior is based on a kind of brain-washing, but I find this claim both arrogant and ignorant. There have always been alternatives, and every measure should be sub-

jected to scrutiny – but the fact that huge numbers of people found the measures taken by policymakers correct, at least on the whole, cannot simply be dismissed as an expression of false consciousness. Just as the majority is not right simply because it is the majority, broad approval is not in itself an indicator of manipulated masses.

The role of journalism is not to simply accept the policies of a government. But this does not mean that the media has been converted to naivete and a lack of criticism simply because it occasionally agrees with policymakers. When people swim against the media tide (warning: mainstream!), it is not always necessarily the result of sensible insight. It may be a result of a refusal to learn (cf. Schultz 2020b). One is reminded of the joke about the man who takes the wrong slip road onto the freeway, hears a warning on the radio about someone driving the wrong way down the freeway on his route – and mumbles in amazement, »Just one? There are dozens of them!«

One can be grateful that not everyone with a strong and abstruse opinion makes it big in the media. Of course, anything is available online, but luckily reputable media providers such as *Tagesschau* [a daily television news program] and the FAZ newspaper still hold some weight in the discourse – whereas in other countries, conspiracy theories can gain a foothold among the population virtually unchecked. A look at the USA is enough to show what could happen if Rieg's demand of German editorial offices were to be adopted: »Every opinion must face a counter-opinion, otherwise it is not an opinion, but a claimed fact or belief that cannot be discussed, voted on, negotiated, or commented.« If one were to take this sentence seriously – gosh, where would one start?! It is possible to find someone with an esoteric opinion on almost anything. But regardless of how important it is to aim towards diversity in reporting, boundaries will always have to be drawn somewhere. That is in part what the media is there for – to help provide orientation and to present people not with *every* opinion, but with those that are relevant. Of course, the decision as to what and who is relevant is based on a judgment by editorial offices and may also reflect the balance of power in society. But the media are nevertheless not simply puppets of the powerful.

Timo Rieg is right to call on the media to act as a check and balance on policymakers – even, indeed especially, when the executive makes decisions with far-reaching consequences. I also think that journalists could often have been more critical during the initial phase of fighting the pandemic in particular. But I am still not convinced by his arguments.

On 1) Democracy demands well-informed citizens

Contradicting Rieg's claim that the media spent too long focusing on »anything vaguely related« to the topic and »appeals for people to stay strong,« there has

been a huge number of informative and sophisticated reports and analyses on a wide range of aspects of the pandemic. The questions of what viruses are, how the disease spreads, how it can be diagnosed etc. have always been anything but »vaguely related.« We know that researchers' knowledge of SARS-CoV-2 has been developing all the time, so offering a good overview of the information has been no mean feat. I, too, found some of the slogans on public service broadcasters intended to create a sense of community a little overbearing (»stick together,« »here for you«). On ZDF, cartoon characters the Mainzelmännchen promoted the hygiene rules.

However, I consider it a little excessive to draw conclusions on the entire media discourse based on these factors. And I simply cannot understand how one can dismiss the outbreaks in Ischgl or Rheda-Wiedenbrück as »single events« that should not be »chewed over« for weeks. I thought that research and recording important background information and contexts was important? There is a lot to learn from how the authorities and people behaved in Ischgl, and the media would certainly not be fulfilling their educational role if they were to merely touch on this issue or report on it superficially. The same goes for the meat factory at Tönnies and the structures of the meat industry. Incidentally, it was the media who repeatedly drew attention to the untenable conditions in slaughterhouses even before the pandemic hit.

On 2) Well-informed citizens demand journalistic research

There is no doubt that, in a crisis, the media should not limit itself to reporting only on what is happening front of house. They need to look behind the scenes, ask questions, and pursue leads. Rieg believes they do too little. I would even agree: In my view, there can never be enough research. But resources are notoriously limited. The demand for the media to make (even) more of an effort and place even more importance on conducting research is therefore always applicable. This is good for media critique, since it always has a point in its favor. But it would be fair to also honor the interesting research conducted in sometimes adverse circumstances: on coronavirus in China, on intensive care medicine, on help with harvests, on the situation of refugees. There were plenty of detailed reconstructions of the political decision-making processes – and plenty of critical, doubting voices outside the YouTube hygiene demonstration bubble: The »established« media, for example, discussed Sweden's relaxed method of fighting the pandemic seemingly endlessly.

Criticism and doubt have come just as much from the left as from the liberal-conservative side. Jakob Augstein, publisher of *Freitag* and co-owner of *DER SPIEGEL*, professed some sympathy for the Swedish model. He was even allowed

to do so in the program *Presseclub* on public service television. The head of the Springer publishing house, Mathias Döpfner, published a long article in *Welt* entitled »I have doubts« (Döpfner 2020). In it, he asked as early as late March whether the measures were really without alternative and whether they went too far. Early on, author Juli Zeh published an article in *Focus* magazine warning of the importance of maintaining proportionality in the measures for fighting the pandemic (Zeh 2020). The list goes on – although it does not change my perception that the initial phase of the crisis saw the establishment of a very broad majority opinion that followed multiple premises:

First: The SARS-CoV-2 pathogen and the disease Covid-19 are not equivalent to the familiar flu; the dangers are greater and more difficult to predict.

Second: In order to prevent the health system from becoming overwhelmed, measures must be taken urgently.

Third: As long as there is neither a vaccine nor good, effective medicines, it makes sense to prevent exponential growth in infections.

Just like a majority in politics, the media, and the population, I consider these three points logical and, according to what we know at the moment, empirically accurate and normatively sound. One can voice objections to them, but those who do will have to live with perhaps failing to convince others. If this is the case, he or she cannot blame the media for having failed in their reporting. I certainly agree with Rieg that no-one needs court reporting (except the court, perhaps). But if the media and policymakers come to the same conclusion independently for good reasons, it is not court reporting.

On 3) Journalistic research demands the ability to recognize and distinguish opinions and facts

There is no doubt that the media could be more sensitive and diligent in distinguishing between facts and opinions. Yet Rieg overlooks the fact that every news selection is already normatively saturated. What is considered *worth* reporting depends on how the media and society view and evaluate a situation – so it is no wonder that even news formulations intended to convey the facts contain normative traces. For media critique, it is often worth looking for such traces and ensuring that they are not simply taken for granted as a matter of course. But, in doing so, there is no need for sophism: Rieg's criticism of the phrase »have to« in the phrase »have to be put on ventilators« may be logical, but it is so subtle that it almost vanishes into thin air. As a responsible reader seeing the criticized phrase, I already understand that the ventilation was the judgment of the doctors who decided it was necessary. There are plenty of similar examples: The victim of an accident »had to« be flown to hospital by

helicopter. A student »had to« retake an exam because he failed the first time. None of these is truly without alternative, but I consider it a step too far to see them as deliberately misleading the reader.

It is a similar case when it comes to Rieg's example of a dpa text entitled »Government not planning compulsory app for restaurant guests.« Strictly speaking, the dpa should have written, »Government announces that it is not planning a compulsory app.« Of course the dpa can never know what may have been planned in secret, but that is not the point here. What matters is that the government has officially announced – counter to reports to the contrary – that there will be no compulsory app. It has thus made an external statement and can be taken at its word. If it later becomes apparent that the government is making the app compulsory after all, this reflects on the government, which communicated incorrectly or perhaps even lied. However, there would be little point in lying here, as it is a situation that cannot be concealed – a government introducing a compulsory app needs to announce it. The dpa therefore runs little risk in repeating the word of the government as fact (if the dpa were reporting on Trump, it may be a different story).

On 4) Facts demand diversity of opinion

Rieg describes the core role of journalism as delivering a range of interpretations on research facts. This is challenging. It cannot be achieved by someone presenting a counter-opinion to every opinion, as Rieg demands. Journalists need to have the skill and judgment required to decide what an esoteric opinion is and who is ignorant or even a charlatan who can safely be ignored. Given the populism, disinformation, and conspiracy theories that abound, the media needs to pay even more attention to creating platform for those voices who have a substantial contribution to make. Of course this decision is not always easy – and always controversial. But the mere existence of a wide range of apparent experts plying their truths on YouTube is certainly not in itself a reason to allow them all to have their say on *Tagesschau*.

According to Rieg's view, climate change deniers must not be given a platform (because climate change is a proven fact), but proponents of the »après moi, le déluge« viewpoint definitely should. Can this be continued to its logical conclusion? No media platform for Holocaust deniers, but one for neo-Nazis who say that destroying Jews is the good and right thing to do? Sensibly, the media also draw certain boundaries for the discussion of normative positions – and not just the limits set by criminal law.

In view of the coronavirus situation, I understand Rieg's argument as saying that the media should present a diverse range of opinions on how to deal with

the pandemic. But exactly this has been the subject of much argument and wrangling for months. The fact that talk shows are not constantly populated with people who hold the opinion that people can just be allowed to become ill and die could simply be because there are not many people who seriously hold this position.

As Rieg would probably agree, the media can now turn this ethical gallantry critically against policymakers and the majority opinion and highlight a huge range of inconsistencies (and perhaps even a certain amount of hypocrisy): What are the benchmarks for fighting misery and illness outside this acute crisis? Is society willing there, too, to do everything in its power to protect the weak?

There are many questions that the media should ask and a great deal of research that the media should drive forward. Encouraging them to do so does not have to mean completely writing off the way it reports at the moment.

About the author

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Debate

Timo Rieg

The neglect of media critique

Tanjev Schultz takes a different view from me on how German-language journalism has reported on the coronavirus. This was not just likely, but truly ›without alternative,‹ at least if we drill down to the tiniest details. After all, what we both have to say are points of view – ›based on individual observations and opinions,‹ as the pre-print study by Quandt et. al. quoted by Schultz puts it. Such a wide-ranging spectrum of opinions or interpretations is exactly what I have missed in the reporting on coronavirus. Of course it was ›multi-faceted,‹ and even underdog Jakob Augstein had the chance to say something somewhere outside his own weekly paper. But our role here is not one of a judging panel for a journalism prize, searching for pearls in a sea of oysters. What matters to me at least is the orientation that journalism provides, and thus ultimately its quality/ies. My question for journalism research is therefore the following:

How can we measure the information performance of journalism? Additively, by crediting every aspect that is addressed somewhere to the total performance of the media? Selectively, using the usual random sampling? As full recording of a full program (broadcaster, newspaper, website)? Or as an ecosystem in which real users spend time, i.e. with their Instagram timeline, their radio broadcasters, their YouTube consumption, and their personal discussions – i.e. their actual media use? Every provider of information or opinion would rightly be able to say: ›But we offered this or that!‹ Yet this is insignificant for real discourse in a democracy (and perhaps it is worth asking to what extent general interest media should create links here that have so far been excessively concentrated on Twitter storms of the variety: ›the internet is laughing/outraged...‹). In other words, are we interested in what ›journalism‹ has offered us in some form or what has reached society?

At no point was it my intention to pass judgment on coronavirus policy. What interests me, at the point at which democracy and journalism meet, is to what extent we citizens had all the information we needed to form our own opinion,

to be able to decide as sovereign (if one were to ask us), if applicable to make suggestions, to protest, to celebrate, whatever – at any rate to be subjects, rather than objects, of policymakers. I am surprised by Schultz’ starting assertion that »Few other countries have (so far) dealt with the coronavirus crisis as well as Germany.« I would be able to neither claim nor contradict this. What does »deal with well« even mean? What period of time are we looking at? How are we weighing up the various effects and side effects? And what do I know about the other countries of this world? Anyone who has just lost their job is likely to be somewhat less enthusiastic. How are we counting the consequential damage, the opportunities lost due to coronavirus? A reminder is due of climate change, which is actually omnipresent but has been largely pushed off the agenda by coronavirus: Our forests are drying out (even if it rains a little), a new wave of forest dieback is visible everywhere, the consequences will be catastrophic. Will we see a new period of mass migration once we have recovered from coronavirus? The Haber-Bosch process – the basis of today’s ubiquitous artificial fertilizer – has massively increased agricultural yields for a hundred years, but may soon radically reduce them for eternity. When measuring its success, do we look at the first few years, the first hundred years, or the entire story? Perhaps the amazing Haber-Bosch process was a terrible idea – just like genetic engineering, nuclear power, and the totally indiscriminate use of antibiotics (the consequences of which we are incidentally noticing in the treatment of coronavirus, too) may turn out to be.

There is nothing sophistic about examining effects and side effects: According to current research, many people have died not *despite*, but *because* of ventilation! That is why it is so essential to separate fact from opinion. Facts do not require any further research; opinions always do (and, picking up on Schultz’ example of »Godwin’s Law« as a purely empirical statement: Until a few days ago at least, Mark Zuckerberg as a (formerly secular) Jew considered Holocaust denial as worthy of publication in certain cases – I, in contrast, clearly excluded it as misinformation). At least to begin with, coronavirus policy was based overwhelmingly on emergency medicine, on the provision of intensive care beds with all the negative consequences that entails. While Germany clapped for the ›lifesavers at the front,‹ doctors and nurses played cards in empty hospitals and panicked about how they would deal with the triage decisions that they would imminently be required to make (I know this not from the media, but from my own research).

I am (I hope) not a denier of anything. I want journalism to provide me with facts and the various opinions on them, as I myself am unfortunately not clever enough to think of everything myself. The bad-tempered title of my original piece, »Disinfection journalism,« reflects precisely this mix of opinion and fact: »wash your hands, wash your hands, wash your hands« is the main message coming out of the media to this day, as if coronavirus were a skin fungus. It drowns out all the side effects of this disinfectant mania and could only be

written by people whose hands touch nothing but a computer keyboard. As an ›outdoor‹ biologist, I really have dug a lot of dirt, and any farmer would laugh his head off at the RKI's recommendation to wash hands »every time you come into contact with animals.« For goodness' sake: Do not treat us like idiots. Tell us what the facts are and what you think about how we are dealing with the facts. »Don't pick your nose without washing your hands first« would be okay, but perhaps too obvious to base a hygiene campaign around (incidentally, even Drosten found this excessive).

»There have always been alternatives,« says Schultz, agreeing with me. But was the question of what we could do with a trillion euros to truly improve our lives researched in such a way that ultimately at least a majority of the population got behind government policy and said: ›What you are planning is right; we have no new ideas to add; and we are absolutely in agreement with where you have taken the money from and whom you have thrown to the wolves for this policy‹? Journalism has spent its time raking over the entirely insignificant lobbying of Philipp Amthor, while billions of euros of coronavirus aid are being distributed every day at the moment, practically without any transparency at all, with no public scrutiny, and especially without public discourse in advance. Where were the much-lauded research teams, especially at the beginning, before the first state measure was passed whose effects and side effects were entirely unknown to the public? There will surely be some nice reconstructions at a later date. But for many people, these will come too late.

About the author

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Reviews

Thomas Hanitzsch, Josef Seethaler, Vinzenz Wyss (Eds.): *Journalismus in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* [*Journalism in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*]. Wiesbaden [Springer VS] 2019, 382 pages, EUR 44,99

Reviewed by Roger Blum

This book is the first of its kind. Journalism in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland have been examined many times, but never before together and using identical questions. Despite this, the first feeling one has upon reading this work is one of tedium – the results do not teach us anything new about the 41,000 German, 4,000 Austrian and 10,000 Swiss journalists. But then comes something truly striking and controversial: Although more than 90 percent of the media people surveyed see themselves as neutral communicators of information, they see their role of providing critique and monitoring as almost negligible. Only 20 percent in Germany and Austria, and 22 percent in Switzerland, view themselves as a counterweight to the government. That figure for the USA is 86 percent. Just 29 percent of the German, 13 percent of the Austrian, and 47 percent of the Swiss journalists trust the government, and clear majorities believe that it is acceptable to use confidential government documents without permission occasionally – yet they do not want to scrutinize the government. The study shows that there is a need for action here, and that the journalistic community in the three countries needs to hold a debate about how it sees its role!

More than 90 percent of those surveyed say that journalists should maintain professional ethics at all times, regardless of the situation and context. Yet at the same time, between 40 and 60 percent say that what is ethically acceptable depends on the specific situation. They thus contradict themselves. In addition, the study shows that journalism is undergoing a rapid transformation, manifested particularly in economic (more competition, greater consideration of expected profit), technological (online search engines, impact of social media), societal (more audience involvement), and organizational (greater time pressure) changes. The proportion of women has risen slightly, but it is a scandal that female journalists still earn around a quarter less than their male colleagues. The level

of academic education has also increased. The pressure to base stories more on sensations was clearly expressed. As Josef Seethaler sums up: »The sensitivity of the question of the freedom to make decisions, as well as the value of research, is demonstrated by its – surprising – connection to factors that influence the image of journalism: its credibility and its relevance in society, like the applicability of ethical standards, are not perceived merely as having fallen, but as having fallen to a relatively low level in international comparison.«

Politically, the journalists continue to place themselves slightly to the left of center (a value of 4.0 in Germany and Switzerland and 4.7 in Austria on a scale of 0-10, where 0 is far left and 10 is far right). They do not want to set the agenda with their work, nor to shape the political agenda or influence public opinion. Instead – especially in Switzerland with its direct democracy and Austria, which has regular referendums – they aim to communicate information that enables people to make political decisions themselves.

The study is the work of teams from LMU Munich (Thomas Hanitzsch, Corinna Lauerer, Nina Steindl), the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Josef Seethaler, Marlene Dietrich-Gsenger), and ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Vinzenc Wyss, Guido Keel, Filip Dingerkus). The University of Neuchatel (with Annik Dubied, Vittoria Sacco) was also involved in the survey, responsible for French and Italian-speaking Switzerland. The study was based on telephone and online interviews with 2,502 journalists, conducted between fall 2014 and summer 2015. The survey was part of the second stage of the Worlds of Journalism Study, which covered 67 countries. Stretching to more than 80 pages, the tables section of the book is proof of how extensive and complex the study was. Before the survey could even begin, arduous work was required to research how many journalists there actually are in the three countries in total: Whom do they include? What counts as an independent editorial office? Which media types need to be excluded?

Unfortunately, embedding the work into the international study made it impossible to examine some research questions: What is the status of elite integration in journalism? Has nepotism in Vienna and Bern been overcome? Is the journalism culture in the three countries focused more on investigative research or concordance with power? How many journalists remain involved in political parallelism by working for party media (such as *Die Neue Freie Zeitung* of the FPÖ, *Radio AfD* or the SVP-supporting *Weltwoche*)? How noticeable is state control over the media? Which complaints processes for the audience do journalists face?

The essence of the study should not only encourage further research, but also initiate debate among practitioners. The transformation of journalism is indisputable and unstoppable. Changed economic conditions appear absolutely irrevocable. Yet many circumstances are also 'self-inflicted' and can be influenced by the community.

This review first appeared in rezensionen:kommunikation:medien, April 22. 2020, accessible at <https://www.rkm-journal.de/archives/22161>.

About the reviewer

Dr. Roger Blum is a journalist and Emeritus Professor of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Bern. His research fields are media systems, political journalism, media ethics, and media history. He is currently working together with Marlis Prinzing on the *Handbuch Politischer Journalismus* (Verlag Herbert von Halem, Cologne).

Translation: Sophie Costella

Katherine M. Engelke: *Die journalistische Darstellung von Vertrauen, Misstrauen und Vertrauensproblemen im Kontext der Digitalisierung. Theoretische Entwicklung und empirische Erfassung von Vertrauensdimensions-Frames* [The journalistic representation of trust, mistrust, and trust problems in the context of digitalization]. Series: Aktuell. Studien zum Journalismus, Vol. 13. Baden-Baden [Nomos] 2018, 492 pages, EUR 94

Reviewed by Beatrice Dernbach

Trust is the buzz word of the modern age. Who trusts whom and why? Or rather: Why are some people not (or no longer) trusted? Is mistrust in political and economic actors growing? PR agency Edelman has been researching trust in governments, non-governmental organizations, business, and the media for 20 years (<https://www.edelman.de/research/edelman-trust-barometer-2020>). Unfortunately, this link is not included in the otherwise very comprehensive bibliography of the dissertation by Katherine M. Engelke. Although this is not a problem, its inclusion would have enabled a broader view of empirical findings on the object of the research. However, this comment is of little importance given the author's overall achievement.

The chosen field of research is undoubtedly relevant to society in every respect. And journalism and the media undoubtedly play a major role as trust intermediaries. The universal daily newspapers in particular represent politics, business, cultural and social environments, science, religion, law and other societal sub-systems and assess both them and the actions of the actors. This may or may not create trust, but it at least provides a platform for discussion on problems of trust. However, it is odd that the author does not address the fact that, aside from their function of reducing complexity and providing orientation for society, the media themselves have been confronted with the question of trust for decades. Especially since the advent of digitalization, the associated expansion and opening of online media production, and social media in particular, the standards of journalistic selection and highlighting of information and its consistency have been subject to regular scrutiny. Journalism and the media thus not only transport the developments, but are also exposed to all the consequences. This has caused disorientation and upheaval in the sector for almost two decades.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Katherine Engelke meticulously brings together numerous research and empirical findings on digitalization and framing. She intelligently weighs up their strengths and weaknesses, before ultimately making a clear decision in favor of the approaches that she will then be able to use for the empirical implementation, and in particular to develop the indicators and categories for her content analysis. In the fourth section – arguably too late – she

also addresses trust research in great detail. Either way, the first half of the book is enriching in every sense and essential reading for anyone conducting research into trust and framing. It also sets up high expectations for the second part – expectations that are not disappointed.

The fifth chapter on »trust dimension frames« forms the transition to the author's empirical study. In Tables 11 (cf. 248), 12 (cf. 250f.), and 13 (cf. 253), she clearly represents the elements of trust, mistrust, and trust problem frames she has deduced. The first column shows the elements of Robert Entman's approach: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. The middle column contains aspects focused on this, such as trust subject and object, trust tendency and worthiness, evaluation of the subjects and objects, and consideration of the planned or executed measures. In the right-hand column, Engelke identifies the possible forms (e.g. person, group, organization, system). The major advantage of this approach is its openness and thus its transferability to thematic contexts other than that of digitalization.

The author divides the nine research questions into two interest blocks. The first concentrates on the general journalistic representation of the trust dimensions; the second on the trust dimension frames in relation to digital issues. In a multi-stage process, the research team (one doctoral candidate and two student assistants) selected and examined 2091 pieces from five newspapers from the years 2002 to 2015. *Der Spiegel*, *Spiegel online*, *die tageszeitung*, the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* and the *Kölner Express* were determined exclusively based on the journalistic criteria of media type, range, and form of distribution. The study is in no way representative – nor does the author make any such claim.

Table 23 (cf. 350) provides a clear summary of the central trends. The media pieces examined are similar on the one hand, yet also display expectable differences. Both the problem definition and the causal interpretation concentrate primarily on persons and groups and organizations – often, no evaluations can be identified (and even if they can, it is largely the object, rather than the trust or mistrust, that is evaluated negatively) and there are certainly no treatment recommendations. The presentation of trust problems increases over the years. When it comes to digitalization, key events such as the NSA affair (2013) and the VW emissions scandal (2015) emerge as having had a negative impact on trust. The value of this study lies less in the individual results and more in the fact that, for the first time, it develops a set of instruments whose usefulness has been proven in empirical use and that is transferable to other fields.

The author – an academic officer at the University of Münster – has succeeded in submitting an empirical analysis, grounded in theory, of the three dimensions of trust-mistrust-trust problems in the context of digitalization. This goes some way towards justifying the length of almost 500 pages, although some sections could have done with abridgment before publication of the updated dissertation.

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Translation: Sophie Costella

Kai von Lewinski (Ed.): *Immersiver Journalismus* [Immersive journalism]
Bielefeld [transcript] 2018, 192 pages, EUR 34,99

Reviewed by Markus Kaiser

The »next big thing in human-machine interaction« is how Kai von Lewinski, editor of the book *Immersiver Journalismus*, refers to virtual and augmented reality. That was the reason behind the »Immersive journalism – technology, effect, regulation« conference at the University of Passau in March 2018. Now the transcript publishing house has put together the papers presented there in a collected volume in a Media Studies edition.

At first glance, the book seems to be an eclectic collection of papers. Unlike the valuable standard work *Augmented und Mixed Reality für Medien, Marken und Public Relations* [*Augmented and mixed reality for media, brands and public relations*] by Dirk Schart and Nathaly Tschanz, Kai von Lewinski's book traces an arc from examples of best practice to technology, psychology, law, media ethics, and regulation, with a clear focus on journalism. That makes the book unique in this form and offers a good, quick overview of a wide range of discussion topics related to x-realities, as virtual, mixed and augmented reality are called today. After all, it is not intended as a text book like *VR-Journalismus* [*VR journalism*] by Manuela Feyder and Linda Rath-Wiggins.

In Kai von Lewinski's book, Andreas Mühlberger, for example, describes in his article »The psychological impact of immersive media« how virtual reality has so far particularly been used in clinical psychology and psychotherapy to treat anxiety disorders. He quotes a study that indicates that phobias manifest themselves more intensely when the subjects see a spider in virtual reality on a head-mounted display than when they do not see it, but are told that it is sitting in front of them on the table.

In relation to journalism, however, Mühlberger has to scratch the surface once again and can merely point to gaps in research, rather than providing answers. »The question of the extent to which experiencing traumatic experiences in VR can lead to post-traumatic stress disorders or other psychological problems, which is becoming particularly relevant in connection with war reporting, remains unanswered.« However, he writes, these problems are not yet prevalent at the moment, »as the preliminary form of VR, 3D video, is often still used for immersive journalism today.« By this, Mühlberger presumably means not 3D videos but 360° videos. These are not seen in the sector as a preliminary form of VR, however, but, in contrast to VR, as depicting reality without additional animations, for example.

The majority of the other papers have a closer focus on journalism. In one very useful essay, Christoph Neuberger from the Freie Universität Berlin makes programmatic considerations on how the results of communication studies could be incorporated into media law. Additionally, the Director of the Weizenbaum Institute discusses how the question of whether innovative media formats should be regulated can be examined. Dominic Habel, on the other hand, looks at the topic of advertising law and immersive journalism, demonstrating that advertising in XR can be of interest to the sector, given its high level of interaction and suggestive power. His observations are particularly of interest, for example, on the question of how the principle of separating editorial content from advertising can be upheld in VR formats.

With such a diverse range of approaches, the book offers interesting food for thought in the field of immersive journalism. It is undoubtedly worth reading – not least in order to encounter topics that may not be immediately apparent when VR and AR are one-sidedly reduced to journalistic production.

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Translation: Sophie Costella

Yoel Cohen (Ed.): *Spiritual News. Reporting Religion around the World*. New York et al. [Peter Lang] 2018, 418 pages, EUR 54.20

Reviewed by Nigjar Marduchaeva

»Corruption, political intrigue, sex, violence, and fiscal irregularities make good religion news« (21). In exaggerated yet undoubtedly fitting style, Yoel Cohen describes – based on the idea that »only bad news are good news« – the common idea of religion journalism. In a total of 19 pieces, this collected volume clearly demonstrates that the topic is much more wide-ranging than this phrase suggests. What does the reporting focus on; how is its content steered; and which influencing factors determine its thrust? *Spiritual News* examines these and many other questions.

Against the backdrop of numerous religiously motivated debates and events currently seen all over the world, 23 international authors examine how and by whom religion journalism is shaped, influenced, practiced, and received in the 21st Century. The texts discuss what position is currently given to which religious topics in the media – including both classic mass media and new media, in both the religious and the secular press.

The authors take a comparative approach in their pieces. Starting from a broad-based insight into the global situation of religion-related media reporting, relevant events and developments in post-Soviet Russia, China, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Brazil, Israel, the USA, and the Vatican are discussed. The 418-page volume is divided into six extended sections: A) Introduction, B) News-gathering, C) Regional Patterns, D) Media Events, E) The Influence of Religion Reporting, F) The Impact of New Media Upon Religion.

The publication analyzes how media, political systems, business, culture, and, last but not least, religion itself help to shape the reporting on religion(s) in various countries and geographical and cultural regions. Socio-cultural discourses and events with a religious connection and political dimension are presented, and the question of whether and how these are (allowed to be) handled in the respective countries is discussed. Media presentations of the debate surrounding *Charlie Hebdo*, »marriage for all« in France, and the LGBT community in Malaysia are just a few examples of the topics covered by the volume's authors. Throughout, the book emphasizes the change processes to which continuing digitalization is subjecting »religious news reporting.«

In »Religious Ideologies and News Ethics: The Case of Saudi Arabia,« for example, Noha Mellor describes how religious regularities have an impact on the exercise of journalistic activities and uses specific examples to demonstrate the different ways in which domestic events with serious consequences for the pop-

ulation groups affected are dealt with by state-controlled media on the one hand and social media and private media groups on the other.

Babak Rahimi dedicates his piece in great detail to the topic of »Internet News, Media Technologies, and Islam: The Case of Shafaqna.« He demonstrates how new media can trigger and even shape new structures and provide food for thought within a religion: »The emergent media technologies change boundaries of self, community and the world [...],« he concludes.

When does religion gain relevance as a topic for the press? What are the consequences of the respective media presence on structures within society? What are the specifics and obstacles typical of the religion journalism segment? Or, in other words: Which factors present a challenge to religion journalism as journalism? After all, as Cohen finds: »Religion is [...] thought in the first instance to be a direct, almost existential challenge to the very nature of journalism [...] religion is a problem because it always claims to be about something else, something beyond the rational, material world where most journalists do their work« (19f.). At the same time, however, »As more and more sources of religion news become active, it is more and more possible to contemplate challenging the once protected boundaries of clerics, religious leaders, and others in positions of authority in the various religions« (22).

One of the greatest obstacles facing religion reporters is access to reliable sources on the ground (cf. 68ff., 79, 83, 96) – »knowing whom to contact can be half the battle« (84). However, not every religious (or political or religious-political) system offers the required opportunities. Another problem is also the frequent lack of trust in media professionals (cf. 69f.). Finally, the text highlights potential risks that this group of professionals in particular sees itself facing (cf. 72).

Ever »since the advent of the first newspapers, the relationship between the church and journalism has been laden with tension« (Kaiser 2012: 120). One possible explanation for this mistrust on the part of clerics is the idea that journalism and the media are anti-religious (cf. 7, 53). But it is also worth taking into account the following perspective, which considers the »functional similarities between the two professions [...]: Both in the pulpit and in editorial offices, priests and journalists perceive the world in a professional context, interpret it from different perspectives, fulfil an educational role, provide assistance and counselling, and take a critical position against injustices in society« (Kaiser 2012: 120).

We thus see a clash between two different systems with the same ambitions, competing with one another. For journalistic practice, this presents the following problem: Can a religious person also be a religion journalist (cf. 53ff, 63)? Or, in other words: To what extent can objective, value-free reporting be guaranteed

despite a journalist belonging to a religion and living according to religious practices (cf. 56ff, 63f)?

Describing the professional group of »Vaticanologists,« Chapter 4 of this volume is of particular interest in this context. Vaticanologists are responsible for reporting in the Vatican's own press, among others. The author of the chapter, Miriam Diez Bosch, stresses that: »A Papal liturgy cannot be covered by any run of the mill journalist« (78). Reporting on the Vatican, she writes, requires experts with a deep understanding of the history, theology, liturgy, and art of the Catholic Church, as well as of international politics (cf. 78). »Vaticanologists« work with a range of journalistic formats and report across different media, not least in order to also reach non-Catholics (cf. 87).

Chapter 17 is also very insightful in this context. In »The Catholic Church and Twitter,« Daniel Arasa, Lorenzo Cantoni, and Juan Narbona discuss the transformation in the nature of the Catholic Church's media presence as a result of social media, and Twitter in particular. As well as the Vatican's in-house media and websites, which are addressed in Chapter 4, the authors also emphasize the use of social media in Chapter 17: »The Vatican also has a presence on [...] YouTube (November 2005), Facebook (June 2011), and Instagram (October 2013). [...] Twitter is the most popular tool for spreading breaking news and ideas in most countries [...], in March 2013, Pope Francis chose to use the microblog to communicate not only with Catholics, but also with many non-believers« (330f.).

A clear consequence is the fact that religion is no longer a purely private matter. Now that everyday life has become unthinkable without the internet, and even more so with Web 2.0, religion has become part of the public debate (cf. 4). The wider public's need for understanding of and insistence on the right to a say on religion determines the socio-cultural discourse in the modern age (cf. 16). At the same time, religion(s) have to rely on publicity through a media presence in order to maintain their own existence (cf. 24).

The volume reviewed here succeeds not only in summarizing the current issues, illuminating situations from a range of perspectives while relating them to specific current global events, and using this as a basis to make predictions (cf. 25), but also in providing information on significant historical facts that help to understand what has been presented. Yoel Cohen has managed to discuss religion comprehensively as an object of international reporting and to add a key volume to the academic library in this specialist field, which has been somewhat lacking up to now.

This work will benefit both up-and-coming religion journalists and those who are interested in world events and want to both gain better understanding of dealing with the media and take a closer look at religion-related content and global developments and trends of change on a sociocultural level in a religious context.

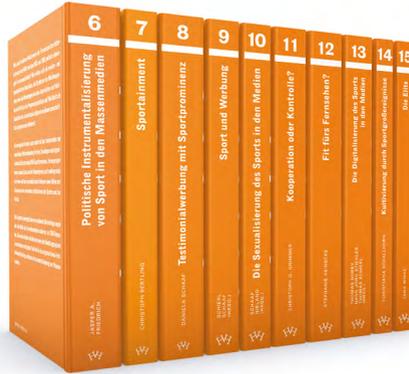
This review first appeared in rezensionen:kommunikation:medien, July 1st, 2019, accessible at <https://www.rkm-journal.de/archives/21874>.

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