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Tanjev Schultz and Martina Thiele

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Editorial

The long and short of it

How long should an editorial be? What amount of text is reasonable? At what point do you, dear reader, get engaged, and when do you stop reading?

It may seem that News Feeds, »bite-sized« journalism, and the economy of attention have won. But there is no trend without a counter-trend: extensive articles are also finding their audiences. In the US, the *New York Times* is considered a pioneer of longform journalism, i.e. narrative pieces whose multimodal online versions are enriched with images and sound, videos, and podcasts. In Germany, for example, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* with its »Langstrecke« format and *Zeit Online* feature longer pieces. In her very worthwhile [blog](#), journalist and blogger Sonja Kaute provides an overview of numerous national and international examples of longform journalism.

Science also provides new insights into storytelling and scrollytelling. Marco Braghieri, Tobias Blanke and Jonathan Gray examined [longform.org](#), a US website that collects and curates journalistic longform articles. Their study not only sheds light on the economic and technological background of the digital long-tail model; but also provides information about the diversity of its sources, predominantly newspapers and magazines from whose archives [longform.org](#) gleans its texts, as well as about the topics of such long texts. The fact that a format like [longform.org](#) is viable raises the questions about its users. The readership of such longform articles, their motivation, and their modes of reception remain to be studied.

The same is true for the recipients of *Constructive Journalism*, a topic to which *Journalism Research* has recently been devoting continuous attention ([Meier 2018](#); [Hooffacker 2021](#)). The data is more abundant, however, regarding the »masterminds« at editorial departments and the authors of »solution-oriented« articles. Marc-Christian Ollrog, Megan Neumann, and Amelie Rook followed the implementation of Constructive Reporting at Verlagsgruppe Rhein Main, examining how new work methods affect journalists' notions of their own roles as well as other aspects. Based on the results of their interviews and comparative content analyses, they offer some practical recommendations for action.

Hans Peter Bull is also concerned with journalistic practice, but even more so with truth and veracity in media reporting. He deplores campaign journalism that goes after figures like Christian Wulff and Olaf Scholz, partisanship, and a lack of differentiation. To counter Bull's rather pessimistic outlook and criticism of the »ignorance« of political actors and journalists alike, Oliver Günther and Tanjev Schultz offer a quite constructive set of »10 theses for strong journalism in the digital media world« with the objective of greater journalistic autonomy. The authors of the debate contribution are very clear: »Journalism must not submit to a market and product logic.«

Another threat to independent journalism and freedom of the media is the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of a few. Valérie Robert shows how this trend is at work in France. To her, entrepreneur Vincent Bolloré, who among other things holds a majority stake in the conglomerate Vivendi, is the Rupert Murdoch of France. Like multi-billionaire Bernard Arnault, Bolloré wields political power through media power – which is certain to impact the outcome of the 2022 Presidential elections, in which Marine Le Pen is a confirmed candidate.

However, before the citizens of France head to the polls, Germany will hold its Federal Elections on 26 September 2021. We know that Angela Merkel will no longer be available for Chancellor after 16 years in office. What we don't know is who will end up governing and in which coalition. This issue contains many great tips on good journalistic practices during this hot phase of the election campaign – both for short as well as longer pieces!

Martina Thiele, summer of 2021

Translation: Kerstin Trimble

Research paper

Marco Braghieri, Tobias Blanke and Jonathan Gray

Journalism aggregators: an analysis of *Longform.org*

How journalism aggregators act as site of datafication and curatorial work

Abstract: What is the role and significance of digital long-form content aggregators in contemporary journalism? This article⁽¹⁾ contends that they are an important, emerging object of study in journalism research and provides a digital methods analysis and theoretical engagement with *Longform.org*, one of the most prominent long-form content aggregators on the web. We propose that *Longform.org* can be understood as leveraging the datafication of news content in order to valorize the long tail of archived material. Drawing on scraped data from the archive, we undertake an in-depth analysis into the practices of long-form aggregators. While *Longform.org* exhibits a degree of curatorial diversity, legacy news media outlets tend to be featured more frequently. Accessibility of news media archives is one of the most relevant factors for being featured by *Longform.org*. Our analysis demonstrates the relevant role of smaller digital-only publications, which provide a unique mix of sources. Through a network analysis of scraped tags we explore the composition of themes, including personal, world-political, celebrity, technological and cultural concerns. The data and curatorial practices of such long-form aggregators may be understood as an area of contemporary news work that conditions which past perspectives are more readily available, experienceable and programmable on the web.

1 A similar version of this article has appeared as a book chapter in: Marco Braghieri (2021): *Yesterday's News. The future of long-form journalism and archives*. Oxford et al.: Peter Lang.

Introduction

While in contemporary digital news consumption, »media stories monopolize the attention for a week or so and then are instantly forgotten« (Fisher 2009: 59), news media digital archives are the recipients of a relevant interest over the World Wide Web (cf. Elliott 2012). Such archives are intended here as the result of »journalistic publications, productions or related content [...] stored and made available in digital form« (Bødker 2018: 1114). While long-form journalism can also be defined as slow journalism (cf. Le Masurier 2015) and literary journalism, »true life stories that can be read like a novel or a short story« (Hartsock 2000: ix), within contemporary digital news production and consumption, long-form journalism departs from the accelerated news cycle (cf. Le Masurier 2016); values writing standards and research (cf. Le Masurier 2015); searches for originality (cf. Belt/South 2016); and places a range of multi-modal digital media production techniques at »the heart of its narrative structure« (Hiippala 2017: 421).

Thus, long-form journalism must be framed as part of digital journalism, »the transforming social practice of selecting, interpreting, editing and distributing factual information of perceived public interest to various kinds of audiences in specific, but changing genres and formats. As such, digital journalism both shapes and is shaped by new technologies and platforms, and it is marked by an increasingly symbiotic relationship with the audiences« (Steensen et al. 2019: 338). Thus, it is important to stress how, as underlined by Seaton (2016), the contemporary architecture of communications is defined by two polarities: »there is an overwhelming abundance of information and communications that are multifaceted and shared multilaterally and multinationally« and yet »narrow ›silos‹ of information and opinion may develop« (Seaton 2016: 808). The scenario described by Seaton (2016), is also defined by the economic difficulties faced by legacy media, as stressed by Franklin: »characterised by falling audiences, readerships and advertising revenues« (Franklin 2014: 482). The media industry has reacted in part investing in »new platforms and consciously diversifying their product portfolios«, yet without a certain outcome: »it is not clear whether media corporations will reap the kind of profits they envisage or news consumers will adopt their new products with the readiness they expect and forecast« (Chyi/Chadha 2012: 432). While mobile usage has gathered traction, as underlined by Nel and Westlund (2012), the media industry has once again found itself at a crossroads between re-imagining its approach or choose a more passive stance. The latter would lead to »independent developers [...] leaping at the opportunity to create apps that harvest the rich content newspapers make available freely on the Web« (Nel/Westlund 2012: 751).

This forecast finds an echo in the long-tail model of the web economy by Anderson (2009), as distribution in the digital contemporary is performed more

efficiently by aggregators rather than producers. Anderson defines the long-tail as a model defined by »infinite choice. Abundant, cheap distribution means abundant, cheap, and unlimited variety« (Anderson 2009: 180). However, the sales cost has to be as low as possible otherwise market entities become »entrenched industries« (Anderson 2009: 185). Anderson indicates the news media as an example of entrenched industry and underlines the value-generation capacity of intermediaries, or »aggregators« (Anderson 2009: 88). This article builds on this idea by Anderson and investigates how long-form journalism is distributed through aggregators, especially by dedicated entities such as *Longform.org*.


Longform.org has been an object of significant attention, either presenting reader data (cf. Boynton 2013), or describing its inception and nature (cf. Albalad Aiguabella 2015) or in the description of the digital news ecosystem analyzing long-form journalism (cf. Dowling/Vogan 2015; Longhi/Winques 2015) and contemporary readership (cf. Jacobson et al. 2018). This article attempts to place *Longform.org*'s activity in relation with digital news outlets' archives and with one of its most relevant types of content, long-form journalism, framing this analysis within Anderson's long-tail theory (cf. Anderson 2009). Moreover, it provides, through digital methods (cf. Rogers 2013; Venturini, Bounegru et al. 2018) – repurposing »methods of the medium« such as scraping and hyperlink analysis – a fresh engagement with the role and operations of news aggregators. We work with a dataset of over a thousand posts on *Longform.org* from 2016.

Background: News Outlet Archives and Aggregators as distributors of long-form journalism

This section is dedicated to creating a framework on how news outlet archives and aggregators' activity can be framed as a distribution practice. It is important to underline that news media outlet digital archives are capable of attracting relevant interest on the World Wide Web. According to the former *Guardian* readers' editor, Chris Elliott, »The *Guardian*'s digital archive holds more than 1m articles [...] And it is very popular. Nearly 40% of content viewed on the website is more than 48 hours old« (Elliott 2012). Moreover, a study on long-form journalism by Smith, Connor and Stanton (2015) established how within their corpus of 5.2 million long-form journalism stories, relevance over time was a defining factor as »longform articles tend to maintain external links, a proxy for interest, longer than typical news articles« (Smith et al. 2015: 2115).

However, this retrieval process poses distinct challenges to content management systems which within newsrooms are used for a number of activities ranging from content creation to editing, publishing and distribution (cf. Barker 2016). Thus, content retrieval in general, and long-form journalism retrieval from news

Screenshot Longform.org (18 June 2021)



LONGFORM

- Home
- Best Articles
- Podcast
- Sections
- Collections
- Reprints

Random Article

Lists

- Best of 2020
- Best of 2019
- Best of 2018
- Best of 2017
- Best of 2016
- Best of 2015
- Best of 2014
- Best of 2013
- Best of 2012

Archive

- Publications
- Writers
- Tags

More

- Newsletter
- Suggest Article
- About
- Contact
- Advertise


Facebook Twitter Email RSS

Get our Newsletter
Great articles, every Saturday.

Subscribe

Read Later
Choose service...

Today, June 18



SCIENCE HEALTH

Is There Something Wrong With the Air in South Portland, Maine?

Residents have lived near more than 100 massive petroleum storage tanks for decades, never really knowing if they're breathing in dangerous chemicals. Now they're fighting to find out.


KATHRYN MILES BOSTON GLOBE MAGAZINE JUN 2021 15min 00


Yesterday, June 17

My Father Vanished When I Was 7. The Mystery Made Me Who I Am.

My dad was a riddle to me, even more so after he disappeared. For a long time, who he was—and by extension who I was—seemed to be a puzzle I would never solve.

NICHOLAS CASEY NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE JUN 2021 35min 00






SCIENCE

The Lab Leak Theory Doesn't Hold Up

The rush to find a conspiracy around the COVID-19 pandemic's origins is driven by narrative, not evidence.

JUSTIN LING FOREIGN POLICY JUN 2021 20min 00



HISTORY

If We Can Soar: What Birmingham Roller Pigeons Offer the Men of South Central

In 1970 South Central, pigeon fancying was serious business. But there's a deeper story behind why these Black Angelenos are entering their fifth and sixth decade raising Birmingham Roller pigeons.

SHANNA B. TIAYON PIPE WRENCH JUN 2021 30min 00

outlet archives more specifically, poses a difficult challenge within the usage of content management systems. Long-form journalism is a type of content that maintains its capacity to attract readers over time and, as such, is more likely to be made available by news outlets. Hence, we can define long-form journalism as one of the factors promoting interest in new media outlets' archives. More broadly, within the digital contemporary, single news stories are organized in digital news archives that operate as distribution tools. Hence, we shall now focus on how news outlet archives can be envisioned as content distributors.

Anderson describes the long tail as a model based on »infinite choice« (Anderson, 2009: 180). The long tail has established itself as one of the leading production and distribution models within the digital economy and society. According to this model, distribution has become cheaper, and variety has been amplified, with audiences tending »to distribute as widely as the choice« (Anderson 2009: 180). According to Anderson (2009), this new model has been embraced more efficiently by intermediaries rather than traditional producers. Anderson (2009) mentions the media industry as one of the main examples of this dynamic: aggregators are performing more efficiently in distributing content if compared to traditional news media outlets. Moreover, there are other relevant factors in the long tail, such as the democratization of production and distribution tools and the connection through filtering between supply and demand (cf. Huang/Wang 2014).

Within the digital contemporary, long-form journalism and digital news media outlet archives are yet to be fully datafied (Mayer-Schönberger/Cukier 2013). Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier define »datafication« as the process of organizing a phenomenon »in a quantified format so it can be tabulated and analysed« (Mayer-Schönberger/Cukier 2013: 78). However, while news media outlet archives in the digital contemporary have a growing digital presence, stemming from the digitisation of physical archives, harmonization of digital archives and digitally native archiving practices, its content is yet to be datafied. As Blanke and Prescott underline the datafication process is »different from the process of producing digital surrogate based on digitising originally analogue content by [for example] transferring a microfilm of a book to digital form or making an MP3 version of a taped interview« (Blanke/Prescott 2016: 192). Hence, datafication is based on the principle that the process outcome can be transformed in a quantifiable format for it to be exploited in different manners.

However, datafication is not a neutral process, as some aspects recall the issues raised by what Derrida defines as the »de-paperization« process (Derrida 2005). While Derrida (2005) identified its potential benefits, he also underlined the issues it raises, such as »invisible hegemonies and appropriations« (Derrida 2005: 55ff). In this regard, an example of the non-neutrality of the datafication process is provided by Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier's praise of the Google Books project as an example of successful datafication (cf. Mayer-Schönberger/Cukier

2013). In 2004, Google began scanning books, gradually building a digital library and, by 2015, the Google Books project had scanned »more than 25 million volumes [...] including texts in 400 languages from more than 100 countries« (Heyman 2015). This process, aside from creating an immense digital library, created economic value for Google (Pybus et al. 2015). Hence, while this datafication process can be defined successful for Google, leading to the creation of an asset with sizable economic value and multiple future applications, it has likewise produced an »invisible hegemonies and appropriations« (Derrida 2005: 55ff.) as Derrida warned while describing the potential issues with the »de-paperization« process.

Before beginning our analysis of a single long-form journalism aggregator across one year of activity, it is useful to remind ourselves of the investigations by Smith, Connor and Stanton (2015) regarding long-form journalism production. The authors underline how overall long-form journalism production in the digital contemporary is increasing, yet it is doing so following a specific trajectory. As the study's authors emphasize, there is an increasing number of news media outlets producing long-form journalism and, among these, there is an increasingly strong presence of digitally native news media outlets (cf. Smith et al. 2015).

Hence, these findings (Smith et al. 2015) describe the digital contemporary as an environment where long-form journalism can be found in numerous news media outlets, but only a relatively small number of those have the economic and organizational strength to produce long-form journalism on a continuous basis, as also underlined by Bruns, Highfield and Lind (2012). »Few journalistic organizations can afford to engage in much long-form, resource-intensive, investigative journalism« (Bruns et al. 2012: 2). The increase in long-form journalism production in the digital contemporary is the result of a large number of news media outlets producing small quantities of long-form journalism stories, while increasing at a slower pace if compared to standard news production, this specific type of journalistic production is capable of remaining relevant for more extended periods of time (Smith et al. 2015). Thus, within the scenario described by Smith, Connor and Stanton (2015), focusing long-form journalism through the analysis of an aggregator such as *Longform.org*, is an effective way of investigating the production and distribution of this specific form of journalism.

An Example of Long-form Journalism Aggregation and Curation: *Longform.org*

As we have seen in the previous section, according to the long-tail model, third-party content aggregators generally perform more efficiently distribution tasks, if compared to traditional entities and the news industry is an example of this phenomenon (cf. Anderson 2009). In this section, we shall focus on the data-dri-

ven analysis of a single long-form journalism aggregator, *Longform.org*.

Longform.org (cf. Longform.org 2010) was founded in 2010 and begun by recommending recently published and digitally archived news items which were over 2,000 words long and already available on the World Wide Web. The difference between *Longform.org* and similar aggregators is the objective of its activity, as underlined Shapiro, Hiatt and Hoyt (2015). *Longform.org* »doesn't hog the traffic; it simply pushes readers on over to the host site« (Shapiro et al. 2015: 175).

Longform.org's first online version dates back to 2010. It was released in parallel with the launch of Apple's iPad, by two individuals, Max Linsky and Aaron Lammer. Since 2010, the aggregator has broadened its offer. In 2012, it added a fiction section, begun an intense podcast production and developed its first iPad application, which was priced at 5\$ (USD) and, as 2014, sold circa 60.000 copies (cf. Bercovici 2014). Moreover, according to an article published in *New York* magazine in 2014, the podcast service had reached 50.000 listeners (cf. Kachka 2014). In September of the same year, *Longform.org* released its first iPhone application, introducing the possibility for readers to build lists of specific writers to follow across different news media outlets and developed an algorithm regulating which articles were to be featured within the application (cf. Mullin 2014). However, as of April 2017, *Longform.org*'s application is not available anymore on both iOS or Android platforms (cf. Longform.org 2017b). Founders Max Linsky and Aaron Lammer explained that this is due to the rejection by Apple of their newly developed version of the application (cf. Longform.org 2017b).

While Linsky and Lammer underline how the tools that allow readers to access long-form content have significantly developed over the years, they also stress that – through *Longform.org* – they »have sent over 100 million outbound links to publishers since 2012« (Longform.org 2017b). Moreover, it is relevant to underline how *Longform.org* perceives itself as »closer to a technology company than a communications medium«^[2] (Albalad Aiguabella 2015: 18).

Further insight on *Longform.org* is provided by Robert S. Boynton. According to Boynton's data, »Longform's demographic is the envy of any advertiser: young (fifty percent of the readers are under 34), mobile (thirty percent read primarily on phones or tablets), and well educated (forty-two percent have attended graduate school)« (Boynton 2013: 130). Moreover, he underlines how »the best narrative non-fiction – unlike basically every other content type on the web – doesn't lose appeal as it ages [...] Longform's readers are ten percent more likely to read an older story than a new one. The publication date carries almost no weight. Readers care more about an article's subject than whether it is new« (Boynton 2013: 130ff.). Hence, according to Boynton's data long-form journalism and archives

2 The original article is in Spanish: »*Longform.org* – apunta su propietario – se aproxima más a una empresa de tecnología que a un medio de comunicación«

in the digital contemporary share not only relevance over time but also possible aggregation and curation practices which, if performed with a user-centric approach such as the one implemented by *Longform.org*, can provide a steady flow of readers to content which news media outlets host on their archives but which is otherwise inactive.

For news media outlets, the activity performed by aggregators such as *Longform.org* demonstrates that, within their digital archives, there are pools of resources, specifically long-form journalism stories, which are under-used as they are not aggregated and curated in order to enhance readership. While this aspect is relevant for legacy publications, which own a great deal of archived content, it is also significantly relevant for news media outlets which have a shorter lifespan, as confirmed by readership data originated by *Longform.org*, as described by Boynton: »A well-known publication name doesn't move the needle much at all [...] unknown publications often do better than brand names because readers are intrigued to see something new« (Boynton 2013: 131).

Having gathered insight on *Longform.org*'s creation and the data resulting from its activity, we shall now confront them with a specific dataset we have extracted from *Longform.org*'s activity in 2016. Thus, we shall assess if the critical factors identified in this section, such as the relevance over time of long-form journalism and the role of archives as resource pools, are coherent with the data analysis in the following section.

Longform.org's Activity – a Quantitative Analysis

We shall now produce a quantitative analysis of all the entries produced by *Longform.org* in 2016. The generation of our dataset began by collecting all *Longform.org* entries from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016. *Longform.org*'s website provides a page by page navigation that goes back to 1 April 2010 and, while the website's design has changed since its inception, it has maintained its organization around a central column which features a feed of articles.

We obtained the necessary data for all *Longform.org*'s 2016 via the World Wide Web, through a process named web scraping which can be defined as »the practice of gathering data through any mean other than a program interacting with an API (or, obviously through a human using a web browser)« (Mitchell 2015: viii). Moreover, »scraping is not only a technique but equally involves a particular way of dealing with information and knowledge: it is also an analytic practice«. (Marres/Weltevrede 2013: 317). As such, web scraping is being used within the framework of digital methods, intended as »techniques for the ongoing research on the affordances of online media« (Venturini/Bounegru, et al. 2018: 4), deployed to harvest »information made available by Internet platforms« (Venturini/Bou-

negru, et al. 2018: 2). In order to perform our web scraping operation, we used a browser extension for Google Chrome, named Data Miner »that assists you in extracting data that you see in your browser and save into an Excel spreadsheet file« (Data Miner 2016).

To obtain the information we needed from *Longform.org*, we had to develop a series of »extraction instructions that Data Miner uses to extract data from websites« (Data Miner 2016), which are named recipes. We were able to scrape 50 pages out of *Longform.org*'s website. The data was provided in a comma-separated values file (CSV), which we then fed to OpenRefine, an Interactive Data Transformation Tool (cf. Verborgh/De Wilde 2013). Through OpenRefine, we performed a data profiling and data cleaning processes. Data profiling was implemented to »discover the true structure, content and quality« (Olson 2003: 119) of the scraped data. The data cleaning process was implemented in order to correct possible errors in our data »in a semi-automated way« (Verborgh/De Wilde 2013: 6). Hence, we shall now analyze the resulting data set which is the outcome of our web scraping, data profiling and data cleaning processes.

In total, we scraped 1.225 posts from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016^[3]. Typically, *Longform.org* elaborates posts which comprise a link to a single long-form journalism story, a summary and information on the author, news media outlet and date in which the long-form story was first published. In 2016 it published 1.074 single-story entries. However, alongside this primary type of entry, *Longform.org* has developed, over the years, other types of entries. The first is the »Long-form guide« entry, which typically groups together long-form journalism stories from different news media outlets which focus on the same subject (30 in 2016). *Longform.org* also publishes entries dedicated to a single author, which has already been featured multiple times in the websites single story entries (15 in 2016). Besides the »Longform Guide« entries and the entries dedicated to single authors, there are weekly entries dedicated to fiction writing (51 in 2016). Aside from its long-form aggregation and curation activity, *Longform.org* has developed a significant original multimedia production, through a podcasting series (55 in 2016).

As we can see, the vast majority of entries regarded single story entries, which are the ones we shall analyze in-depth. We will provide an assessment of the news media outlets selected by *Longform.org* to be featured in this type of entries, and we shall also focus on the publishing dates in which each long-form journalism story was first published. As *Longform.org* is a curation service which we have framed as an aggregator following the long-tail model (Anderson, 2009b), it is relevant to examine its choices in detail, as its activity revolves specifically around long-form journalism and news media outlets digital archives in the digital contemporary.

3 The dataset which is used in this article is publicly available and has been uploaded onto the Open Science Framework website at <https://osf.io/8myj5/>

We shall concentrate our analysis on the 1.074 single story entries published by *Longform.org* in 2016. As the first publishing date for each long-form journalism story is provided within the entry, it is possible to establish how *Longform.org* has distributed its choice within news media outlets and different production eras. The 1.074 single story entries on *Longform.org* in 2016 are drawn from an extensive time frame, as the oldest long-form journalism story that was featured in a single-story entry was first published in 1877. Year-wise, the most relevant group is the one which comprises stories published in 2016, the same year which we focused our analysis on, as single-story entries based on long-form journalism stories first published in 2016 were 77% of the total.

Figure 1

Single Story Entries on *Longform.org* in 2016 divided per first publishing date



As we can see in Figure 1, the timeframe from which long-form journalism stories were chosen to be featured in single story entries is very ample, approximately in the period ranging from 2009 onwards, choices tend to become more

frequent. *Longform.org* aggregates and curates solely content within news outlet websites or archives, which do not implement a »radical« paywall (Brock 2013: 155). This pre-condition does appear to affect the total pool of news media outlets this specific aggregator uses.

Moving on from the overall distribution of first publishing dates of *Longform.org* single story entries is clear, we focus next on those entries which have a first publishing date that precedes 2016, the year of *Longform.org*'s activity on which our analysis is focused on. As we have seen in Figure 1, they comprise 23% of the total single-story entries, but – in order to gain better insight on their distribution – we have divided all pre-2016 entries in decades, grouping together all entries referring to long-form journalism stories published before 1960.

Figure 2

All *Longform.org*'s 2016 single story entries with a first publication date prior to 2016

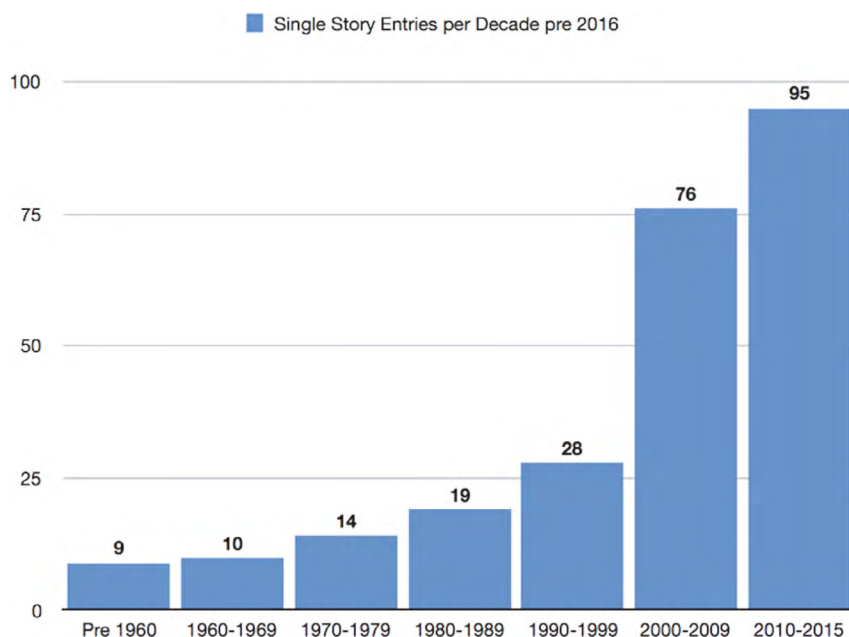


Figure 2 shows how single-story entries which revolve around long-form journalism stories with a first publishing date that pre-dates 2016 increase gradually every decade. However, the increase in entries dated between 1990-1999 and the

following decade is a record 171 per cent. The newsroom digitisation process has had a significant impact on news media outlet digital archives, broadening their development and fruition, which seems to be confirmed by the number of stories sourced from the 2000-2009 decade. While digital news media outlet archives which originate from physical copies are labor-intensive to create, the newsroom digitisation process has brought broader access to news archives. As we can see in Figure 3, news media outlets which have significantly developed their digital news archives tend to be more represented.

Figure 3 shows that slightly more than four out of ten long-form journalism stories selected in single story entries by *Longform.org* were published on outlets which are overall featured ten times or less in the 1,074 entries. The total number of news media outlets featured in single story entries by *Longform.org* in 2016 is 221 and, out of these, only 25 news media outlets are featured ten or more times. Moreover, among the 196 news media outlets which have been chosen for ten or fewer entries, the most relevant group comprises outlets selected once or twice. Out of the 196 news outlets featured less than ten times, the most relevant group are the news media outlets that have been chosen just once, comprising 108 news media outlets.

While the majority of *Longform.org*'s selection revolves around a selected number of news media outlets, variety in news media outlet selection is a relevant factor among *Longform.org*'s selection choices. This diversity is achieved not just by generally widening the number of news media outlets the aggregator sources its stories from, but by specifically choosing news media outlets which are featured fewer times. This selection activity seems to indicate that one of the major focuses in aggregator activity is variety in outlet selection. However, among news media outlets featured in single story entries in 2016, there has been a particular focus on *The New Yorker*, featured in 95 entries.

To assess the consistency of the top news media outlets featured in single story entries in 2016, we compared our dataset with the overall number of times a news media outlet has been featured on *Longform.org*. However, while this data is available directly on a specific page of *Longform.org*'s website (*Longform.org* 2017a) and is relative to 22 May 2017, the methodology with which *Longform.org* has derived its data is not specified, as the page simply displays the number of news outlets which are featured in more than a set number of posts.

Figure 4 confirms the consistency between the data which we scraped from 2016 single story entries and the overall data provided by *Longform.org*. We can observe how there is a small number of outlets that have not been chosen as frequently in 2016, while being featured extensively in the past, such as *The New Republic*, *Slate*, *The New York Review of Books*, *WIRED*, and *Rolling Stone*. However, it is possible to assume that the top 25 contributors in 2016 for single story entries are representative of the overall news media outlet selection in *Longform.org*.

Figure 3

News media outlets featured in *Longform.org* single story entries in 2016

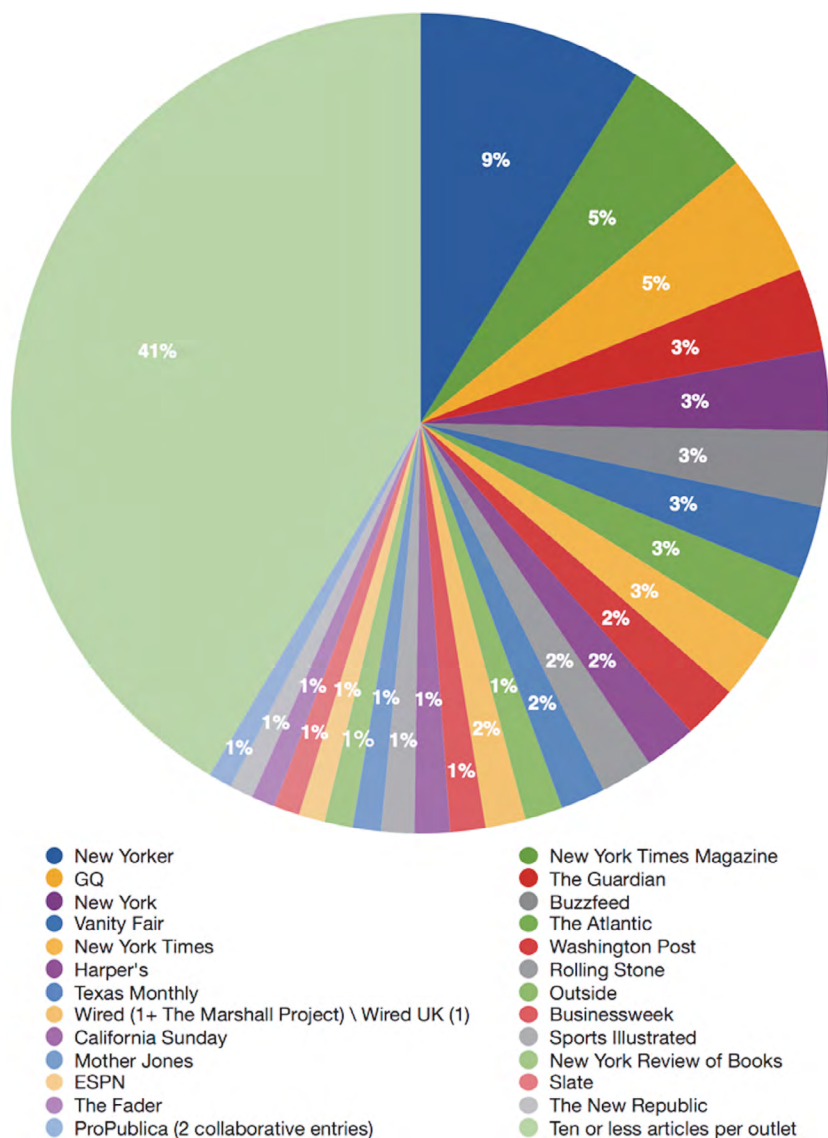
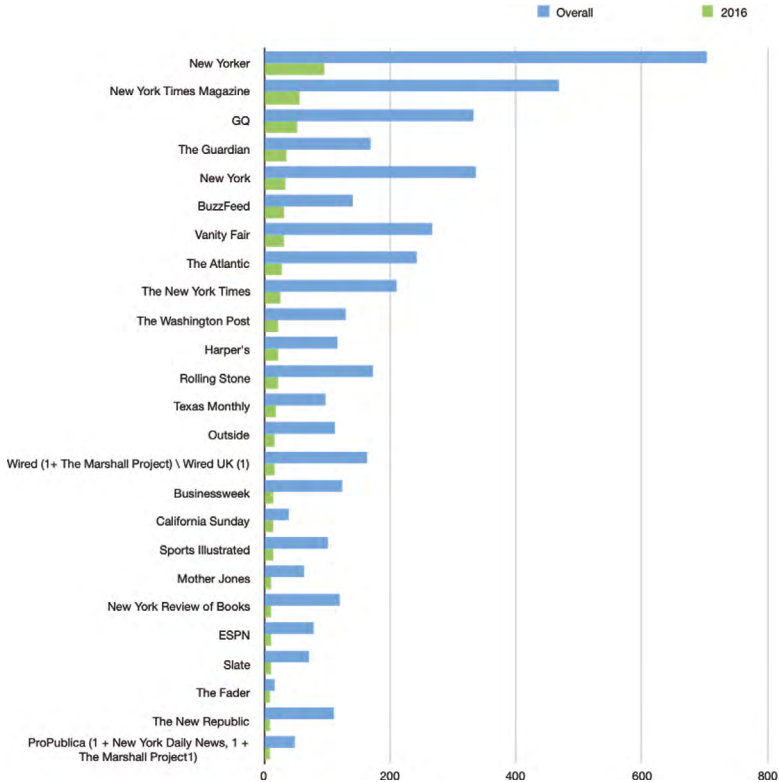


Figure 4

Top 25 news media outlets per single story entries in 2016 and the respective data regarding overall production sourced from *Longform.org*'s website.



We can also see how, alongside outlet variety, the other factor at play in news media outlet selection operated by *Longform.org* is legacy. As outlet presence seems to be consistent in both datasets, the overall orientation in *Longform.org*'s choices for its main contributors is decisively aimed at major news media outlets which have been active for an extended period of time, as among the top overall contributors we can find *New Yorker* magazine, *The New York Times Magazine*, *New York* magazine, *GQ*, and *Vanity Fair* magazine.

To further assess news media outlet relevance, we shall focus on news media outlets which have had at least two long-form journalism stories featured in *Longform.org* 2016 single story entries. The number of news media outlets which have been featured at least twice in *Longform.org* 2016 single story entries is 111,

and they are responsible for 965 entries out of the total 1,074. As we have seen in Figure 4, news media outlets most frequently chosen in 2016 are consistent with the overall choices made by *Longform.org* since its inception in 2010. An analysis of the type of news media outlet responsible for these 965 entries could then provide more general insights about which type of news media outlets are more relevant among *Longform.org*'s overall choices.

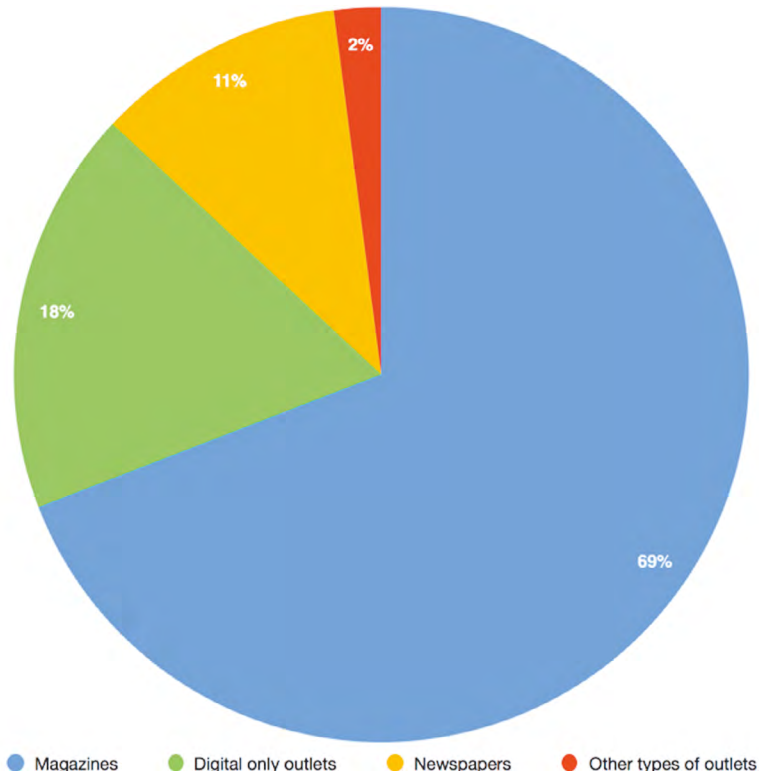
Out of the total 111 outlets which are featured at least twice in single story entries in 2016, 68 are magazines which retain a paper edition, 32 are digital-only news media outlets, 8 are daily newspapers and 3 are websites developed by media companies which focus primarily on another type of medium, such as television or radio. The overall number of magazines which retain a paper edition is highly relevant, both if compared to other types of news media outlets featured in 2016 and to the top overall contributors to *Longform.org*. However, there is a significant number of digital-only publications (32 in total) which are the second largest group among news media outlet types. The number of digital-only publications is moreover relevant as this group is four times larger than daily newspapers, which are only eight, namely the UK's *Guardian*, the United States' *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Tampa Bay Times* as well as the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet*. Alongside magazines, digital-only publications and newspapers, there are three websites developed by media outlets which focus primarily on television or radio, which are ESPN, MTV, NPR and *Fusion*.

Figure 5 displays the percentage of each news media outlet category among the overall single-story entries in 2016. Magazines are the most relevant type of news media outlets, accounting for 69% of all single stories drawn from a pool of 68 different outlets, which were 61% of the total outlets. Digital-only news media outlets account for 18% of all single stories featured but represented 29% of the total news media outlets selected by *Longform.org*. Moreover, while daily newspapers account for 11% of the single-story entries, they represent just 7% of the overall news media outlets. A similar result can be found among other types of outlets which account for 4% of the number of single-story entries but represented just 2% of the overall news media outlets.

The percentage difference between news media outlet type and the number of articles selected from each group shows that digital news media outlets are used as a source for a smaller number of articles. Thus, news media outlet variety is achieved by *Longform.org* mostly by choosing long-form journalism stories published by digital news media outlets. In comparison, magazine and daily newspaper production are both over-represented in relation to the total number of news media outlets in the two categories. Thus, *Longform.org* tends to privilege legacy news media outlets, as we saw in Figure 3. There is a further factor of influence in *Longform.org*'s choices which can be clearly identified, as all but eleven outlets

Figure 5

Number of entries per news media outlet type in 2016 on Longform.org

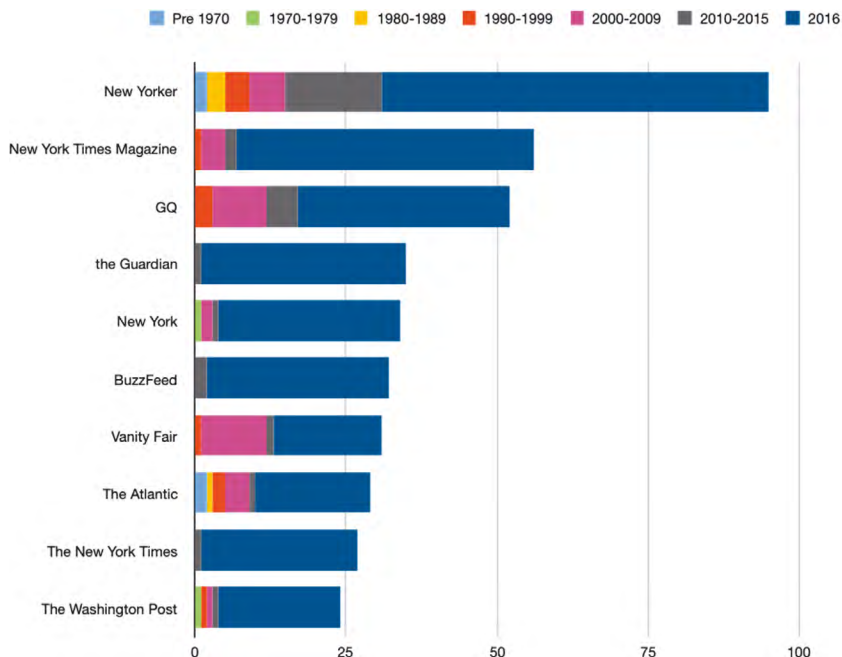


are based in the United States. These news media outlets are based in the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Canada and Australia and are *The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *London Review of Books*, *Dagbladet*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Canadian Business*, the BBC, *The Economist*, *The Sidney Morning Herald*, *The Toronto Star* and *Toronto Life*. Among these news media outlets, *The Guardian* is the only one with a significant impact in terms of selection, as it accounts for 35 single-story entries in 2016. Overall, the number of single-story entries sourced from non-US based news media outlets is 56 out of 1074.

To further examine how specific news media outlets are selected by *Longform.org*, we shall now focus on the first publication dates of long-form journalism stories sourced from the top ten contributors in 2016.

Figure 6

The top ten news media outlets in 2016 and the first publishing dates of their long-form stories divided per decade and in the year 2016



As we saw in Figure 3, single story entries in 2016 were sourced from a wide variety of news media outlets. Out of the top 25 news media outlets which were featured more than ten times in 2016, we shall focus on the top ten. In order to better understand how single-story entries from these news media outlets have been selected we have tracked the publication date for each of the entries by *New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *GQ*, *The Guardian*, *New York* magazine, *BuzzFeed*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. We have divided first publication dates into seven different time frames, one devoted to entries first published before 1970, followed by five decade by decade time frames, devoting the last time frame to entries first published in 2016. As we can see in Figure 6, the latter is by far the most represented category. However, only two news media outlets have entries which were first published in six different time frames, *New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*. Both are legacy news media outlets, as they were founded in 1925 and 1857 respectively. Moreover, we can see how *The New York Times Magazine*, *GQ* and *Vanity Fair* all have a similar pattern, with entries from the same

four eras [1990-1999; 2000-2009; 2010-2015 and 2016]. The only exclusively digital outlet featured among the top ten is *BuzzFeed*, yet its pattern is similar to the one developed by entries from *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, which feature only single-story entries first published between the 2010-2015 period and in 2016. *The Washington Post* highlights a different pattern, with entries drawn from five different time frames. Hence, we can conclude that legacy magazines entries tend to be drawn from a more composite pool of publishing eras, with a more pronounced focus on entries which were first published before 2016.

Finally we explored the relations between articles and their associated tags by creating a network diagram (see Figure 9) using scraped data that was visualized using the Gephi software and the Force Atlas 2 spatialisation algorithm, such that articles sharing similar tags were clustered closer together (Jacomy et al., 2014). Using this network as a device to visually explore associations (Venturini, Jacomy, et al., 2018) in aggregated content through *Longform.org*'s tagging practices, we can discern five main clusters of articles. Firstly, perhaps the most prominent cluster in the top left, of which the largest tag is »2010s« (associated with three quarters of all of the articles) contains themes such as »love«, »relationships«, »sexuality«, »identity«, »women«, »family«, »marriage«, »parenting«, »work«, »death«, suggesting the thematization of the personal and narratives about experiences of everyday life. Secondly, a tighter cluster in the bottom right is concerned with »hollywood«, »entrepreneurs«, »celebrity«, »profile« as well as »dictators« and »cults«. Thirdly, a region to the top right concerns »technology«, »dot-coms« and »gadgets«. Fourthly, an adjacent area focusing on »movies«, »film« and »arts & culture«. Fifthly and finally, a more diffuse region towards the center-right contains articles associated with »crime«, »history«, »world«, »politics«, »war«, »international politics«, »germany«, »cia«, »cuba«, »white-house«, »afghanistan-war«, indicating an enduring interest with dramatic events on the global stage.

Tags representing journalistic genres across the network include: Crime (13%), Arts and Culture (8%), Essays (7%), Profiles (7%), Politics (7%), First Person (6%), Business (6%), Sports (6%), Technology (5%), Science (5%). From this brief analysis we can see how the articles tagged on *Longform.org* indicate the resonance of personal, dramatic world-political, celebrity, technological and cultural themes in long-form news archives.

Conclusion

In this article, we focused on the *Longform.org* aggregator, providing data on its aggregation and curation choices. Assessing how these third parties perform their activity, allowed us to identify a specific set of practices, such as news media outlet variety and a balance between more recent and older long-form journalism stories.

Bipartite network of articles and their associated tags generated using Gephi visualization software

Moreover, *Longform.org* content aggregation and curation activities adhere to

tribution practices at scale as in the case of platform services such as social networks which – among other activities – perform an intermediary function between producers and crowds. *Longform.org*'s case, in this sense, is highly relevant as it did not begin as a scale operation and, as the two founders remarked, »the audience that came just kept getting bigger and bigger without us doing much« (McQuade, 2015). Hence, we can assume that, within the digital contemporary, aggregation and curation are decisive factors in the growth of intermediaries, whereas production and ownership's role is diminishing in importance. The success of *Longform.org* as a long-form journalism aggregator in the digital contemporary demonstrates that this type of entities has successfully attracted readers and attention, whereas news media outlets have struggled to develop effective intermediation practices which regard their own content.

There are multiple directions that aggregation and curation activities could take driven by text and data mining processes, especially if the datafication process of news media outlets digital archives will progress in the future. Studies based on person-centric mining (cf. Coll Ardanuy et al. 2016) and based on historical geospatial data extraction (cf. Yzaguirre et al. 2016) both indicate that there seems to be a fertile space for new types of user-centric aggregation and curation services originating from news media outlets' digital archives, once they are datafied. These new types of curation and aggregation seem to be tailored for news media outlets looking to develop aggregation and curation services among their archived production.

Attending to the practices of aggregators such as *Longform.org* may help us to understand how news outlets are organizing online encounters with archives and reshaping how audiences relate to stories of the past – including through recontextualization, recombination, re-valuation and circulation on digital platforms and infrastructures. The data and curatorial practices of such aggregators may be understood as an area of contemporary news work that conditions which past perspectives are more readily available, experienceable and programmable on the web.

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Research Paper

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When newspeople get constructive

An editorial study on implementing Constructive Reporting at Verlagsgruppe Rhein Main

Abstract: Constructive (or solution-oriented) Journalism is in vogue right now. In addition to specially created formats, such as *Perspective Daily*, more and more traditional media are also adopting this new reporting model. In 2019, the editors-in-chief of the newspapers of the publishing group Rhein Main (VRM) launched the »Project Future«, which was to subscribe to the goals and methods of »Constructive Journalism«. The Ostfalia University of Applied Sciences was commissioned to conduct an accompanying study, the results of which are presented here. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used in a triangulated procedure to assess the effects of Constructive Reporting. Guided interviews were conducted to provide insights on the effects of these new work practices on journalistic role perceptions. In a two-part content analysis, the study examined coverage by VRM newspapers and compared it with articles from *Perspective Daily* and the *Sächsische Zeitung*. The results show that Constructive Journalism was successfully introduced into the daily editorial routine of the VRM newspapers. The study also ascertained effects on self-image and work practices. It also identified certain differences between the media that were examined. The article concludes by offering some implications for journalistic practice.

Introduction

The purpose of Constructive Reporting is to offer readers added value. Editorial offices hope that the new reporting model will intensify their interaction readers and strengthen the bond between readers and the medium (cf. Beiler/Krü-

ger 2018: 178). To this end, VRM launched the »Project Future« in 2019, which addresses structural challenges in the Rhine-Main region under the overarching topic of mobility. From April to December 2019, editors volunteered to work on the project team in addition to their usual editorial duties. The objectives of the research project were:

1. Monitor and support the transformation process within VRM
2. Identify content-related and strategic potentials for improvement as well as
3. Conduct a content-analytical examination of project outcomes.

A two-part content analysis was conducted to examine coverage by VRM's newspapers and compare it with articles from *Perspective Daily* and the *Sächsische Zeitung*, two media which have been engaged in Constructive Journalism for some time already. How does the introduction of Constructive Reporting affect editorial practice and what are the outcomes?

First, we will provide a brief introduction of VRM, followed by the elementary components of Constructive Journalism and research findings on its perception and impact. We will then explain the methodology and present the results. Seven guided interviews provide information about the project and how it evolved at VRM. Content analyses point out differences between Constructive and traditional reporting and differences between the media.

VRM – focus on a regional publisher

VRM is a long-standing media company operating in the region between the Rhine, Main, and Neckar Rivers. With 27 daily newspaper editions in Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate, its circulation area covers the western and southern Rhine-Main region as well as Wetzlar and Gießen in Central Hesse. Thanks to acquisitions over the past decade (including Darmstädter Echo 2015, Wetzlar-druck 2018), VRM has become one of the regional publishing groups with the widest reach (cf. IVW 2020) with a total daily circulation of around 290,000 copies (of which approx. 30,000 are e-papers), in a newspaper market that has been plagued by dropping circulations, declining advertising revenues, and more and more bankruptcies. However, it is not among the top ten largest newspaper publishers in Germany (cf. Röper 2020).

VRM is home to the following daily newspapers: *Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Wiesbadener Kurier*, *Darmstädter Echo*, *Gießener Anzeiger*, *Wetzlarer Neue Zeitung*, *Wormser Zeitung* and *Main-Spitze* as well as advertising gazettes, hometown papers and digital products (cf. VRM, n.d.). Including them, VRM reaches 1.09 million readers daily (cf. ma 2019). A total of 1,750 employees work at 35 locations, 483 of them at headquarters in Mainz.

Table 1

Overview of sold VRM daily newspapers in the 2nd quarter 2020

Titles of the daily newspapers	Sales	of which digital editions
<i>Allgemeine Zeitung and Wiesbadener Kurier</i>	129,156	14,755
<i>Darmstädter Echo</i>	36,890	3,575
<i>Gießener Anzeiger</i>	21,200	1,825
<i>Wetzlarer Neue Zeitung</i>	19,424	1,063
<i>Wormser Zeitung</i>	12,824	581
<i>Main-Spitze</i>	9,618	939

Source: IVW

In 2019, VRM took up the cause of Constructive Journalism and launched the »Project Future« to address the structural challenges facing the Rhine-Main region. Initially conceived as a publishing initiative with the aim of implementing new business models within the publishing group, »Project Future« became a purely editorial project following internal discussions about feasibility and project goals. The project ran from April to December 2019. Thematically, it mainly addressed questions of mobility and traffic, which are of particular concern to the Rhine-Main metropolitan area. It kicked off with the topic of rural areas and their modes of transport. Other topics included high-speed bike paths as new thoroughfares in the distribution area, a self-experiment for individuals to assess their personal ecological footprint, and testing mobility apps, including the existing public transit company app. Last, it addressed future topics such as autonomous driving, delivery drones, and air taxis as well as new drivetrain technologies in public transit.

Central features of Constructive Journalism

The editorial team's goals for the project included increased reader loyalty, in line with the traditional objectives of editorial marketing (see also Beiler/Krüger 2018: 178; Krüger 2016: 98-101). Constructive Journalism aims to draw attention to aspects beyond traditional news factors (cf. Kramp/Weichert 2020: 34). Accordingly, the question is how journalistic routines change and what that means for journalists' daily work. How and to what extent can the relatively recent concept of Constructive Journalism be integrated into traditional reporting and established work processes without producing additional work? It also seems reasonable to assume that a changed approach to topics and collaboration with other experts could impact the journalists' notion of their own role. In recent years, a

consensus has emerged about the nature and goals of Constructive Journalism. The following table is a summary of its key aspects.

Table 2

Summary of the features of Constructive Journalism

Features of Constructive Journalism	Description
Solution- and future-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solution-oriented presentation of issues, making suggestions for alternative action; (Haagerup 2015; <i>Perspective Daily</i> n.d.); <i>Perspective Daily</i> n.d.) • Emphasize diversity of proposed solutions: Think outside of the box about issues and critical issues, view them from a variety of perspectives, and point out different tools and options for action (Meier 2018: 4) • Critical, investigative research as a central component (Gleich 2016: 14) • Go beyond the traditional W-questions (What happened? Where did it happen? Who is affected? When did it happen? Which way did it happen? Why did it happen? What are the consequences? [Mast 2012: 274]), adding questions about research and topic selection: What happens next? What happens now? (Meier 2018: 6)
Report on context instead of events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to merely rendering the events, provide in-depth information that gives readers contextual knowledge (Hermans/ Gyldensted 2019: 5)
»Co-creation«	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate a more sophisticated debate on social issues; promote social participation, and create content in cooperation with the readers (ibid.)

Constructive Journalism in practice

Danish journalist Ulrik Haagerup introduced the term »Constructive Journalism« as a new »reporting model« (Weischenberg 1995: 111-119) which journalists follow partly consciously, partly unconsciously (ibid). Constructive Journalism complements and enriches traditional reporting formats. By defining new criteria of newsworthiness for reports or topics, it aims to counteract the negativity bias in reporting, which has done much harm to the reputation of journalism.

(Fletcher/Park 2017) Based on the definition used in this paper, Constructive Journalism goes further yet: It aims to convey a more »holistic« view of the world and, with the new type of reporting and the changed journalistic structures and rules it entails, to allow audiences to participate more in social processes and issues.

Constructive Journalism has gained prominence in journalistic practice over the past decade, both nationally and internationally (see Seng 2018: 126). Amidst the ongoing economic crisis and restructured public sphere, it is even hailed as the savior of journalism and a way out of the media crisis (cf. Hermans/Drok 2018). Even at first glance, this seems excessive. In any case, the Constructive Reporting model requires time, skill, and space for background reporting – pre-conditions and structures which themselves must first be created and/or, in any case, taught. This is why few media companies are consistently implementing the ideas of Constructive Journalism (Seng 2018: 127), but the concept has undoubtedly made its debut in the German media landscape (see Meier 2018: 5-6). Prominent current examples include public television station ZDF with *Plan B*, NDR Info with *Perspektiven* and *Sächsische Zeitung* with »Gut zu wissen«, International examples are the crowd-funded web magazine *Perspective Daily* (which currently has more than 13.000 subscribers).

Constructive Journalism in research

Given the small number of Constructive formats and projects, research on this topic is still in its infancy in German-speaking countries. The little research that does exist is focused on the social added value of the concept (Beiler/Krüger 2018; Krüger 2017; Meier 2018; Pranz/Sauer 2017), there are no content analyses. Most recently, Kramp and Weichert (2020) interviewed journalists about Constructive Journalism in Germany – such as their expectations, editorial approaches, and effects on work processes and forms of distribution. So far, both in the German-speaking world as well as internationally, the debate has been mainly about theory and concepts. (cf. Aitamurto/Varma 2018; Beiler/Krüger 2018; Bro 2018; Hermans/Drok 2018; McIntyre/Gyldensted 2018; Pranz/Sauer 2017). Also, there are only few experimental studies of audience impact (Baden/McIntyre/Homberg 2019; Curry/Hammonds 2014; McIntyre 2015; Meier 2018). In the Netherlands, Hermans and Gyldensted (2019) conducted the first-ever online survey of 3,263 people on their appreciation of constructive elements in the news. Curry and Hammonds (2014) found evidence of increased reader interest and influence on reader opinion, resulting in increased reader loyalty (ibid). In the German language area (2018), readers were presented with a news item and a report in an experimental 2x2 design, one featuring Constructive and the other non-Constructive language. The findings are »surprising« (ibid: 14): The differences between the perception of classical and constructive repor-

ting are minor. The expected result that the audience expects proposed solutions cannot be confirmed experimentally. On the contrary, traditional messages are rated better, at least if they are worded in a more »well-rounded« way than Constructive messages (ibid.). Therefore, it cannot be generally assumed that there is a preference for Constructive Journalism.

So far, we can only make few reliable statements about the production conditions, statements, and consequences of Constructive Journalism. There is a lack of empirical research on editorial practice, for example using guided interviews with editorial offices or individual journalists, as well as content-analytical inventories, which might elucidate the actual Constructive nature of the reporting. We also need more recipient research on the perception and impact of Constructive Journalism, for example by means of focus group discussions, group discussions, or even guided interviews. This is the only way to understand the implementation and challenges of Constructive Reporting as well as to identify which issues matter to readers.

Research questions and hypotheses

For the VRM project described above, the overarching research question is:

- How successfully and with what results has VRM established the »Project Future« in the organization and introduced Constructive Reporting into its work routines?

The first research question addresses the transformation process within the newsroom and its success.

- RQ₁: How and with which results has »Project Future« been implemented within VRM?

We will use quantitative and qualitative content analysis to investigate the extent to which VRM reporting that has been explicitly declared as »Constructive« differs from competing products as well as from its own traditional articles.

- RQ₂: Do journalists successfully implement Constructive Journalism in their reporting, and to what extent does this differ from traditional reporting?

Based on previous research, and in light of the circumstances of the project at VRM, we developed three additional hypotheses. We assume that VRM has successfully established Constructive Reporting and is publishing Constructive articles. Moreover, we assume that VRM articles are at least as Constructive as the products of the *Sächsische Zeitung* and *Perspective Daily*. The third hypothesis aims to determine to what extent contributions that are declared »Constructive« are actually more Constructive and solution-oriented than traditional ones.

- H₁: The contributions within the »Project Future« feature Constructive Reporting.

- H2: In terms of their Constructiveness, the articles in »Projekt Future« do not differ from articles in the *Sächsische Zeitung* and *Perspective Daily*.
- H3: Contributions from »Project Future« feature Constructive and solution-oriented elements more frequently than traditional articles.

Method

We chose to interconnect quantitative and qualitative methods. They are divided into guided interviews with VRM editors who are responsible for or prominently involved in the project, as well as a quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The guided interviews with the responsible editorial staff provide information on factors such as internal »change management«, changed work processes, and changes in journalists' notions of their role or their self-image. This provided insights into project rollout and implementation. We used quantitative content analysis to determine the Constructiveness of the contributions and compared it with *Perspective Daily* and the *Sächsische Zeitung*. We leveraged qualitative analysis to compare traditional VRM newspaper articles on related or comparable mobility topics with explicitly »Constructive« articles.

Guided interviews

Between 28 and 30 August 2019, we conducted five guided interviews with the responsible editors-in-chief (project management), editors of various VRM newspapers who are involved in the project, and a trainee.¹⁾ We interviewed the editors-in-chief of the *Wetzlarer Neue Zeitung*, the *Darmstädter Echo*, and the *Wiesbadener Kurier*. In addition, we included a reporter (economy, traffic) of the *Wiesbadener Kurier*, the head of the newspool, as well as a trainee in Mainz. In September of 2019, we conducted two additional telephone interviews with the editor-in-chief of the *Wiesbadener Kurier* and an editor.

Qualitative and quantitative content analysis

We conducted the content analyses in October 2019 while the project was ongoing. They cover the 17 VRM articles published by that date, from 2 April to 12 October 2019. In addition, we coded 16 articles from *Perspective Daily* and 17 articles from the *Sächsische Zeitung*, resulting in a sample of 50 articles. We chose *Perspective Daily* and the *Sächsische Zeitung* as benchmarks for our comparison because they have

1 We interviewed only men, which is why we will refer to the interviewees with male pronouns and generally male terms.

already been engaged in and/or work exclusively according to the principles of Constructive Reporting. We created a codebook of 32 variables to collect the data and answer the research questions. The intercoder reliability analysis showed good to very good values in the different categories (Krippendorff's alpha for formal categories was at 1.0 and for content categories at 0.86). Formal criteria include medium, date of publication, length of the article, headline of the article, form of presentation, and interactivity options such as a comment function or other means of contacting the author. Content categories include the tone of the titles and teasers as well as the overall coverage, the range of topics, news factors, and the quality of the articles, as measured by the Constructiveness of the coverage. Variables in this Constructiveness index include: a variety of perspectives, at least one approach towards a solution, critical reporting, addressing the seventh W-question, source transparency, suggestions for further sources/literature, background information, explanation of complicated issues, one-sided versus multi-perspective presentation of conflicts and problems, and exaggeration/dramatization.

Constructive journalism at VRM: Results of the guided interviews

Project Management/Change Management

The interviewees felt that the »Project Future« was off to a successful start and was working. All interviewees were proponents of the project and rated its importance as high or very high. »In-house, the project is very important – for the entire publishing group. I quite like working across the Rhine region« (IV-1).¹²¹ The project was presented across all media throughout the company – the project leadership felt that the point had been clearly communicated via different internal channels, for example by email or via the intranet. The scientific monitoring was also communicated. However, general engagement and participation on the part of the editors was limited. As this was a top-down project, imposed on the organization by the editorial leadership, it did not win the approval of all editors. »Initially, the publisher decidedly saw the project as an opportunity to boost revenue and a vehicle for economic interests. That is not our job.« (IV-3) Thus, there was no majority participation across the involved media. »New projects are often perceived as fads that will blow over and are not worth keeping up with.« (IV-1) Another problem was a lack of clarity as there were several, sometimes concurring projects. Furthermore, we assume that most editors were reluctant to assume what they expected to be an extra workload and therefore chose not to join the project. As a result, the project leadership proactively approached

2 Respondent (IV), numbered consecutively.

potential editors and recruited them for the project. Interested editors joined the work group for topic planning; which meant that these editors were, of course, better informed than the non-participants. The local editorial offices were not involved, as the selected topics were meant to work well for the entire distribution area of VRM under the overarching topic of mobility. Some interviewees criticized this decision, since it meant that the project could not be fully integrated into the entire editorial team. Although some praised the selection of topics, others said they would like to see project editors in charge of topic identification, introduction, and research. They argued that in the future, topics should no longer be predetermined, but rather developed by heterogeneous, larger groups of editors. Last, we assessed channel-specific implementation. »Overall, the project is too much geared toward print« (IV-2), and not digital enough. The publisher's digital potential is not yet fully exploited. There is also room for improvement in social media integration, which should be intensified to increase online traffic. In the long term, the new reporting model is expected to have a positive impact by increasing reader loyalty.

Analysis of roles and self-image

Working Constructively expands the respondents' understanding of their own roles. The Constructive approach and its focus on the users' perspective are not about replacing »the traditional understanding of the role of the critical reporter who states what is, addressing and explaining conflicts« (IV-2), but rather about adding a new component to the journalists' notion of their own role, that of being a »solution provider.« (IV-2) »The control function remains important and works well with the concept of Constructive Journalism.« (IV-2) One respondent struggled with the term 'solution-oriented': »I find it presumptuous to be solution-oriented: VRM can't solve problems. We are not reinventing the wheel.« (IV-7) Overall, all respondents agreed that Constructive Journalism should be integrated into everyday work and be an original component of journalistic work. All respondents welcomed the new thought process of working out solutions and finding sources that offer solutions on certain topics. They found it enriching as well as exciting – albeit not right from the start. »At first, I struggled a lot with the concept. I consider myself a very critical journalist. I don't see my role as necessarily being Constructive.« (IV-3) They often emphasized the proximity to the reader and life's realities. Overall, Constructive Journalism is understood as a change of perspective.

Work processes, workload, work enrichment

Editors and editors-in-chief offered no uniform assessment of the additional effort involved with Constructive Journalism (and the project). Organization

and project management entailed extra work for the editors. However, the aim of the project was not to generate any additional work. Although individual editors felt a Constructive article required a special effort, especially in terms of research and planning, respondents generally did not experience a considerable additional effort. »After all, these are big pieces, so you reflect more, tap into new experts. It doesn't really involve any extra effort.« (IV-3) In some cases, the additional effort depends on the topic and the extent to which it is prepared for digital and social media presentation, which entails additional work steps. Although the editors' other workload was lightened to compensate for their work on a Constructive contribution, some respondents perceived an extra effort due to the change and the novelty of the approach. »The project has triggered a thought process, which I don't think is wrong.« (IV-4)

The respondents disagree on the need for further training. Some do not think that Constructive Journalism requires new research patterns and training. Others felt that Constructive Journalism does require additional training and a fundamental review and discussion of the approach in order to clarify the distinction from other forms of journalism, such as positive journalism. Some of the participating editors-in-chief felt a need for practical workshops for onboarding and support, both during initial training as well as for all seasoned editors. Another new aspect, in addition to the changed approach to research and thinking, is working with different interfaces, for example with the digital editorial team. For example, some editors lack the »planning mindset« necessary to collaborate with the digital media team. The basic problem, or rather the great challenge, lies in breaking down old thought patterns and raising awareness for new approaches, cross-media and digital thinking, in order to remain relevant in the future and reach a larger audience. They would like to see new structures and planning tools that integrate questions of Constructive Journalism into everyday editorial work. »Constructive Journalism is not a nice add-on, but rather will and must be a fundamental part of journalistic work.« (IV-6)

Reader responses

As explained, our chosen method did not allow direct measurement of reader responses. We captured this aspect indirectly through the interviewees own self-reporting. The respondents agreed that VRM editors were disappointed to see only sporadic reader reactions. „We wanted readers to be involved in the project. That failed. No one looked after the collective email inbox. I can't take it on.« (IV-7) Also, the reading value³⁾ of the Constructive pieces was not necessarily higher than that

3 The »reading value« measurement of the Dresden team »Added Value Makers« partially overlapped with the »Project Future«, but did not cover it completely. Ostfalia did not have complete access to reading value data at this point.

of traditional pieces. The editors concluded that the project had not yet fully gotten through to the readership. The project should have been explained to the readers more forcefully and frequently. »It takes time for readers to realize that there is a different quality to the Constructive articles.« (IV-1) Overall, the editors had hoped for more reader reactions and clicks, but they did not register any more reader reactions than usual. »I found the reader response rather disappointing. I expected more.« (IV-5) However, the editors-in-chief are optimistic: »Reader involvement will grow.« (IV-4) Isolated reader reactions show that the addressed topics met with interest and were relevant to everyday life. For example, readers left comments, contributing their own proposals for action and solutions on a given topic.

Interim summary: »Constructive journalism is not tied to a particular project«

»Constructive journalism can identify problems, analyze them, bring people together. But we cannot solve the traffic problems of the Rhine-Main area, which have been a topic of our coverage for 15 years. That would be presumptuous.« (IV-3) In summary, respondents agree that the new reporting pattern is important but needs explanation. This is the only way to encourage people to try something new. Moreover, such a project should not be practiced in a top-down manner only.

The aim should be to create a new, original approach to topics and process them creatively across all editorial departments. Permanently establishing the new approach will require different structures and planning tools as well as new formats, depending on the set-up of each editorial office. The results of the present study thus also confirm the findings of Seng (2018): The new reporting format will require time, skill, and enough space for background reporting. Such structures must first be created or professionalized. The interviews made clear that it takes a controlled project to break out of familiar routines in everyday editorial work and pursue new approaches – such as introducing and establishing a new form of reporting. Nothing will just change on its own. Constructive Journalism is also an ongoing learning process.

- According to the respondents, the following has been achieved successfully:
- Management, timetable was kept
- Explanation of the »Project Future«
- Topic selection
- Participating editors showed high degree of involvement
- Testing of new work methods and research techniques
- Constructive Journalism as a change of perspective.
- Stronger focus on user perspective and expectations

- Reporting that is relevant to everyday life
- Overall, no additional work
- Sporadically triggered reader reactions

The following aspects were criticized:

- Non-involvement of the local editorial office
- Top-down topic setting
- Focus on print, lack of social media integration
- Technical problems (Newspool)
- Insufficient focus on reader awareness, few reader responses

The following table contains succinct quotes from the guided interviews according to their valence, reflecting what has remained the same in VRM, what has changed, and what respondents think of future perspectives for the project.

Table 3

Summary of impressions from »Project Future« as expressed in the guided interviews

Consistency and change	Positive	Neutral	Negative/critical
Continuity	<p>»The control function remains important and works well with the concept of Constructive Journalism«</p> <p>»After all, these are big pieces, so you reflect more, tap into new experts. It doesn't really involve any extra effort.«</p>	<p>»I find it presumptuous to be solution-oriented: VRM can't solve problems. We are not reinventing the wheel.«</p>	<p>»At first, I struggled a lot with the concept. I consider myself a very critical journalist. I don't see my role as necessarily being Constructive«</p> <p>»The project is geared too much towards print.«</p> <p>»I found the reader response rather disappointing. I expected more.«</p>
Change	<p>»The Constructive approach and its associated user perspective adds a new component to the journalists' notion of their own role, that of a 'solution provider'.«</p>	<p>»The project has triggered a thought process, which I don't think is wrong.</p>	<p>„We wanted readers to be involved in the project. That failed. No one looked after the collective email inbox. I can't take it on.«</p>
Perspective	<p>»Constructive Journalism is not a nice add-on, but rather will and must be a fundamental part of journalistic work.«</p>	<p>»Constructive journalism is not tied to a particular project.«</p>	<p>»There needs to be more of a planning mindset.«</p> <p>»I feel that the texts are not powerful enough yet.«</p>

Constructive reporting at VRM: Results of the content analyses

Qualitative content analysis

A quantitative content analysis of the contributions produced within »Project Future« shows that they predominantly meet the criteria of Constructive Journalism (H₁). To test the first hypothesis, we calculated an index to reveal the level of

Constructiveness of an article. The selected characteristics for the Constructiveness index adequately represent Constructiveness (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.743$ – acceptable). On average, the 17 articles examined in the VRM newspapers feature Constructive Reporting with a mean score of 2.52. Table 4 shows which elements of Constructive reporting were particularly well met.

Table 4

Constructiveness characteristics (H1)

Characteristics of Constructiveness	Mean value
Multiple perspectives	2.70
Solution approach	2.42
Critical reporting	2.78
Seventh W-question	2.44
Source transparency	2.84
Suggestions for further sources	1.72
Background information	2.68
Explains complicated issues	1.58
Focus is not exclusively on conflicts/problems	2.84
Not merely exaggeration/dramatization	2.98

Mean values from 1 = not met to 3 = met, n = 17

In particular, the articles present multiple perspectives and report critically; sources are almost always evident. None of the articles is exaggerated or dramatized, however, complicated issues are not always adequately explained. However, the low mean value also indicates that the topics are not always complicated issues. The article in the sample with the highest degree of Constructiveness has a mean of $M = 2.9$. Also, it was notable that the more diverse the proposed solutions, the less often the articles focused exclusively on negatives or problems ($r_{sp} = 0.547^*$). Similarly, responses to the seventh W-question correlate positively with the variety of proposed solutions ($r_{sp} = .807^{**}$). Constructiveness traits (index) also correlate positively with variety of solutions ($r_{sp} = .744^{**}$), showing long-term trends ($r_{sp} = .600^{**}$), and explaining the root cause of a problem ($r_{sp} = .649^{**}$).⁴ A comparison of Constructive articles between VRM, the *Sächsische Zeitung*, and *Perspective Daily* shows clear differences. VRM reports have a higher degree of Constructive Reporting than *Sächsische Zeitung*, but lower than *Perspective Daily* (H2).

4 * The relationship is significant, at a level of $p < 0.05$; ** The relationship is highly significant, at a level of $p < 0.01$.

Table 5

Index of Constructiveness in media comparison (H2)

Index of Constructiveness	n	M	SD	Min	Max
VRM Newspapers	17	2.52	0.17	2.20	2.90
<i>Sächsische Zeitung</i>	17	2.16	0.25	1.90	2.70
<i>Perspective Daily</i>	16	2.83	0.13	2.60	3.00

Mean value ranging from 1 = not Constructive to 3 = Constructive

Significant differences were found between the newspapers.^[5] A post-hoc test shows that the level of Constructiveness of VRM articles is significantly higher than that of *Sächsische Zeitung* ($p < .001$) and significantly lower than that of *Perspective Daily* ($p < .001$).^[6] This means we cannot confirm Hypothesis 2, which predicted that there would be no differences between media.

A group comparison reveals the differences between articles by the VRM and the *Sächsische Zeitung*. VRM reporting exhibits the following characteristics significantly more frequently or strongly: Number of perspectives and approaches, critical reporting, answering the seventh W-question, and suggestions for further sources/literature.^[7] Accordingly, the VRM and the *Sächsische Zeitung* are similar in their source transparency, thoroughness of background information, explanation of complicated facts, focus on exclusively negative aspects, and dramatization of content. The VRM and *Perspective Daily* differ significantly on three characteristics. *Perspective Daily* more frequently provides additional sources, offers more background information, and explains complicated issues more often than VRM.^[8]

Qualitative content analysis

In order to answer the research question from a content analytical perspective as well as complement the quantitative content analysis, we ran a qualitative content analysis to distinguish between traditional and Constructive Reporting at VRM. In particular, we sought to narrow down what constitutes Construc-

5 We performed a Welch analysis of variance (heterogeneity of variance; $F(2, 47) = 5.83, p < .01$), which confirmed a significant difference in Constructive coverage between the newspapers ($F(2, 30.25) = 51.00, p < .001$).

6 We conducted a Games-Howell post hoc test.

7 Number of perspectives ($U = 58,500, p < .001$) and solutions ($U = 59,000, p = .001$), critical reporting ($U = 68,000, p = .001$), response to the seventh W-question ($U = 78,000, p = .022$), and suggestions for further sources/literature ($U = 102,000, p = .037$).

8 *Perspective Daily* provides more in-depth sources ($U = 8,000, p < .001$) and background information significantly more often ($U = 96,000, p = .043$), and it explains complicated issues significantly more often than VRM ($U = 24,500, p < .001$).

tive journalism and what factors can be used to determine it (H3). Our analysis summarized the following elements of Constructive Journalism regarding the topic of mobility: 1. present multiple perspectives, 2. present possible solutions, 3. report critically, 4. assume a future-oriented attitude, 5. cite scientific sources. In addition, we compared the argumentative line of the articles.

For our analysis, we contrasted six Constructive articles from the VRM project with six traditional articles, all on the topic of mobility. The selection was made by the editors-in-chief. As far as a content analysis allows, the qualitative analysis confirmed the presented fundamental components of Constructive Journalism, expanding them by two central aspects. We were thus able to establish that the articles not only critically considered individual issues and offered solutions, but that the solutions themselves were also critically reflected. In addition, Constructive articles follow a dynamic argumentative structure, that is, articles often feature quotes from different people with different positions that make the argument come to life. This includes more frequent pro/con comparisons as well as more evidence through practical examples. Arguments are also supported by background knowledge. Another result was that VRM's constructive articles report more critically than traditional articles on similar topics. Although all articles are fundamentally critical, the Constructive articles go a step further, taking a critical look at possible solutions or projects that are presented as solutions to the problem. Constructive articles are therefore also critical of possible improvements. Traditional articles also feature significantly less diverse perspectives and proposed solutions, and they dwell on problem descriptions and one-sided argumentation. Their orientation towards the future is mostly limited to listing aspects or areas in need of change, without proposing solutions (H3).

Our comparative analysis confirms that a new way of thinking – or at least an active engagement with Constructive Journalism – has taken hold in the VRM editorial team and that Constructive articles do indeed differ from traditional ones in that they are more solution- and future-oriented and shift the focus away from problems and negatives. The participating editors succeeded in reporting (more) Constructively.

Conclusion

Constructive Journalism will not replace traditional journalism, but it can complement and enrich it, as the present study has shown. The reporting pattern allows for a new, original approach and treatment of complex and controversial issues. The new reporting format will require time, skill, and enough space for background reporting – resources which are more readily available in media that do not publish daily. Contrary to critical voices that maintain that Cons-

tructive Journalism cannot be introduced into daily news coverage for lack of resources, our content analyses showed that it is very much possible to establish Constructive articles as part of traditional reporting. VRM has been even more successful in this than the *Sächsische Zeitung*. The measurable critical stance of Constructive Journalism does not necessarily fall short of traditional journalism. Here, our content-analytical examination of the topic did not substantiate any general suspicion that Constructive reporting is merely PR. This was also corroborated by the guided interviews, which identified no potentially controversial changes in the journalists' perception of their own role.

The guided interviews made clear that these new work processes also require new structures and planning tools. Experienced journalists, in particular, find it difficult to reinvent their approach to topics. Therefore, comprehensive training seems necessary to understand the essentials of Constructive Journalism. The fact that elaborating and proposing solutions and critical reporting are not mutually exclusive, as our content analysis shows, has yet to sink in with many editors. Integrating readers into reporting in the sense of »co-creation« is the greatest challenge. Attempts to integrate this into daily journalistic work have failed.

We were also able to show that the Constructive approach and its work method and associated user-oriented perspective also have an effect on the interviewed journalists' self-image. Here again, their self-image was supplemented and expanded, but neither discarded nor challenged. For example, the control function remains important. The role image evolves from that of a »pure reporter to a solution provider« (IV-2). Respondents often emphasized the proximity to the reader and to life's realities. The bond with the audience is an important part of Constructive Journalism, and exchange with media consumers was actively promoted in the »Project Future«. The sporadic feedback from readers shows that the fundamental characteristics of Constructive Journalism – its orientation towards solutions and hope – are being perceived and processed as something positive. According to the editors, Constructive articles also encouraged readers to propose and discuss their own solutions. This indicates the positive effect of focusing on every-day life or citizens. The editors were disappointed by the scantness of direct audience reactions. Reader responses did not increase beyond the usual amount, which the editors interpreted as a sign that the readership was not fully aware of the project. However, given the results of Meier's (2018) experiments on audience impact, we tend to believe that the hopes for a positive perception and a positive effect of Constructive reporting may have been significantly inflated. Apparently, as the present results suggest, these aspects do not differ significantly from traditional journalism. However, we must concede that we were only able to capture audience reactions indirectly via the interviewed editors. A new desideratum would thus be focus group discussions with readers on the different perceptions of traditional reporting and Constructive Reporting

and the possible influence on reader loyalty, especially regarding the critical integration of positive examples.(ibid: 19) It does not seem to be a panacea for tapping into new readerships and markets.

For journalistic practice, we can conclude that Constructive Journalism can be integrated into the daily routines of traditional editorial offices with some reservations. Reader integration poses some challenges and would require significant changes to current routines. The project or any further integration of Constructive Journalism would need to fully leverage, and be better incorporated into, the publisher's digitalization strategy, especially in terms of social media.

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Research Paper

Hans Peter Bull

How true is media reporting?

Of bad practices and ignorance in public communication

Abstract: There is no such thing as unquestioned truth, yet political journalism is committed to truthfulness. This article identifies typical bad practices and blind spots that cause journalism to fail this commitment. As someone who has been involved in the formation of public opinion for many years and as a lifelong consumer and observer of media, I will offer some examples of how imprecise language creates a skewed picture of reality. This is due, in particular, to a lack of differentiation, inappropriately clustering people into groups, improper personalization, and simplifying complex issues. I will highlight certain recurring clichés and stereotypes as well as some high-profile cases of media failure (such as the campaigns against Christian Wulff and Olaf Scholz). Reasons for this include questionable standards of judgment and inappropriate partisanship on the part of the writers. Finally, I will address the consequences of »digitalizing« public communication and whether it poses a danger to democracy.

To avoid misunderstandings, let me preface my paper with a personal note: Journalism is a great profession, and the best minds of the trade do excellent work. Without journalists, society would be in a bad state; journalists are a pillar of democracy. I almost became a journalist myself. I interned with a large newspaper and after doing some more work for the editorial office, I was offered a job. I first wanted finish law school, so I passed on this opportunity and became a legal scholar. I have since maintained a connection with the media world as a freelancer, and in my decades of legal and political work, have authored numerous newspaper articles in addition to academic texts, trying to explain sometimes difficult legal matters and topics of state theory to general audiences. The following is therefore neither an academic nor a populist media bashing, but a

contribution to help make our good media even better.¹¹ It is an attempt to draw on my experiences in dealing with journalists and my long years as a media consumer; to offer a realistic, differentiated picture of media production to reveal pathways towards improvement.

What we owe is not truth, but truthfulness

The essential guiding notion of any journalistic work should be truthfulness, i.e. a commitment to truthful reporting to the extent possible and to fair commentary. Criminal defense lawyer and writer Ferdinand von Schirach recently published a manifesto calling for six »new fundamental rights«, including the »fundamental right to truth«: Accordingly, every person should have a right that »statements made by public officials be true« (Schirach 2021: 19; on this topic, Schloemann 2021). He also formulated an essential requirement for journalists in their role as mediators of politics. But what is »truth«? In any case, it cannot be enforced in a court of law, nor can anyone be expected to go through the hassle of litigation to enforce good political practice. In individual cases, affected parties can take the media to court if they transgressed the limits of criminal law and freedom of expression, but even then, the judiciary can only correct such infringements on a case-by-case basis. It cannot defend the democratic dispute as such. Thus, the guiding principle of truthfulness implies something other and greater than respect for legal norms. It is, first and foremost, about authors maintaining an appropriate subjective attitude to their subjects. Those who want to report truthfully must try to suppress their own prejudice, engage with new and more precise information, and repress any likes and dislikes they either hold personally or that prevail in their own peer group.

In practice, there are many obstacles to truthful reporting and commentary. Consumers expect the media to be ever wary of »them«, i.e. politics and its actors. Subscribers reward »their« newspaper for continuous critical research and clear words in the assessment of political action. Freedom of expression allows for a wide range of different wordings and pointed reprimands of anyone who engages in political activity. Economic constraints are forcing many editorial offices to cut corners regarding their own quality standards, which is covered by freedom of the press. But all these restrictions don't change the journalists' duty to be correct, accurate, and fair. It is one of their basic professional requirements. If it is fulfilled, democracy is strengthened; if it is neglected, extreme, apolitical, and misanthropic views and movements gain ground.

1 Cf. Bull 2020b and 2018 pp. 86 et seq., 97 et seq. and 167 et seq. I already wrote about my media contacts as Federal Commissioner for Data Protection in 1983 (Bull 1983). Most of the observations I made back then about the topics, methods, and quality of journalistic work still hold true today.

Necessary medialization and typical deficits

As I now list examples of how the quality of media products is impaired by ignorance of the actual facts and a poor assessment of those facts due to bad journalistic practices, I must acknowledge that the writers are often unaware that numerous bad practices have crept into their journalistic practice over the course of decades and with the keen participation of other sectors of society.

I also concede that every media representation inevitably features some degree of abridgement and distortion. The product of mediation is not the original. The very selection of topics requires a decision by an editor, and even a mere rendering of »facts« will be affected by their subjective perspective. This is inevitable, and as long as there are enough competing media products, some of the biases will even out. But on the other hand, there are always distortions and falsehoods that could actually be avoided and which, in sum, worsen the overall assessment.

A few typical wordings reveal how this process works, i.e. how imprecise language gives rise to a skewed picture of our reality:

- The worst offence in this context is a *failure to differentiate*. When people don't speak of individual politicians, parties, or groups, but instead generalize about »those« politicians, it is due to a general mistrust, built on an assumed dichotomy between the »good« people and the »bad« politicians – disregarding the obvious fact that politicians are people and share the same characteristics as very many of us. There are decent and indecent, compassionate and inconsiderate, altruistic and selfish people – among ordinary citizens as well as among the political class (and among men as well as women). Criticism of political action can only be effective if it makes clear who is being criticized, whereas blanket bashing of policies and politicians will only stir up emotions, but not contribute to rational policy.
- If there is no differentiation, people are divided into *groups* that are described and judged summarily. This bad habit is so widespread in politics and society that we hardly notice it, let alone criticize it any more. Without missing a beat, we associate members of political parties with the statements of other members of that same party; we judge ethnic groups according to their compatriots' crime statistics; we judge entire families by the actions of one of their kin. While criminal courts pass their verdicts strictly based on the individual perpetrator's guilt, politicians and journalists routinely brand and label individuals as members of a certain group. This happens particularly often in election campaigns and at places of social gathering, be it out in the open at the neighborhood pub or in the digital realm, and the media follow these bad examples. The latest example of this »sorting« of people was the almost unanimous media reaction to

#allesdichtmachen, an initiative by some artists to protest excessive pandemic restrictions. The signatories were immediately suspected of conspiring with irrational »contrarians«, ostracized, and labelled »extremists« (Blazekovic 2021).

Of course, group formation is often inevitable; moreover, it frequently reflects actual uniformity of political thought and action. The prevailing practice of assigning certain characteristics to entire peoples also stems from such generalizations; the formation of collective cultural identities in the guise a »national character« has a long and highly problematic tradition. As soon as a person is not treated as an individual, but reduced to being one of many, a skewed picture emerges and the individual is either exempted from personal responsibility or unfairly burdened. Both phenomena exacerbate the level of mistrust that is already all-pervasive, making it harder to reach a mutual understanding. The pertinent thing to do would be to extricate individuals from their supposedly dangerous group, but it is easier to lash out at an entire group than to have a thorough debate on the factual issues that cause concern, also to mainstream society – e.g. crime rates amongst certain age or ethnic groups – and to work towards solutions in a spirit of solidarity.

- In contrast, the much-lamented *personalization* of contentious political issues seems to offer the advantage that it allows us to address the concerned individuals. However, this focus on prominent actors is no less problematic, for other reasons. When we primarily talk about individuals, the debate quickly zeroes in on »scandals« or campaigns (which we will discuss later); but it always deteriorates or even obfuscates our discussion of the facts. Certainly, political decisions are greatly impacted by the personal stances of those who make them, but the deeper and more decisive reasons lie within the conflicts of interest between the involved power groups. These conflicts exist independently of the idiosyncrasies of single actors and must be solved regardless of individual character. That is why it is detrimental if a debate, such as the one on Covid 19, gets mixed up with the power-political competition between federal and state governments (federal Chancellor and state leaders) and rivalries as to who gets nominated as the next candidate for Chancellor.
- Complex relationships are routinely presented in a starkly *simplified* way. Of course, this is also inevitable, but a reporter's ambition should be to be as accurate as possible and to offer explanations that enable readers and listeners to make an informed judgment.

Anyone who has professional expertise on any subject matter knows that a press report, no matter how well-intentioned, will misstate, distort, or omit important details, simplify causalities, and misassign responsibilities. Journalistic reporting usually cannot meet the standards of accuracy of an expert – and it

does not need to. But when certain abridgements and simplifications keep occurring, creating obvious misconceptions in the minds of the public, it should give us pause. In the long run, sweeping judgments, arising from a lack of due diligence in political reporting, are more than just an annoyance: They undermine one of the pillars of democratic politics, namely the minimum level of trust that citizens must have in their representatives so that compromise and a reasonably stable social peace are possible.

One way to improve the technical accuracy of press articles is to invite real experts to explain complex issues in understandable language. It is not uncommon for contentious issues to be debated in a »pro/con« format; scholars and practitioners could and should be involved in such exchanges. My impression is that this practice has become less common than it used to be. Of course, it is not easy for laypeople to judge who can really offer an expert opinion on a specialist topic. But an adequately well-staffed newsroom is able to find out who knows more about a subject than they do.

By the way, some editorial offices think that texts by politicians should generally not be equated with expert statements. There seems to be a widespread perception that all politicians merely submit manuscripts that are written by either their staff or ghostwriters, or that their only intention is self-promotion. Editorial offices fear that when they publish a piece by one politician, representatives of all other parties will also want the same platform, and that they could not be turned down for the sake of equal treatment. Apart from the fact that this rule is not strictly observed – it betrays a distrust of all politically active writers, promoting a nonsensical polarization of science and politics. Politicians are known to be experts on the general, and authenticity should be seen as a hallmark of quality.

The decision to publish a text should therefore be guided only by its journalistic relevance and quality, and not depend on the author's status, profession, or role. The same applies to scientific texts: I often find that a contrast is being construed between scientific positions and contributions by active politicians. However, an editorial office should be able to verify if submitted text meets scientific standards.

Again, politicians need a minimum level of trust to do their jobs; distrust is an ever-lurking aspect of their work, anyway. In this respect, they are no different from journalists; they, too, need a certain level of public trust in their integrity, and they therefore rightly defend themselves against slander from extremists, for example. »Taking credibility away from journalists is the worst,« says Anja Reschke (Reschke 2020). Talk show hosts should also remember that when they adamantly discredit politicians' credibility when they change their minds on an issue.^[2]

2 Bull 2020a gives an example on p. 48 with fn. 123 (Anne Will).

How do institutions work?

Central *functional conditions* and *process rules* keep being misrepresented. Most people still have a certain level of knowledge about the constitutional institutions of their state, but their understanding of how society and the state work and what they are capable of is deficient in many respects. Most of the time, the government's capabilities are overestimated. Accordingly, governments present themselves as almost omnipotent – even to the point of that they think they could quickly curb a global raging pandemic with »tough« rules... An example of a more harmless error is when a text states that a government has »decided on a law that is yet to be approved by parliament«. The government's job is to draft most legislation, but the final text is determined by parliament. The more important question is how powerful a government is; that depends on other players, who also must be taken into account. Daily news coverage of legislative projects often neglects to analyze the respective *interests* that are at play. Those who simply reiterate the official statements on legislative projects fail to explain the real issues at stake and the power relations that have shaped the bill. During election campaigns, parties are rightly accused that their political advertisements are hardly more substantial than commercials for laundry detergent, i.e. making lofty promises and omitting the real problems: the challenge of asserting their agenda against conflicting political forces. This happens every day, in various forms, in the media, which only cover political objectives, but not the pathways to attain them.

Another area of state organization that is all too often subject of inaccurate reporting is the judiciary. Gone are the days when judges worked in seclusion from the public and considered journalistic criticism of their verdicts an improper interference or a threat to their independence. Most courts have significantly expanded their public relations efforts, offering explanations to the media, which are often not well received. Tabloid media have been criticizing the judiciary for decades. The argument often goes that judges are too lenient in their sentencing, failing to explain, and probably sometimes also in ignorance of, the legal implications that have led to these verdicts that are supposedly overly lenient. Criticism that a court has »failed to shed light on the background of the deeds«, (or even: »failed to put them into proper historical context«) – as was the case during the NSU trials – ignore a necessary boundary of jurisprudence. This is not the task of the courts, but of truth commissions and – idealistically speaking – of parliamentary committees of inquiry.

When society and politics talk

Once again, it is by no means only the media that fail to meet their educational mandate with the necessary degree of diligence. Politicians of all stripes are partially responsible as they eagerly spread oversimplified statements fraught with clichés and stereotypes:

- »The Chancellor summoned the refugees«; »Most refugees are asylum tourists« (or: »economic migrants«, »criminals« or »terrorists«): This reduces a humanitarian gesture to a political agenda; it paints a global disaster that caused millions to flee from poverty and oppression as a personal decision made by a head of government; it turns the plight of refugees into discrimination against entire peoples. Long after September 2015, a documentary revealed just how intractable the situation was. It would have been helpful to read about all of that much sooner in the newspapers.
- »The administration is acting against the interests of the citizens«; »Germany is lagging behind in digitalization«; »Civil servants are wasting taxpayers' money« – the list goes on. Individual cases are generalized, sound and flawed decisions are lumped together, and state employees are badmouthed as if they were a monolith. Obscure rankings are treated as facts, without stating their benchmarks or even putting them into perspective. Statistics are only meaningful if current data is juxtaposed with comparative historical or international data and accompanied by proper commentary.
- Commentators fail to even acknowledge that digitalization – i.e. the automation of decision-making processes and the shifting of communication processes online – is by no means an improvement for any and all governmental tasks (although the pandemic clearly highlighted the inadequacy of digital-only instructional delivery in schools). Anyone who does not wholeheartedly join the general chorus of IT enthusiasm is considered a technophobe. The media routinely report on the »black books« of the German Taxpayers Association (which should really be called the Association of Income Tax Payers, as it represents high-income earners) without any further comment; any responses from the authorities that were thus criticized are published only days later (if at all), when the reports have already done their damage.
- A particularly popular game is *red tape bashing*. It is so appealing to the media because it relieves them of the need to make any substantive assessment of administrative procedures (or so they think), at least in this first quick shot from the hip at these administrative procedures. There are several varieties of this practice: A more harmless variation is the occa-

sional compilation of curious or obsolete regulations that govern now defunct living conditions. Many a legal norm that once seemed sensible and necessary has outlived its usefulness and is no longer applied in practice – »purging« them from the lawbooks is a formality with no political significance. In most cases, however, it is affected parties complaining about individual provisions that are unfavorable to them, be it taxes, contributions or fees, formal obligations such as using certain forms or meeting certain deadlines, providing data, or submitting to the control of an authority. Regulations that appear particularly cumbersome are often the result of lobbying that is going on in the background of parliamentary deliberations – for example, when a particular industry gets unreasonable exemptions from general legal requirements. When such an exemption is difficult to implement, the blame is readily assigned to ministry officials, who in this case are totally innocent of the complexity.

- Whenever politicians promise to help »unbureaucratically«, public servants have to be extra careful. Emergencies must be addressed quickly, and when aid is being distributed, an excessive insistence of the letter of the law would be inappropriate. But the unfortunate story of COVID19 aids in the winter of 2020/21 shows that a minimum of accountability is essential. An overreliance on the integrity of the applicants is an invitation for fraudsters. We simply can't do without »bureaucracy«; for without it, government and society would not function, and chaos would spread. Blanket criticism of »red tape« is cheap. Here again, it is vital to discern who is responsible for what.

Linguistic issues and deficiencies in content

Criticism of bad practices and ignorance and the resulting misdevelopments falls short if it stops at linguistics. Language teachers are important, but they only have a marginal impact on content. So it's not just a matter of linguistic instinct or sloppy style, but of the authors' *attitudes and views* regarding the content. As much as »attitude« is a desirable trait in a journalist, i.e. faithfulness to principles and independence from others, it is inappropriate for authors (or an entire editorial team) to uncritically adopt a third party's viewpoint in their reporting, out of sheer like or dislike of one political tendency or another, or if they are sloppy in their wording.

Party-aligned newspapers may report in a one-sided way, omit counterarguments for their party leaders' policies, and paint a rosy picture of their own people (but in this day and age, even loyal party supporters no longer buy into this sort of adulation of their leadership). Tabloid media thrive on embellishing and spreading news and photos of (would-be) celebrities, who in turn seek publicity

and deliberately open up their private sphere to gain attention. When journalists and magazines cater to this interest and take liberties to exaggerate or even invent entire interviews, they presumably count on the tacit consent of their »celebrity« victims. These circles are fraught with cynicism on both sides; court rulings awarding damages to victims quickly fall into oblivion. But again, the obligation to be truthful is incumbent on all media.

Civil servants and public officials have a duty of moderation when making political statements; journalists may and should make pointed statements when they deem it necessary. But journalists also fail in their professional duties when they excessively criticize, denigrate, or insult others. It is simply bad journalism when newspapers and magazines allow themselves to be instrumentalized by political parties or associations and go after individual politicians, and it is no better when an editorial office takes up a political group's cause of its own accord. (Upon closer inspection, similar dealings can be observed in the realms of culture and science; the only difference being that a relatively narrow circle of insiders is expressing outrage, rather than the general public).

The empirics of media failure

The discussion is not new. My small private archive contains several decades' worth of newspaper clippings that cover and critically comment on journalists' failures. These critics include some eminent representatives of the trade, such as Herbert Riehl-Heyse, Robert Leicht, Hans Leyendecker, Gunter Hofmann, Heribert Prantl, Georg Mascolo; they found choice words to remind their unprofessional colleagues of the damage they are doing to the people concerned and indirectly to our democracy. In most of the cases, hindsight shows that their media-critical comments were well founded. The most prominent example is the case of German President Christian Wulff, who was so relentlessly hounded by a whole army of newspapers, led by »Bild«, that his resignation became inevitable, even though the accusations were false except for some ridiculous trifles.

Many similar media campaigns – not all of them launched by the tabloid press – have been forgotten, such as the one against Hamburg's Senator of the Interior Hartmuth Wrocklage, who was ousted from office by the majority of Hamburg's newspapers following anonymous allegations and insinuations from the police. The background was a fierce dispute over the Senator's security policy, which was sharply attacked by conservative sections of the population, parts of the police leadership, and the Springer press. The Hamburg press (except for the taz) engaged in this populist bashing of Wrocklage primarily because he had announced that he would take civil action against those who spread the insinuations and slander. Dr. Martin Schmidt, member of the Green-Alternative List in

the Hamburg Parliament, said that Wrocklage had »made a serious mistake« by »violating a basic rule that applies to all politicians: He criticized the press that attacked him. You can't do that if you're a Senator and want to stay one.« The State Press Conference (LPK) considered his announcement to fight back in court as an »unacceptable attempt to suppress critical voices«. While some considered it clumsy or even naive, it was really no more than a sign that the politician was the inferior party in this dispute. »Instead of openly confronting the issue, Mr. Wrocklage resorts to repressive methods against independent journalism, which he obviously struggles with.« Only the editorial director of *taz* Hamburg objected to this almost grotesque distortion of the circumstances, attesting the LPK »undifferentiated bias«, i.e. »the opposite of serious journalism«.^[3] The Hamburg correspondent of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, on the other hand, considered Wrocklage's reaction »ludicrous« because it was »politically highly unwise«. I have a hard time understanding how a ruthlessly persecuted politician would be acting »wisely« by refraining from exercising his rights.

Small mistakes, big consequences

In the hustle of day-to-day journalism, inaccuracies are unavoidable when the information situation is unfavorable, as is often the case. However, it is a bad practice to disregard relevant information that *is* available, especially when the matter at hand is important.

I personally experienced a disquieting example of this in the context of a particularly difficult role I held, showing me how easily major misunderstandings can arise from small inaccuracies – and how difficult it is to prevail against journalists' biases.

I was one of the two legal representatives of the Federal Government in the proceedings on the first NPD party ban. The trial failed because various intelligence offices in charge of protecting the Constitution had recruited paid informers to serve on the NPD's executive committees. They reported on the goings-on in the executive committees for considerable fees.^[4] This observation of the NPD by intelligence services was widely presented as if the state had »infiltrated« the party with its

3 The quotes are from the documentation of the newspaper *taz* Hamburg dated 5 June 2001, p. 21. »Medien. Macht. Meinung«. Haug von Kuenheim has reported on a previous media campaign against Wrocklage (Kuenheim 1996).

4 For more details on this case, see: Bull 2003, which also contains references to some questionable procedural decisions by the court that contributed to the inglorious end of the trial. The (first) NPD decision of 18 March 2003 is printed in the Official Records: BVerfGE 107, 339

»agents« in order to make the party appear extremist to the public. In fact, it was not even remotely proven that the informers had had any impact on the party's public image.^[5] Moreover, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution had already ended its cooperation with the NPD informer five years earlier after he had published particularly poisonous anti-Semitic statements.

I tried to explain the complicated circumstances to any journalist who asked, but they failed to report the crucial details. At that time, a RBB television team immediately rushed from Berlin to Hamburg for a long conversation with me for their upcoming show »Kontraste« – they only reported one sentence from our conversation, which was not only irrelevant, but also did not explain the special relations between the Offices for Protection of the Constitution and the NPD. Quite obviously, the show's writers had already made up their minds when they spoke to me and only sought my confirmation rather than any contradiction. On this occasion, I remembered something veteran journalists had winkingly warned me against in the past: Do not let your texts be »researched to death«...

Security policy as a journalistic challenge

Secret services have always been the subject of special journalistic interest, but the coverage of their activities is usually extremely superficial and sometimes – as in the case of monitoring the NPD – downright misleading. The secret services themselves are partially to blame for this poor public information, because they shroud themselves in an aura of secrecy beyond the degree necessary to protect their sources. No one objects to the fact that foreign intelligence services like the BND strictly protect their sources; foreign spies operate in very dangerous environments all over the world. Even a domestic intelligence service must protect its undercover operatives from detection by those who are being monitored and from acts of retaliation by those who feel betrayed. But the undercover agents of the Offices for the Protection of the Constitution who provide information on extremist activities are not in as great a danger as foreign spies, and the public has a legitimate interest in knowing what the domestic intelligence service's methods. In principle, the affected parties even have a right to know what information the authorities hold about them; however, security authorities routinely make use of the legal exceptions to this right. As Federal Commissioner for Data Protection, I encouraged security authorities to engage in some form of public relations work to convey to the public that they are operating lawfully.

As the federal government's representative in the NPD trial, I made the unpleasant experience that the constitutional protection service withheld the

5 This is also the case for four of the seven judges of the BVerfG Senate, cf. BVerfGE 107, 339 (381).

information necessary to assess the request to ban the party even from the nation's highest court. I advocated for explaining the inner workings of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution to the Federal Constitutional Court in open court so the judges could get a realistic picture. I did not succeed, and so three of the seven judges and many observers of the trial sided with the NPD's defense tactic, namely that the state had »infiltrated« its executive boards with its agents and had them create a certain public image of this undesirable party that would have it banned.

Other security agencies have also always dealt in secrecy. Before the introduction of data protection legislation, the police would never have expected that their methods of investigating criminals and of detecting threats to public safety could be scrutinized and possibly challenged by outsiders. Since then, public debate has criticized many police information rights as being too vague, too incriminating, thus disproportionate, and therefore illegal. The Federal Constitutional Court has repeatedly corrected legislative attempts to codify police law. This gave rise to a public notion that the entire nation is under »complete«, »blanket«, and deeply invasive »surveillance«. That was and is wrong, but the next time the German Constitutional Court finds a new police authorization too vaguely worded and therefore scraps the regulation, many observers who don't listen or read carefully will once again come to the conclusion that Germany has become or is at the verge of turning into an Orwellian surveillance state. Nothing can dispel such stereotypes, not even the fact that most of us say that we are quite satisfied with our local authorities and feel protected rather than threatened by our police.

Often, just a few words make all the difference as to whether a text accurately explains a context or renders an opinion without reflection. As a rule, reporting picks up on more or less familiar themes and then adds a new variant, an exception, or an extreme example to our existing notion of how the world works. Those who understand this starting point can adapt their presentation in a way that it either corroborates an existing judgement (or prejudice) or clearly contradicts the common perception. If your only agenda is to provide readers or listeners with a basis to form their own judgement, you research more thoroughly and thus write differently: more open-mindedly, avoiding expletives and the usual metaphors (on the concept of »Constructive Journalism«, cf. Hooffacker 2021).

To put it bluntly: Using catchphrases such as »surveillance state« pushes our perception in a system-critical direction, even if the example at hand does not even justify it; whoever speaks of a »waste of tax money« makes it harder to clarify the actual processes; whoever calls a controversial practice a »violation of fundamental rights« without further justification robs the affected party of their opportunity to explain the legal implications. Freedom of expression means you have the right to use all these catchphrases – but is that enough?

False standards and damaging campaigns

Stereotypes become opinions. Opinions become alliances for or against other people. Political-minded journalists find it difficult to stick to reporting rather than taking sides, and the tendency to make harsh judgments has grown, not only in the neighborhood pubs and virtual hangouts. The media's standards have become stricter, sometimes petty, and judgments are rendered not only along the lines of right and wrong, but are ever more often moral condemnations. It is a good thing that corruption in all its forms is now being more closely monitored and fought, and that nepotism is being exposed. But it is not a good thing that politicians are held to higher standards than ordinary citizens, and that a slip-up that can happen to anyone is magnified into a political crime that can cost them their office. Let's remember the media campaign against then-Federal President Christian Wulff: An alleged lack of transparency about the financing of his private home and an invitation to a holiday trip turned into accusations of dishonesty and bribery, leading to criminal proceedings and the resignation of the accused. When the court finally acquitted Christian Wulff of all charges, the damage was beyond repair.⁶ Green politician Cem Özdemir suffered a setback of his hitherto very successful career due to an accusation that he had used airline bonuses for business trips for private purposes – an incorrect, but hitherto unchallenged and rather common practice. In 2021, we should note the tenacity with which Federal Minister of Finance, Olaf Scholz, keeps getting confronted with allegations of omissions or errors that really don't amount to anything by the light of day.

The Scholz case, despite its formally inconspicuous language, is an apt example of reporting that fails to fulfil the journalistic mandate of elucidating facts and providing fair commentary. There is one particular author who keeps bringing up Scholz⁷, always with the core message that he must justify himself on a variety of issues, that he rejects the accusations, that he does not admit guilt or take responsibility – always insinuating that he is fundamentally and knowingly guilty. Recently, the journalist added that these (unproven) accusations will cast a heavy shadow on the election campaign (cf. Gammelin 2021a). She only uses catchwords to describe his alleged wrongdoing, and always states there are still many unanswered questions and a great need for explanation. This method of casting a politician in a bad light is very successful – at least, this editorial office is dedicating a lot of space to these texts. Therefore, I would like to explain what strikes me about these texts upon closer inspection.

What is the nature of the accusations made against Olaf Scholz? In a more

6 About this, among others, cf. Kepplinger 2018. Further evidence in Bull 2020b: 441 (444 including footnote 15 as well as 452). A fair commentary on Wulff's behaviors and the accusations against him has been provided by Adam Soboczynski (Soboczynski 2014).

7 For example: cf. Gammelin 2020. More about this: Bull 2020b: 441 (445 with fn. 19).

recent article in this series, the one dated 23 April 2021,^[8] the key sentence reads: »It's a huge handicap for him as a candidate for Chancellor having to defend his work in the Bundestag's fiercest investigative body, which he had initially wanted to prevent.« I beg your pardon? Parliamentary inquiry committees are set up by political opponents; they are a stage for dramatic, lengthy political disputes and attempts to drive a wedge into government coalitions – it is obvious that those concerned would rather prevent such initiatives, but can't if the opposition is strong enough. And it is equally obvious that they must then defend their work. The author says, without a hint of self-criticism: »And something, experience teaches, always sticks. It costs trust, especially in an election campaign.« Right – but is that the fault of the person who is summoned before the committee? In fact, distrust is also always sown by the press.

The accused fervently denies the charges, and his critic concedes that »a really major transgression cannot be proven«. The only accusation that remains after the testimony before the investigation committee is Scholz's official use of a private email account, to which he admitted. The author comments as follows: »An email affair ultimately cost Hillary Clinton the Presidency five years ago«. What a comparison! What was the Clinton »affair« again? It was political opponents (possibly with the help of Russian secret service agents) deliberately using reports on »private-official« use of emails as ammunition in an election campaign. And what exactly was and is the damage (to democracy) when internal government communication takes place on a private device? When such trivia are blown into a state affair, there is a lack of appropriate standards for what constitutes proper political action.

The author seems to have run out of ammunition when, at the end of her summarizing article on the matter, all she has left to talk about is the Minister's rhetorical qualities. She notes that Scholz speaks »stoically and consistently friendly«, but not as eloquently or as persuasively as his state secretary Jörg Kukies. And just like that, a commentator on a parliamentary committee turns into an election campaign strategist, reproaching the Vice-Chancellor for his inability to »win hearts«.

Of course, her recommendation to emulate the state secretary's style will not be the last of her critical engagement with the Minister. Indeed, in the same article, as in numerous previous contributions, the author also rehashed other accusations. She blames Scholz for the fact that the G-20 summit in Hamburg was disrupted by violent protesters as well as for the billion-dollar fraud of Wirecard AG. She has nothing to say about the actual perpetrators; they have gone into hiding or are held in pre-trial detention; the courts will (hopefully) deal with their ingenious crimes. Journalists and political opponents accuse authorities and ministers of

8 Cf. Gammelin 2021b. The thesis of the article is illustrated in an accompanying cartoon by Burkhard Mohr.

inadequate supervision. In doing so, they are diverting attention away from the perpetrators towards politicians and civil servants who have been deceived just as much as investors who lost money. The term »political accountability« is stretched to the point that it loses any actionable value; under this perspective, taking charge of a ministry amounts to committing political suicide.

And despite unambiguous statements to the contrary, the press continues to imply that Scholz helped out Hamburg-based Warburg Bank in a dispute over a million-Euro tax debt – albeit in nebulous, evasive terms: »That he, as Mayor of Hamburg, claims not to have known anything about the Cum-Ex tax fraud is all the more difficult to believe because we know how meticulously Minister Scholz controls his house.« What an argument! You don't have to be a painstaking minister to know about the tax frauds associated with »Cum-Ex«. But being a meticulous minister would make you all the more unlikely to have helped tax criminals. A journalist who doesn't want to admit to this fact is doing the bidding of the political opposition and putting his or her own credibility on the line.

And how does digital communication change this?

Media criticism today is focused on the changes brought by the »digitalization« of public communication (cf. Schicha et al. 2021). There is hardly a paper that does not invoke the dangers of new information and communication technologies for democracy. And it's true: Some new manifestations of our political communication are a threat to the public good. Hate speech against politicians, extreme rejection and personal insults of certain political tendencies and their representatives, which have become common in some »social« media (and even seem to serve as a model for letters to newspaper editors), sow discord and poison the political climate. Insults and threats directed at anyone who thinks differently and an inability to listen and argue make compromise difficult or impossible. The ideal of rational debate about the future of our body politic is lost in the rhetorical battles of opinion groups.

Despite the disastrous consequences of extremely subjective, unenlightened opinion wars, some feel they must defend freedom of expression on this front. When the state leverages laws or litigation to protect personality rights or the copyright of third parties, they consider it an encroachment on their supposed right to be able to express themselves everywhere and without regard for others. Today, the norm is that anyone and everyone can communicate their opinions to countless others in the fastest possible way – making anyone an uncensored de facto publisher and editor-in-chief. Both those who benefit from this phenomenon and the representatives of the digital economy have elevated this reality into a *right* to disseminate their views. This happened mainly because the business model of the Internet companies is based on free access for users and financing

through advertising revenues. The state's only active role in this field is that of regulator, yet all the anger is directed against the state and its officials. The »traditional« media are losing influence and economic power because their mediating role is no longer valued enough.

Meanwhile, in the real world, angry groups of people clash in protests and counter-protests and resort to violence – even against journalists who are just trying to report on the events. As a result, the Federal Republic has dropped to a lower spot in international rankings of actual freedom of expression. And hardly anyone seems to notice the inherent paradox: Here too – as in the virtual world of the Internet – the state is not the aggressor, but the guarantor of freedom. Yet its job is made more difficult by »champions of freedom«.

There are no easy solutions to these conflicts. As a seasoned observer, my two cents are that those who act politically and those who report journalistically have always cultivated the same bad habits and displayed the same ignorance – regardless of technological capabilities and economic business models. In essence, it comes down to observing a few basic rules, above all striving for truthfulness and respect for those who think and live differently. Even if some of our social structures and institutions have ossified, even if some politicians and journalists have been in their jobs for too long – the »conservative« values from which we derive our basic rules of decent conduct have lost none of their significance.

About the author

Hans Peter Bull (*1936), Dr. iur., served as Professor of Public Law at the University of Hamburg from 1973 until his retirement in 2002. He was the first Federal Commissioner for Data Protection (1978-1983) and later Minister of the Interior of the state of Schleswig-Holstein (1988-1995). He headed the North Rhine-Westphalian government commission on »Public Service of the Future – the Future of Public Service« (2001-2003) and represented the German Federal Government in the first proceedings to ban the right-wing political party NPD before the Federal Constitutional Court (2001-2003). Throughout his academic and political career, he maintained numerous professional contacts with various media.

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Essay

Valérie Robert

France's very own Murdoch

Money, media, and campaigning

Abstract: In recent years, France has not only seen an upheaval of its party system, but also changes in its media landscape. The influence of large corporations and entrepreneurs might endanger internal freedom of the press and reinforce a political shift towards the right. This article analyses current developments on the French media market as the election campaign gets underway, with a particular focus on the conglomerate TF1 and billionaire Vincent Bolloré.

France ranks 34th on the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. The Scandinavian countries and Costa Rica are in the top five, Germany is in 13th place. What are the reasons for France's relatively poor rank? One is police violence against journalists during protests, especially those against the Global Security Act (cf. Balmer 2020; Pantel 2020). This law has now come into force, but without a paragraph that would have made it a criminal offence to publish footage of police operations with the intention of psychologically or physically harming police officers. Journalists' organisations as well as numerous members of parliament considered this regulation an encroachment on the freedom of the press because it would effectively have prohibited filming any police operation. Now the Constitutional Council has overturned the paragraph, but only because it was too vague; the Council did not cite freedom of the press in its reasoning.

Reporters Without Borders (2021), however, also expressed concern about internal press freedom: »Editorial independence continues to be a sensitive issue because media ownership is concentrated, and there is a tendency to incorporate media outlets into commercial enterprises with other economic interests, which encourages conflicts of interest that feed mistrust of the media.«

To understand the situation of journalism in France, it is necessary to consider ownership structures, the power of industrial groups, and how they are intertwined

ned with the state and politics. This also explains the success of new media such as »Mediapart«, which advertise independence from corporations and advertising as their identifying feature (Robert 2011: 128-129). To illustrate the interdependencies within the triangle of money, media, and politics, I will focus on three important players, namely the conglomerate TF1, billionaire Vincent Bolloré, and President Macron. A topical occasion for such an analysis is the (partial) withdrawal of the German Bertelsmann group from the French market, which has left it in turmoil.

Prisma Media, a former German publisher

France's largest magazine publisher Prisma Media was founded by Gruner + Jahr in 1978 and has left a strong mark on the French market (see Robert 2013: 367). The publisher has now been sold to Vivendi, of which Bolloré is a major shareholder. Bolloré's own corporation is actually a transport and logistics enterprise (the largest port operator in Africa), but it has spent the last 15 years investing heavily in media, such as television, radio, magazines, and free newspapers. Through Vivendi, Bolloré determines the programming and general direction of Groupe Canal Plus, which includes not only pay tv channel Canal+, but also, among others, the small channel CNews.

In television, the Canal Plus group holds a market share of 7.2 percent, CNews has 2.2 percent, behind BFMTV, the ever less dominant top dog among news channels, which holds 2.6 percent (BFM, by the way, is owned by billionaire Patrick Drahi, main shareholder of the telecommunications group Altice). As main shareholder of the Lagardère group (originally an air travel sector company), which also owns a number of media, Bolloré also *de facto* controls the radio station Europe 1 (cf. Garrigos/Roberts 2021b). Europe 1 has recently seen ratings drop and is in crisis with a market share of 4.5 percent. However, the radio station remains an important brand and is already contemplating possible synergies with CNews. A political transformation is also underway.

An engagement

Bertelsmann originally also wanted to sell its shares in Groupe M6, which includes M6, France's third television channel with a market share of 9.1 percent¹, as well as smaller channels and the RTL radio family. Numerous media groups had offered to buy it: Bolloré with Vivendi; Czech coal billionaire Kretinsky, who

1 The figures stem from surveys conducted by the Institut Médiamétrie (in May 2021 for television, in January-March 2021 for radio).

already owns several magazines and has an indirect stake in *Le Monde*; telecommunications entrepreneur Xavier Niel (along with Matthieu Pigasse and Pierre-Antoine Capton; Niel and Pigasse are major shareholders in *Le Monde*, and Niel also owns several regional newspapers); and the Italian group Mediaset. In the end, however, Bertelsmann changed its mind and Groupe M6 is now to merge with the TF1 television group. The latter holds a market share of 27.5% in the television sector. Its flagship is France's first television channel with a share of 19.9%. TF1's main shareholder is the global construction company Bouygues, which is to control the new group, while Bertelsmann will remain represented.

The »engagement« of those two long-standing rivals in French free-to-air television is still subject to scrutiny by the Competition Authority and regulator CSA, as the new entity would have a 42 per cent share of the television market and thus dominate a large part of the advertising market. Public broadcasters have a total market share of only 28.2 percent. Presumably, Bouygues and Bertelsmann also hope to push through a new course in concentration limits, which they consider necessary in the face of dominating new players like Netflix (see Renault 2021). While the stations TF1 and M6 are to continue to exist, each with their own programming, pluralism in political reporting could be endangered – for example, by TF1 exerting influence on the radio stations of Groupe M6. Among them, RTL, with a market share of 12.4 percent, is the second major radio station in France after public broadcaster France Inter (13.3 percent).

Apart from Bertelsmann and Mediaset, all other players in this game of »media monopoly« (Klimm 2021) were industrialists from other sectors who invest in media. This intertwining of information and economic interests is a potential threat to both internal press freedom and pluralism (cf. Chupin et al. 2012: 105, 110; Robert 2011: 68, 156). Industrialists influencing reporting in their media in their own interest is a phenomenon we know from Bernard Arnault (LVMH) or Dassault (the armaments group which owns *Le Figaro*). In some media, such as *Le Monde*, the editorial board is legally protected from interference by its main shareholders, but this is an exception. The fact that such statutes are considered necessary in the first place betrays a lack of journalistic autonomy in France.

The French state (or even other states) is a major customer of some of these groups, which means: »Media acquisition indeed appears a means to influence certain governmental decisions with politicians who seek positive media coverage.« (Chupin et al. 2012: 109f)

Bolloré's media empire versus TF1, the old bogeyman

As disquieting as the merger of TF1 and M6 may be, the steady growth of Bolloré's media empire is a far greater concern for public and political life in France.

Just a decade ago, no one would have thought that the news of this merger would be met with a sense of relief, because things could have been even worse, namely a takeover by Bolloré. When the public broadcaster TF1 was privatized in 1986, it was sold to the large construction company Bouygues. It quickly became clear what Bouygues hoped to gain from this purchase: Profit, for sure, but also political influence.

TF1 developed into a conservative channel that engaged in election campaigning with fear-mongering pieces on security and crime, which favored the political right. TF1 continues to follow this line, but people have become accustomed to it. Compared to Bolloré, TF1 is now perceived similarly as Jacques Chirac was in comparison to Jean-Marie Le Pen in the 2002 Presidential election: the lesser, familiar evil.

With Bolloré, there is no inner freedom of the press. Instead, there are witch hunts. Fear reigns amongst the staff of Groupe Canal Plus. Criticism is unwelcome (cf. Garrigos/Roberts 2021a). In the spring of 2021, more than 20 (out of 120) journalists were ousted from the sports department for »disloyalty« after they expressed solidarity with a journalist who was fired for making fun of Pascal Praud (CNews). Externally, Bolloré fights any attempts at critical coverage about his group by filing defamation lawsuits, which puts considerable pressure (also financially) on investigative media (cf. Aveline 2021). Bolloré's own media, of course, never criticize his dealings or business partners, but always cover them in positive terms. At Prisma Media, especially its business magazine *Capital*, journalists fear editorial intervention and a »CNews-ization« of their outlet (Cohen 2021).

CNews, an »opinion news channel«

The news channel CNews emanating from former channel iTélé in 2016. A large part of the editorial staff went on strike for weeks, protesting the hiring of a show host who had been accused of sexually exploiting minors. Three quarters of the journalists had to leave. Bolloré was rid of rebellious staff members and free to implement his guiding principles: savings, profit, politics.

There are numerous news channels in France, including CNews, BFM, and LCI from the TF1 group. All feature more or less the same characteristics: News in real time, hardly any background or costly investigative pieces, but instead, inexpensive talk shows (cf. Eustache 2021). Media historian Lévrier speaks of »commentary channels« (Lécuyer 2021). CNews program director calls them »opinion news channels« (Ubertalli 2021). Polemics and pointed phrases are being recycled, adopted by others, especially on social media, and take on a life of their own, boosting the profile of both the guests and the channel, leaving both in a state of mutual interdependency (cf. Eustache 2021).

At CNews, it's also talk shows that generate ratings and brand the network's identity: *L'heure des pros* with former sports journalist Pascal Praud, airing every day at 9 am and 8 pm, and *Face à l'info* with Eric Zemmour at 7pm. Both follow the mantra: »The more provocative and hateful the attacks, the better« (Schwarz 2021). Thanks to this strategy, the channel increased its market share by 0.8 percentage points within a year. In May 2021, it first began surpassing BFM's market some on certain days. At times, *Face à l'info* with Eric Zemmour attained 4.9 percent. Praud's show often achieves ratings of around 10 percent. The media response to these shows also contributes significantly to the channel's visibility.

»Competitive symbiosis«

CNews is often compared to Fox News because it trivializes far-right ideas (see Cassini 2021). It rails against the usual pet peeves of right-wing populism: Islam, so-called »Islamism«, (immigrant) crime, which is allegedly bringing the country to the verge of civil war, political correctness, the supposed »Cancel Culture«, feminism, decolonialism, gender, etc. The station presents itself as a »thermometer of society« (Sallé 2021) and the mouthpiece of a »silent majority«, a champion of freedom of expression fighting a supposed language and thought police. On the other hand, they welcome actual restrictions on the freedom of the press when they are imposed by the state and the police, since they only affect alleged Leftist or »Islamist« agitators.

One of the stars at CNews is publicist Eric Zemmour, who »conjures up a civil war against Muslims in barely veiled terms« (Minkmar 2020) and obsesses over the supposed downfall of France due to the whimsical notion of a »Great Replacement«. Zemmour has greatly increased the market share of CNews: »Ratings are rising thanks to hate and incitement of hatred« (Garrigos/Roberts 2019). He seems immune to the fact that the publicist has repeatedly been convicted of inciting racial hatred – he is there because Bolloré personally wants him to be (see Garrigos/Roberts 2019).

Thus, CNews has become a political player that makes no secret of its ambitions to play a major role in the upcoming election campaign. Does that make it »a thorn in the side« of French President Emmanuel Macron (Wüpper 2021)? Only partially. Sure, CNews is spreading far-right talking points, but that is not exactly an inconvenience to Macron. Right-wing extremism must be vociferous so that Macron can present himself to left-wing or moderate right-wing voters as the last bastion against it and thus the only alternative, as he did in 2017. And CNews provides just that. Media historian Alexis Lévrier comments: »Macronism, that's Anti-Lepenism. This is why Macron needs Le Pen to exist.« (Lécuyer 2021)

At the same time – »en même temps«, as the President likes to say – Macron's government is occupying Le Pen's themes, such as homeland security and Islam, and he needs CNews for that, too – to reach right-wing voters. The relationship between Macron and CNews can be described as a »competitive symbiosis« (Lachenmeier 2007: 62). Incidentally, Macron is in contact with CNews journalists, and he even exchanges text messages with Praud (see Chemin 2021). It is undeniable that the public debate is drifting strongly towards the radical right. But that is not just due to obviously far-right media such as *Valeurs Actuelles* or CNews or *Le Figaro*: Macron's government is also doing its part, especially Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin.

»Our regulars' table«

Members of the government and Macron's party are ever more frequent guests on CNews, even on Zemmour's show. Their reasoning is this: »CNews is the channel of 2022. Think what you will of Praud, but it's our regulars' table, so we have to go and face the debate.« (Le Courrier picard 2021) Boycotting the channel is becoming increasingly difficult for any party. Even the radical left-wing party LFI often appears on Praud's show. The Greens only avoid Praud's and Zemmour's shows. Conservatives, on the other hand, welcome the fact that »right-wing voters finally have a channel that appeals to them« (Vigogne 2021) – as if that hadn't already been the case with TF1 and BFM.

By the way, CNews is not the only channel among Bolloré's media that has become a watering hole for politicians. On channel C8, the nightly show *TPMP*, which reaches up to 1.5 million viewers, is a hot ticket. Host Cyril Hanouna is known for stupidly vicious, misogynistic, or homophobic jokes; the channel was even fined to the tune of three million euros. Nevertheless, Bolloré is holding on to him. He has become an inevitable stop on politicians', and especially Macronists' talkshow rounds as they hope to connect with young voters and »everyday« French people. Minister of Citizenship Marlène Schiappa is virtually a regular on *TPMP*. She even thinks that Hanouna ought to moderate the traditional televised debate after the first round of the Presidential election.

Macron also has a hand in all this – as a former investment banker and former Minister for the Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs, he knows his way around the industrial groups involved and is very well connected; he can count on billionaires like Bernard Arnault and Xavier Niel, among others (Cassini/Faye 2021). In the context of the upcoming election campaign, the Macron administration is trying to stop Bolloré's empire from growing any further. Thus, the option of a merger between TF1 (a group that is favorable to Macron) and M6 received support behind the scenes. Even if this merger ends up not going through because of

competition authority concerns, M6 and RTL are protected from Bolloré for the time being. However, Macron has failed to save Europe 1 from Bolloré (Rose et al. 2020), and it remains to be seen whether the Lagardère media *Le JDD* and *Paris Match* will also fall under Bolloré's sway. This would be a painful loss for Macron, since the Sunday newspaper *JDD* has become his unofficial mouthpiece in recent years (cf. Klimm 2021).

So what drives Bolloré? Profit or conviction? Surely, it is both. The political line of his media cannot be explained by economic calculation only, but is undeniably also driven by political ambition (cf. Eustache 2021). There is no doubt that Bolloré wants to influence the election campaign in favor of the far-right. It remains to be seen whether he would prefer Marine Le Pen or possibly support the even more radical Zemmour (according to a poll from February 2021, the latter could garner as much as 13 percent of the vote). In any case, France now has its own Murdoch – or even its own Hugenberg?

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Debate

Oliver Günther and Tanjev Schultz

Inspire, enlighten, disagree

Ten ways to ensure strong journalism in a digital media world

Abstract: Digitalization is transforming journalistic processes and ways of working. The sector must resist being subjected to the logic of markets and products. Reflecting on the standards and objectives of journalism is vital. In ten propositions, this paper outlines the tension between journalistic autonomy and technological change, calling for confident journalism that trusts both editorial offices and the audience to play a more proactive role.

Digitalization in journalism is expanding all the time. So what? What more is there to say? A lot. In our view, the work journalism is doing on understanding its own role – which would be the key to it accompanying (or even leading or at least influencing) the cultural and technological transformation – is too half-hearted or simply insufficient (cf. also the main topic of *Journalism Research*, Vol. 1[2]). Instead of discussing what an editorial office wants and can do in *journalistic* terms and how it can achieve its goals *journalistically*, debate too often focuses on which structures should be built or abolished and which corporate goals and performance indicators need to be met.

Journalism is thus under pressure on two fronts. On the one hand, digital production processes and concepts like ›design thinking,‹ ›useability,‹ and ›community management‹ are taking over media houses and competing with conventional journalistic resources like research, fact checking and expert skills – not least in an age of increasingly limited financial means. On the other, and at least as seriously, mechanisms of the digital attention economy are increasingly penetrating journalism at its very core – from the topics selected, to where topics are positioned, and even the way in which journalistic stories are told.

In our view, both of these pressures are clear evidence that journalism is being influenced by factors that are not only changing it (which would be entirely normal), but also endangering it. Journalism has a harder time understanding its own role, as these developments are accompanied by alleged (perceived, or perhaps even stirred up) or real generational conflicts within the editorial offices, increased economic pressure, demotivating reorganization and instructions to save money, new demands on the media brought about by digitalization, a lack of practice at reflecting honestly on journalism's own role – and the collective despondency of a sector that senses its own loss of importance, be it genuine or merely perceived. This makes it all the more important to clarify what matters both now and in the future – and what does not.

The propositions below are intended to help advance this process of clarification. Needless to say, we cannot answer exhaustively, or even address, every key question here. We see the propositions emphatically as food for discussion, not as statements of truth.

1.) Inspire and shed light – good journalism is good journalism

Good journalism sheds light on the reality in which we live; it gives people orientation, offers them perspectives and insights that go beyond the reality in which they themselves live, and even confronts them with new and unfamiliar points of view. Good journalism is not only informative; it questions power structures and highlights wrongs. It conducts research even where it encounters resistance. Good journalism critiques realities in society, but is not only critical, also demonstrating constructive options for resolving issues. Good journalism takes its audience seriously, devotes itself to its audience, but can also serve up uncomfortable truths. Good journalism is diverse and forces diversity on others. It is open to new ideas. A digital media world changes the framework conditions, the formats, the way journalism is conducted, and the way it communicates with its audience, but it does not change the essence of journalism. Good journalism remains good journalism.

2.) User interest is no substitute for journalistic criteria

Digitalization offers entirely new opportunities when it comes to the relationship between the audience and the editorial office. Analysis tools can be used to poll and analyze what users need, while digital channels create connections between editorial offices and recipients. For journalism, this is an opportunity to get closer to the way people really live. But user interest is not a substitute for journalistic criteria. Not everything that the audience, or a certain section of the audience, wants and likes, is journalism. The click count for a podcast is no

more a replacement for journalistic criteria than ›likes‹ received – regardless of how many – on social media platforms. Data analysis and surveys can improve journalism but, for this to work, journalism must be seen as more than simply serving user interests. It is not about teaching or converting people; it is about breaking out of cycles that simply confirm one's existing opinion. Replacing journalistic criteria with user interests ultimately harms not just journalism, but the users as well.

3.) Journalism is journalism – not a ›product‹

Journalism is produced, and this production is subject to framework conditions. But journalism is not a ›product.‹ Journalism has value in and of itself, beyond product categories that are defined in terms of economics. A ›product‹ needs to please people, needs to be ›sold,‹ needs to bring a ›return on investment‹ – while production costs are reduced at the same time. Although these economic aspects are part of the business of journalism, too, they do not define its quality. Funding public service broadcasters from a license fee is a deliberate attempt to free journalism from commercial interests. To turn public service journalism into a ›product‹ is to betray its fundamental principle. Of course private companies also enable (good) journalism, as demonstrated by the long and rich tradition of many publishing houses. Yet the main feature and the scale of their journalistic success and their credibility depends on their guaranteeing their editorial offices the greatest possible independence – and not misinterpreting their journalistic efforts as merely sales objects.

4.) Journalism provides a service – but journalism is not a service product

Journalism has a value for society. One could also say that journalism serves society – not the state or its institutions – by enabling people to live and thrive together. As such, journalism hopes to have an impact on society, and cannot be satisfied to remain only in a specific niche. It must address the full breadth of society. There is good reason why ›relevance‹ is such a central criterion for journalistic work. It means that journalism needs to access a lot of people – from the widest possible range of groups in society. But good journalism does not have to be liked by everybody, or even anybody. From a negative point of view, journalism should not lecture people or evangelize – equally, in a positive sense, it should educate, inspire, and challenge. This means not underestimating its own audience, but believing that its audience is open to new, bold, stimulating content – and often even for content that is complex or contradictory. Many people argue that one of journalism's roles is to reduce complexity. That is not wrong, if what they mean is making content easy to understand. But the real challenge

lies in highlighting the complexity of social and technical processes and phenomena and enabling communication beyond sheltered circles of experts. Serious research means familiarizing oneself and the audience with complexities. This is not only a service to a fully differentiated society; in contrast to the dangers of simplification, it is also a service to democracy.

5.) The user is king – journalism's (not so) mysterious self-sacrifice

Personalization and individualization are two central properties of the digital transformation process. It is a process that is well described by the term »singularities« (Reckwitz 2019). Creating and cultivating (alleged) individuality is a feature of the digital economy. This makes it all the more tempting for media companies to offer users content that is as individual as possible, is relevant to them, and meets their individual interests – an attractive concept for »product« thinking. But journalism's interest should be a different one. If it wants to enlighten and inspire, it cannot serve only individual interests. A functional society is more than the sum of the individual interests of its members. In other words, a society is more than the sum of its bubbles and echo chambers. Journalism that is relevant to society cannot be designed to serve individual user interests as efficiently and accurately as possible. Given recent debate on the level of financial contribution to be paid, the fetish of user interest may promise agreement and acceptance for those responsible at public service media houses in particular – but it is ultimately nothing more than populism at the cost of public service.

6.) Emotionalization, personalization, intensification – the three key mistakes of digital content

Facebook, YouTube, and all other successful media companies produce their content in line with the three principles of emotionalization, personalization, and intensification. This »content manufacture« is guided by the economic interests of global digital technology companies. Yet over time, journalism that adopts this process will become surplus to requirements. Given the range and networking effects of the digital world, simply copying non-journalistic tricks and mechanisms purely designed to generate attention is a surefire way to achieve insignificance. Journalism that simply takes on the economic concepts and storytelling of digital corporations, including default individualization as a distribution concept, is failing to fulfil its role in society. A »product« cannot shed light on issues. Instead, what is needed is attractive forms of presentation and storytelling concepts that give transparency to complexities in society and inform the audience about societal processes in a clear, comprehensible, and captivating way; pieces that use insight and examination instead of empty short-term emoti-

onal effect (»How does this make you feel?«) and psycho-social tempering (»That topic is too difficult for the weekend«), thus creating space for substantial dialog and discourse.

7.) Likes and clicks – today's fetishes

The undersheriff of the journalistic ›product‹ is the number of clicks. This figure defines targets, serves as the basis for evaluation processes, and determines whether a journalistic ›product‹ has paid off or was ›too expensive.‹ Keeping an eye on economic factors is rightly an important criterion – not least in the public service sector, which is funded by license fees defined in law, rather than people choosing to pay for a ›product.‹ However, economic efficiency is not a sufficient criterion for journalistic quality. Yet it is exactly this kind of qualitative, rather than quantitative, criteria that are spectacularly absent from everyday journalism. Has journalistic reporting had consequences for society? Has it enriched the debate on an important topic? Created a platform for a relevant voice? Was the storytelling attractive and appropriate to the topic? It falls to communication sciences and journalism studies, with their tradition of researching quality and performance, and not least the management of media houses, to develop criteria specific to each editorial office and to discuss them with the journalists. Criteria like this, which are appropriate to the role and working practices of journalism, are urgently needed in order to set priorities and create a basis for editorial work in a digital media world – not least in an age of ever tighter budgets.

8.) Social media does nothing to improve poor journalism

Good journalism is not afraid of social media. But social media is seductive and makes no allowances for journalistic criteria. It rewards fast *soft news*, trivial excitors, cheap celebrity stories. It also rewards simple professions of belief, exaggerated criticism, pure malice, and moralizing self-presentation. All this endangers serious journalism and journalistic integrity. In addition, the sheer speed, the real-time nature of communication, and the bypassing of editorial controls all make social media much more liable to errors. Journalists do exactly what they are constantly advised to do: Present themselves as a brand, strike a pose, keep producing content. At the same time, they form camps – their own bubbles and communities of fans and enemies. What does, or could, all this have to do with good journalism? Our impression is that there is too little discussion, as long as everyone (or perhaps just some people?) is ›active‹ and ›present.‹ There is undoubtedly a place for journalism on social media, as long as it is actually journalism. Ideally good journalism.

9.) Space for research, not merely a snapshot of the here-and-now

With public life taking place in real time, speed is nothing special any more. What counts more than ever is substance. Moving beyond quick news updates, journalism can only retain the upper hand if it has more to offer than that which anyone can google themselves in seconds. As a result, expert journalists are not losing relevance, but becoming more important than ever in the digital media world. A commitment to this is often heard, only for these standards come up against the pressure of editorial reality, where shifts need to be manned and the day's news presented. Everything else has to wait until there is time. Having so little time is dangerous. It is not only about large-scale research and revelations (although they are crucial, too) – it is about the day-to-day substance. Such substance can only be achieved by establishments with an editorial office that gives individuals and teams the opportunity to get to know their fields in great detail and to remain with them for longer periods. The covid-19 pandemic has shown a lot of people just how vital it is for media houses to have skills in scientific journalism. Many do not. The same goes for many other topics of reporting. Generalists are always useful – but only if editorial offices also have enough people who are familiar with the details of a topic and able to drill down deeper.

10.) The courage to expect compromise from others

Many editorial offices have now realized that they are not diverse enough. They want to do something about it – and not a moment too soon! This lack of diversity extends from the people, i.e. the journalists (too few people of color, too many children of the middle classes etc.) to the topics, perspectives, and opinions covered. Good journalism is curious about all of society. It gives a voice and a forum to those who have little or no power (even those who do not themselves cry out to be heard). Good journalism considers the world from numerous points of view, looks in every corner, listens. Moral criteria are important here. On the other hand, however, journalism must not only report on and give a voice to those who consider themselves the »good,« or whom the editorial offices consider »good« (perhaps they are, but who knows?). Journalism that makes choices strictly based on opinion, is divisive. Good journalism builds bridges between different sections of society, but must not ignore social contradictions, conflicts, and rifts, nor paper over them with superficial reporting. Achieving greater diversity in editorial offices and reporting means not expecting everyone to share the same opinion. It takes the virtue of open-mindedness, paired with a »discursive generosity« (Frick 2020: 149) that leads to constructive conflict – and includes the courage to expect compromise from each other.

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Translation: Sophie Costella

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Reviews

Michael Haller (2020): *Die Reportage: Theorie und Praxis des Erzähljournalismus*. [Reportage: Theory and practice of storytelling journalism. 7th edition, completely revised] Cologne: Herbert von Halem, 312 pages, EUR 26.

Reviewed by Steven Thomsen

It is more than 30 years since the spirit of this book began its long journey through the institutions. Men and women in print journalism, who were given a copy of Michael Haller's *Die Reportage* during their own degree or apprenticeship, are themselves now teaching and researching, leading departments and editorial offices, guiding trainees, or giving advanced training to deskmen and reporters. Just like back then, they too are now incorporating Haller's textbook into their syllabus and teaching the next generation in the profession to create vivid, informative, subjectively colored reportages with contemporary relevance, based on what they themselves learned from the work first written in 1987.

Now in its seventh edition, the book has adapted to the changes and challenges of time. Michael Haller has revised the text for this edition for the first time since 1995 – and extensively so. He has even worked on the structure of the book, removing an entire section from the previous edition (2008) and adding a new section on the Relotius case.

Written in a deliberately descriptive style, the book is still divided into a historical, theoretical section that maps the development of the modern reportage, and a practical section. Numerous passages have been rewritten and updated, the wording is tighter, and sub-headings have been added to make it easier to read. Typos that were previously copied from one edition to the next have been corrected (although new ones have slipped in). In a negative development for a textbook, the drastically reduced subject index and the patchy index of persons have been combined in a single index. Despite this, Haller's guide remains a standard reference work on reportage.

With this new edition, the author – who was a Professor of Journalism at the University of Leipzig until his retirement in 2010 – hopes to take into account both the myriad digital possibilities that have become available to journalists for

their research over the last two decades, and »the transformation of the political culture. In this, journalism is the subject and the object of the media transformation« (12). However, the main trigger for Haller's restructuring his book is the Relotius case. He argues that the system of »falsified storytelling« (100) established by the former SPIEGEL deskman Claas Relotius threw the entire sector into a state of shock: »Storytelling journalism fell into crisis« (11). Yet this storytelling is the pinnacle of print journalism. To put it another way, in the words of the great Hans Habe: »Journalists may be craftsmen, reporters are artists« (Habe 1976: 370). Artists like Heine, Kisch, and Roth, whose work placed them over and above objective reporting on day-to-day events.

In this context, Haller also notes that a literary form of reporting has a long tradition in the United States, where it has been spared the constant fight for recognition and acceptance that it faces in Germany. It is no accident that the American professors of literature Robert L. Root and Michael Steinberg called their anthology on »creative nonfiction« *The Fourth Genre* (1999). They place »creative nonfiction« on the same level as drama, epics, and poetry, making it a fourth main genre of literature.

Since Claas Relotius' falsifications were uncovered, argues Haller, reportage in German newspapers and has increasingly sunk to a form of presentation dominated by facts rather than perceptions. Yet, he continues, the very purpose of storytelling is »to allow the audience to share in notable observations and experiences on an intellectual and an emotional level« (109). This is achieved by bringing characters to life, visualizing spaces and events, and structuring chronologies for dramatic effect.

By demanding a return to writing as opposed to »superficial fact-quoting« (11), however, Haller also indirectly disputes that storytelling journalism was already in a poor state even before Relotius. The author does correctly state that »[f]acts have been presented incorrectly since journalism began« (97), and mentions that some newspaper publishers were guilty of deliberate deception long before Relotius. But reportage, even in large newspapers and magazines, has had another problem for many decades now: Too often, it is boring. The truly important things that the authors have to say in their texts – the essence of the text that can be boiled down to the core message – is often in no proportion to the length of the article, the storytelling »run-up« taken by the reportage or feature, or the vanity and clumsiness of some reporters. Some key features of this include the following:

- Trivial description of appearance
- Simplistic characterization
- A terse style that is tiring to read (someone who chooses to read a reportage is willing, indeed needs, to read sentences of at least medium length)
- Formulaic dramatization
- Lack of emphasis of critical thoughts

- Fear of scandalizing readers with provocative claims
- Failure to place episodes described within a wider context

Having finished the article, the worst-case scenario for the reader is to feel as though they have wasted their time with trash. This is far removed from what Haller considers successful storytelling, to which he hopes to return. He demands a fine balance between attentive experiences, careful research, and artistic communication. However, this requires extraordinarily talented and carefully trained men and women. Even in its seventh edition, Michael Haller's book is certainly apt to point talented people like this in the right direction. It is up to them to follow.

About the reviewer

Steven Thomsen M. A., born in 1969, has been a freelance journalist and author since the 1990s, publishing articles in newspapers and magazines such as *Computerwoche*, *Die Welt*, *Management und Training*, *Westfälische Rundschau*, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, *Darmstädter Echo*, *Rheinische Post*, and *Publik-Forum*. With a degree in literary studies, he is currently working on a book on the life and work of the American author Norman Mailer, with publication planned for fall 2022.

Translation: Sophie Costella

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Claudia Mast, Georg Spachmann, Katharina Georg (2019): »Den Mächtigen auf die Finger schauen«. Zur Zukunft gedruckter Tageszeitungen in der Region. [»Keeping a close eye on the powerful.« On the future of printed daily newspapers in the region.] Baden-Baden: Nomos, 224 Pages, EUR 44.

Reviewed by Silke Fürst

Having paid little attention to local journalism in the past (Arnold/Wagner 2018; Hanusch 2015), journalism research is now taking much more of an interest in the field (see e.g. Gulyas/Baines 2020a: 1; Jenkins 2019; Örnebring et al. 2020). This is linked both to the vital role local journalism plays and to the challenges presented by digitalization and the competition for attention and advertising revenue. Even today, local journalism, and the local press in particular, is extremely important not just to many users, but also to community life in villages and towns, as well as ensuring a diversity of information within the media system as a whole (Arnold/Wagner 2018; Gleich/Puffer 2019; Jenkins 2019; Möhring 2019).

These studies on local journalism focus on investigating news quality, editorial practices and autonomy, journalistic understanding of local journalism's role, funding options, and what recipients need and expect from their use of the media (Arnold/Wagner 2018; Costera Meijer/Bijleveld 2016; Gulyas/Baines 2020b; Hanusch 2015; Jenkins 2019; Örnebring et al. 2020). Linking these topics, the findings in the book »Den Mächtigen auf die Finger schauen«. Zur Zukunft gedruckter Tageszeitungen in der Region make a valuable contribution to the growing body of research into local journalism.

The publication is based on a case study conducted in summer 2015 as a cooperation between the Pforzheimer Zeitung (PZ) and the Department of Communication Science and Journalism at the University of Hohenheim (Stuttgart). A local newspaper rooted in south-western Germany, the PZ had a circulation of around 36,000 and employed around 40 deskmen in 2015. At the heart of the book is the question: How can the constant fall in sales of local newspapers be turned around, or at least slowed (13)? Identifying the causes is intended as the first step towards developing measures to secure the future of printed local papers. The study thus pursues the normative objective of helping local newspapers like the PZ to achieve success, i.e. improving the journalistic concept of the printed newspaper in such a way that economic profit can be increased (once again) and the connection between the reader and the paper enhanced.

Although the theory section of the work is extensive and well structured, it pays little attention to the findings of international research into local journalism or studies into news quality from the audience's perspective. It begins by describing how use of the press has changed over the last few decades (cf. 21–41). If one

considers readership figures for both print and online editions, the audience is actually paying more attention to local reporting than before. However, this does not translate into profit for publishing houses, as printed newspapers do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to funding local journalism, even as their readership has consistently shrunk over the decades. Younger groups of readers in particular are now almost impossible to reach with printed newspapers.

One of the book's strengths is that it not only presents these developments as a consequence of the internet's spread and the media transformation, but instead also examines the »changes in the framework conditions in society« (43–58). The idea that changes in society – such as individualization, changed family and household structures, a change in leisure activities, and disenchantment with politicians – play a role is convincing. However, some of the statements made in this chapter over-generalize, are not backed up with evidence, and contradict the findings of research (cf. e.g. Reuters Institute 2018; Schultz et al. 2020). To quote one example: »The dominant force today is the citizen as a consumer, who takes an interest in public affairs only selectively and where individually affected, takes a distanced or skeptical view of conventional institutions, and displays eclectic information behavior when it comes to news« (53).

The subsequent chapters explain »what makes a daily newspaper in the digital age« (59–73) and the role played by »journalistic services and proximity to readers« (75–86). This section largely emphasizes the local press' function of providing information, orientation, a forum, and critique; highlights the importance of proximity to readers, everyday references, and audience participation; and poses the question of how important the concept of topical news on a daily basis still is in the context of the digital transformation.

In the empirical study, the central topic of the book – how the future of the printed local newspaper can be secured (cf. 13) – is boiled down to the question of the extent to which the perceptions and expectations of readers and non-readers fit together with the deskmen's perspective (cf. 90–95). This was achieved by conducting guided interviews with ten deskmen and managers in the PZ editorial office and publishing house, as well as nine guided interviews with PZ readers. These were then used as a basis for developing a representative survey of readers (n=501) and non-readers (n=260) of the PZ. The data analysis is predominantly descriptive; a regression analysis to explain reader satisfaction is not sufficiently presented and shown in tables (150–152).

In the view of the deskmen (97–115), the PZ impresses with strong, careful, and diverse local reporting with original and exclusive stories on local topics and events that are useful, informative, and entertaining. The journalists see themselves particularly as neutral imparters of information and »topic service providers« (99) for the region. They see the PZ as having strong roots in the town and the lives of its readers, and would be able to enhance the diversity of its reporting and

its proximity to readers further if deskmen were to go out more to research on the ground and record people's views. The deskmen also believe that the newspaper is extremely close to decision-makers in politics and business, with some seeing this as an advantage and others as a problem.

The subsequent observations on the readership and its usage, expectations, and assessments (cf. 117–153) show that the printed PZ is used primarily by women and people aged over 50, and that many users read it daily. In contrast, the PZ's website saw very little use in 2015. As a whole, the readers value the newspaper's local focus, the quality of its reporting, and the topic weighting, but would like to see even more local stories and information, and a strengthening of independent and critical reporting. In terms of operationalization, it is surprising to learn in this chapter that no reliable measurements from research on audience expectations and perceived news quality were taken (cf. e.g. Costera Meijer/Bijleveld 2016; Heise et al. 2014; Neuberger 2014; van der Wurff/Schoenbach 2014).

The survey of non-readers shows that the PZ is »very familiar [to them] and has a largely positive image as a newspaper for the local area and the region« (176). In addition, some of those surveyed could imagine reading the PZ in future, providing potential for expanding or at least stabilizing its readership. Given the question of how falling circulation of local newspapers can be turned around (cf. 13), however, it would have been interesting to survey those people who have cancelled their subscription or ceased to buy the PZ (see for example Haller 2014: 130). A survey like this could also be conducted later. The PZ's circulation has continued to fall over the five years since this study was conducted, from around 36,000 copies in 2015 to around 31,000 in 2020 (see <https://tinyurl.com/PZ-Auflage>).

The book ends with reflections from Thomas Satinsky (cf. 181–192), Executive Publisher of the PZ, and Magnus Schlecht, PZ Chief Editor (cf. 193–202). In their view, the study delivers particular inspiration to expand the PZ's critical reporting, to boost the local perspective in all reporting, to reflect more of the activities of clubs and societies, to allow more reader participation, to use the online channels more effectively, and to reinforce cross-media work.

All in all, the authors have succeeded in writing a book that can inform actors in journalism, media companies, and media policy on the significance, challenges, and opportunities for development in the local press. It also makes a contribution to research into local journalism and audience expectations. However, this contribution could have been enhanced significantly if the authors had done more to take into account existing (international) research and more complex data analyses.

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Translation: Sophie Costella

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Mandy Tröger (2019): *Pressefrühling und Profit. Wie westdeutsche Verlage 1989/1990 den Osten eroberten*. [Press spring and profit. How West German publishing houses conquered the East in 1989/1990]. Cologne: Herbert von Halem, 360 pages, EUR 25.

Reviewed by Hans-Dieter Kübler

The fact that the political reunification of the two German states – or, more accurately, the GDR's accession to the Federal Republic of Germany – on October 3, 1990 was preceded by economic annexation or infiltration in the form of fusions, joint ventures, pricing policy, and confidential agreements with the financially strong West is sufficiently known and has been the subject of a great deal of research. The author of this book argues that one particularly symptomatic and momentous example – as a paradigmatic conflict between the market interests of large-scale journalism and small publishing houses on the one hand and alternative reform concepts and noble democratic ideals of press freedom on the other – is the aggressive annexation and restructuring of the GDR press market using West Germany as a template. This publication is a revised version of her dissertation, which she wrote and had approved at the Institute of Communication Research (ICR) at the University of Illinois, with the support of Michael Meyen at LMU Munich.

Much research has already been conducted into the fusion of the two press markets, including the reports by Beate Schneider et al on the press (1991/92) and by Michael Haller et al (1994) on the newspaper press, both on behalf of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, and Bernd Klammer's study on *Pressevertrieb in Ostdeutschland* [Press distribution in East Germany] (1998). Although the author reviews these briefly in a short literature report at the start, she still perceives various gaps and fields that justify her work.

For one thing, she would like to see an exploration and assessment of the transformation chiefly from the perspective of actors from the GDR, i.e. less of the »victors« and more of the »vanquished.« After all, she argues, despite all attempts made to achieve dispassion, neutrality, and intersubjectivity, history can never be written entirely objectively. Instead, for the sake of academic balance, it must be as »transparent« (30) as possible about its inevitable subjectivity. As she was born and grew up in East Berlin, the author continues, she is in a better position to understand the myriad efforts made at reform to achieve a sovereign, democratic, and socialist GDR – efforts that also included a changed press that was close to the people and as unconcentrated as possible.

In order to examine the many controversies and conflicts in more detail, continues the author, she has also shone a spotlight on the key actors in both the GDR

and West Germany, focusing on how they acted in their respective economic and political interests. She does so by reviewing countless sources – in particular material that is (now) accessible in official and private archives – and by conducting interviews (17 in all) with actors from the time. All these sources are listed in the appendix. Through her research, writes the author, it became clear that the »lynchpin« (267) was press distribution, to which little attention has been paid up to now, and »the political and economic struggles« (38) for dominance over the press market in the GDR. She thus sees her work as »a story of the reunification period,« not »the reunification story« (32) – although she does reflect on what language is appropriate in light of such terms (43). This is the considered, nuanced, and methodical way in which Mandy Tröger approaches her work.

The two chapters that follow present the facts. The second chapter describes the historical context of German-German relations at the time of reunification and presents the most important institutions in media policy in the GDR. It is not written chronologically – a chronological overview is provided at the start of the book – but instead presents key events, bodies, and actors as a way to outline the economic and political interests that shaped the transformation of the GDR press. The GDR's constitution did, in fact, (formally) guarantee freedom of opinion and the press, albeit under the terms of democratic centralism. The press thus largely belonged to the SED and parties and organizations close to the SED, with only church publications having a limited degree of independence. Distribution was the role of the state post, while licensing, allocation of paper (which was always in short supply), and thus circulation figures were controlled by the state. The sole source of news for all East German media was the Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtendienst (General German News Service, ADN).

The follow-up meeting to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in January 1989 was intended to open up the GDR market for capitalist media, too. With so many efforts to achieve reform in the time around reunification, the period after 1989 was a hotbed of ideas and concepts both for democratic, authentic, and sovereign GDR media (including internal press freedom) and for a free press exchange between the states. The »Round Table,« the Medienkontrollrat [Media Monitoring Council], and various committees of journalists and publishing houses discussed the drafts, while the governments of Modrow and de Maizière worked with the Volkskammer and its committees to try to pass a media law. But all of them reckoned without the businesspeople of West Germany.

As soon as the Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989, the large West German publishing houses Bauer, Burda, Gruner & Jahr, and Springer in particular began supplying their products in the GDR through a combination of joint ventures, informal contacts, and rock-bottom prices. They were thus in direct competition with the »old' GDR and SED newspapers, most of which were stuck with old technology, poor paper, and limited access to international news, making it hard for

them to keep up with the pressure to modernize and adapt to the new formats. But they were also equally in competition with the reform pamphlets and new publications that emerged, most of which were produced by amateurs and lacked capital, journalistic expertise, and technology. GDR representatives complained of »Wild West methods,« while West German agents rhapsodized about the introduction and stabilization of a »free press.« The central arena was the GDR postal service's monopoly on press distribution.

In the third and largest chapter (over 160 pages long), the author describes and analyzes the tricks and controversies of the various actors. It often reads like a crime novel. The reader learns a great deal not only about the strategies and weaknesses of the GDR actors, but also about the machinations of the West German publishing houses (including their effective collaboration with government-backed bodies). The crux of the issue was whether press distribution should be organized independently of the publishing houses, as it was in West Germany, or should be more or less dependent on publishing houses – the system that the large publishing houses had already established with their own investments and exchange transactions.

Everyone knows the result. The author sums it up as follows in her fourth and last chapter: Although the »Big Four« did ultimately have to largely give up on their unilateral goal under pressure from the (West German) Bundeskartellamt [competition authority], her analysis shows »how large [West German] publishing houses not only influenced the legislative process, but changed an entire economic order (at least in the press sector) and adapted it to their own goals and interests« (280). This market logic, she argues, strangled numerous reform concepts and »radical democratic visions of a free press« (280).

It would probably be useful now to discuss whether and to what extent the author selected, edited, and evaluated the sources from a point of view that is neutral and as »objective« as possible. However, as she herself points out, there are already so many studies from a Western point of view. It thus can only aid the cause of pluralism in the writing of history if a contribution is made from a reflective and distanced (Eastern) perspective.

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About the reviewer

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Translation: Sophie Costella

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Reviewed by Guido Keel

The internet has become a core research instrument for journalists over the last fifteen years. To start with, many questions were asked about how this new information medium should be handled in journalism. But online research is now so ubiquitous and online communication has become so institutionalized in connection with public organizations and actors, that such questions are of little interest.

An exception to this is social media – a much faster-moving, more chaotic world in which it takes little time or organization for almost anyone to publish information. This fast, unreliable transmission of information offers journalists an infinite wealth of information and stories. Yet at the same time, there is considerable uncertainty when it comes to how trustworthy this information is.

This brings us to the topic and the research question that Florian Wintterlin attempts to answer in his dissertation: What role do social media play as sources in journalism, and to what extent do media professionals trust this type of source? Wintterlin refers to these sources as »distanced sources« – a somewhat unusual name by which he means sources for which journalists »do not have the opportunity of (or interest in) meeting the actors in person« (17). This type of source comprises both unknown private individuals and professional communicators from organizations. On the one hand, this definition of the object appears a little generalized, including as it does a wide range of types of social media source. On the other, it is not sufficiently clearly differentiated, as it initially remains unclear whether actors who are contacted by telephone, for example, rather than social media, are also included under distanced sources. Only later does it become clear that Wintterlin means exclusively social media sources.

In the theoretical part of the book, the author first describes journalism in general as a social system, before moving on to the importance of sources in journalistic work. This is followed by the first empirical investigation, in which he uses eight events dating from 2011-2015 to explore the significance of social media as a source for journalistic reporting.

As the author himself notes, these are events at which no correspondent was present on the ground and about which little information was available. Apart from an attack in Paris and political protests in Turkey, all the events took place outside Europe – making social media even more significant as a source. The author examines nine media outlets: three television channels, one radio station, one online magazine, two daily newspapers, one weekly newspaper, and one weekly

magazine. Unsurprisingly, he finds that the online magazine relies most heavily on social media, while radio uses this source the least (cf. 54). He goes on to discover that social media play the greatest role as a source in the case of political crises. Time considerations also play a part in whether social media are contemplated as a source: Information from social media sources is used more often for breaking news, but is less important in the case of latent topicality, such as during the Ukraine conflict (cf. 63).

In order to answer the question of the extent to which journalists trust social media as a source, the author spends more than sixty pages of the second theoretical section presenting findings and models from trust research (largely in sociology), thus explaining how trust in sources can be explained in general. Based on these considerations, he goes on to compose seven research questions on the topic of trust in sources. To answer them, he then conducts guided interviews with twelve media professionals from all types of media and in a range of roles. Compared with the extensive theoretical preparatory work put into this part of the empirical investigation, the findings are limited. The author finds that »risk perception« (184) when dealing with sources from social media depends on four factors: the relevance of the topic, the availability of other sources, the uniqueness of the event being reported on, and the type of source, by which he primarily means what experience has been gained of this source in the past.

Finally, the author conducts a third empirical investigation using an online survey of journalists on Germany and England – a country in which social media plays a significant role as a source for journalism. The survey asks the journalists about how they use social media as a source and, in particular, which factors influence how they assess its trustworthiness. Somewhat surprisingly, given that he has spent the first two hundred pages of the book focusing on common theories and models of journalism research, the author draws on Bourdieu's lesser-known field theory to compose his hypotheses. In doing so, he attempts to identify influencing factors that have a decisive effect on how the trustworthiness of sources is assessed.

As the author himself writes at the end, this book comprises an explorative study (in fact, there are three) that attempts to explain systematically how journalists handle distanced sources and social media as sources. By taking trust theory into account, he allows a view of the way potential influencing factors work and interact. The study is not purely explorative, however, but instead largely descriptive: The findings from the three empirical investigations are barely subjected to critical discussion, nor are they linked to the normative requirements of journalism and how effective it can be. In terms of its thoroughness, the book does meet the requirements and characteristics of a dissertation. It may inspire other researchers to launch their own investigations based on its findings. But it is less suited to application-oriented academic work with a normative dimension, or even to

journalistic practice. For this, the work remains too general in its description of the reality it finds.

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About the reviewer

Prof. Dr. Guido Keel leads the IAM Institute of Applied Media Studies at the ZHAW. The focuses of his research include quality in journalism; change in journalism; and journalism in non-European contexts.

Translation: Sophie Costella

Kommunikationswissenschaft



PHILOMEN SCHÖNHAGEN / MIKE MEISSNER

Kommunikations- und Mediengeschichte. Von Versammlungen bis zu den digitalen Medien

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Dieses Lehrbuch gibt einen Überblick über grundlegende Strukturen der Entwicklung gesellschaftlicher Kommunikation und der dafür genutzten Medien. Geografisch stehen dabei weitgehend das heutige (West-)Europa sowie der deutsche Sprachraum und die Schweiz im Mittelpunkt. Inhaltlich liegt der Fokus auf dem Funktionieren gesellschaftlicher Kommunikation und damit vorwiegend auf dem je aktuellen Austausch von Nachrichten und Sichtweisen – Medienunterhaltung wird eher am Rande thematisiert. Ausgangspunkt der dargestellten Entwicklungen ist die Versammlungskommunikation, die von frühzeitlichen Gesellschaften bis weit ins Mittelalter hinein die dominierende Form öffentlicher Kommunikation war. An ihre Stelle traten zunehmend Formen von Kommunikation über Distanz, die schließlich seit der Frühen Neuzeit – mit dem Aufkommen von periodischen Zeitungen und Journalismus – die zentrale Rolle für den gesellschaftlichen Austausch übernahmen. Dies stellt einen tiefgreifenden Umbruch in der Kommunikationsgeschichte dar. Anschließend werden die Ausdifferenzierung der Pressemedien sowie das Aufkommen elektronischer Medien – vom Telegrafen bis zu Internet und Social Media – dargelegt. Dabei wird auch die Frage diskutiert, ob letztere erneut einen revolutionären Umbruch gesellschaftlicher Kommunikation mit sich bringen.



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